

Preparing for the National Certification Exam

About the FNP and ANP Certification Examinations The American Nurses Credentialing Center offers computer-based certification testing for Family Nurse Practitioners through authorized testing agencies at locations across the country. The examinations assess nurse practitioner skills in the areas of patient assessment, diagnosis, planning and intervention, evaluation of response to care, patient education, health promotion/disease prevention, scope of practice and ethics.

National Certification Examinations for Family Nurse Practitioners are administered three times a year at selected sites by the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Program. The examinations are designed to assess knowledge in the areas of health promotion, disease prevention and diagnosis and management of acute and chronic diseases. The examinations have been developed in cooperation with the Professional Examination Service, who administers the exams.

Examples of the types of questions used in the FNP National Certification Exams are listed below.

Example 1:

GF is a 4 year-old girl who comes to your clinic for her annual physical. She is brought to the Snellen Chart for testing of her vision and is unable to read the letters. What is the best Snellen chart type to use in this case?

- A. Basic Letters chart
- B. Tumbling "E" chart
- C. Picture chart
- D. Number chart

Example 2:

A patient may be diagnosed with hypertension:

- A. After 3 readings of elevated pressures
- B. Only after lifestyle alterations have failed
- C. Only after "White Coat Syndrome" is found
- D. Only after systemic symptoms also occur (e.g., headaches)
- E. After only one reading of systolic 200 and diastolic 100

There are several ways to approach the questions on the exam, and you must choose the approach with which you are most comfortable. However, keep in mind the following:

- Doing easier questions first may be a morale booster, but be careful you don't cloud your thinking by dwelling on the items you skipped.
- If you answer questions in the order presented, don't leave any blanks. If you spend any time at all on an item, mark your best response at the time and move on. Remember, there is no penalty for wrong answers, so **answer every question!**

One of the greatest sources of test-taking error results from misreading or misinterpreting the question stem or alternatives. Suzanne Kiewet, M.Ed. (1996, p. xii) suggests the following to help you minimize this source of error:

1. Quickly read the stem.
2. Quickly read the alternatives.

3. Carefully read the stem, underlining key words and phrases as needed. If a diagram is included, orient yourself to it.
4. Ask yourself what the stem really asking; restate it to make sure you understand.
5. Look for clues in the stem to help you answer the question; sift through the details and determine which information is relevant.
6. Note key descriptors in the question stem such as less than, greater than, adult, child, acute, chronic, etc.; analyze base words, prefixes, and suffixes.
7. Carefully read each alternative, and label each as true, false, or uncertain.
8. Mark the most correct response(s).

Be careful not to answer too quickly. Although first impulses are often correct, make sure you read all the alternatives before reaching a conclusion. If the decision comes down to a coin toss between two alternatives, review your underlines and other marks.

Watch for negative stems using words such as except, least, false, incorrect, not true. Circle these words to make yourself more aware of them. If you cross out the negative word and read the stem as a positive, the false answer will be the appropriate choice.

Be on the lookout for words that narrow the focus or are too extreme such as all, always, never, every, none, etc. Alternatives using these terms tend to be incorrect. By the same token, alternatives that broaden the focus with words such as generally, probably, most, some, often, etc, tend to be correct.

How to Manage Your Study Time

To derive the most benefit from the CLER for Advanced Practice Nurses Course, it is important that you plan your study time well in advance. Before completing the Diagnostic Test, consider your commitments between now and the date of the exam. Estimate the amount of time you have available for study, taking into account your normal activities of daily life such as sleeping, eating, parenting, socializing, and/or work.

Using your individualized study prescription to determine your review priorities, map out your study objectives over the next several weeks. Make sure you allow enough time to review the high-risk areas. Decide how you can best use the remaining study time.

When planning your study time, make sure you allow enough time to take the Final Practice Test and brush up on any remaining problem areas.

Before sitting down to the computer, we suggest that you warm-up to the task by doing some simple stretching exercises such as neck rolls, shoulder rolls, etc. Take a moment to visualize yourself successfully completing your objectives for each review session.

Keep your study sessions limited to two to three hours. Plan to take a five to ten-minute break every hour, ideally when there are natural breaks in the review process.

When the Exam Date Arrives. . .

Keep in mind the following common-sense suggestions that apply prior to or during the certification exam (Kiewet, 1996, p. xi):

1. **Get a good night's sleep.** Although sleep needs vary according to the individual, six hours is usually considered a minimum.
2. **Eat well prior to the exam.** Choose foods that help you maintain a consistent energy level. You should maintain proper eating habits during your study sessions, too.

3. **Watch the medications.** If you're subject to cold symptoms or allergies, avoid medications that make you drowsy.
4. **Layer your clothing.** Wear clothes that can be added or removed depending on the temperature in the testing area.
5. **Prepare yourself mentally.** Keep your thoughts about the exam positive. Visualize yourself succeeding.
6. **Don't rush to the test site.** Allow plenty of time to check in and take care of any personal needs.
7. **Relax a little.** Seat yourself comfortably and take several deep breaths to relax. If time permits, do some of the warm-up exercises mentioned earlier.
8. **Pay attention.** Listen to the proctor, and read all instructions carefully. Ask for clarification if needed.

For more information on the ANCC and AANP Certification Examinations, including test dates, test administration, and preparation guidelines, contact:

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Reference: Kiewit, S. F. (1996). Test-taking strategies. In Bollett, A. J., Step 2 reviews: General clinical sciences. St. Louis: Mosby.