Bank of Strategies for Success

Before presenting our bank of strategies for success, let us take a moment to look at other resources that can contribute to student success. As teachers, we should not be duplicating services that can be provided by other professionals. Whether we are working with an individual student, a small group or an entire class, it is important for us to acknowledge that some student issues cannot (and should not) be addressed by teachers. Our role as nursing teachers is to assess the situation and link students to the appropriate resources.

Here is a list of resources available at our college; you may be aware of additional ones.

* Peer tutoring (Nursing, Math, French)
* Student Resource Room
* Mentorship Crew
* Learning Centre
* Student Services (Counselling, Financial Aid, Academic Advising, Access for Students with Disabilities)

Our Bank of Strategies

This bank was compiled over the years, as a result of our experience in listening to our students and working with them on their path to success. You will be able to draw on this bank for the strategies you need to build an individualized Action Plan for each student.

As we mentioned in our Introduction toPASS, nursing tests seem to pose a greater challenge to students than tests in other courses. Keeping this in mind, we organized our bank as follows:

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| Classification of strategies | Focus |
| **Strategies for help with studying** | * Developing a strong knowledge base

Applying theory |
| **Strategies for help with test-taking** | * Preparing for the test
* Preparing for Assessment-type questions
* Preparing for Intervention-type questions
* Performing on Test day
* Strategies for Short-Answer format
* Strategies for Multiple-Choice format

Advanced strategies for preparing for the test |
| **Strategies for managing anxiety** | Strategies for Success – Addressing Student Anxiety |

We have written our strategies as if speaking to the student. This makes it easy for you to select and adapt the strategies and incorporate them into your Action Plan. Many of these may seem obvious. However, we have been surprised numerous times at the simplicity of some solutions. For example, we were alarmed to see a pattern develop whereby, for various reasons, students did not have access to the required textbooks. When these were made available, we saw improvement in the students’ marks. This is how the strategy *Have access to the textbooks* came to be first on our list.

A word of caution

This list of strategies is not a blanket solution. Offering students a generic list of strategies without any assessment of each one’s individual needs is not how PASS is intended to be used.

PASS works because we select *specific* strategies based on an assessment of the individual student. This results in a *different* plan for each student. The plan that is developed for the student is tailored to their individual path to success.

Let us compare this to the role of a *personal trainer.* This person works with the *client* to design a fitness program tailored to meet the client’s personal health and fitness goals. In the case of PASS, similarly, the *teacher* works with the *student* to design a plan to meet the student’s personal academic goals.

Strategies to help with Studying

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| Focus: Developing a strong knowledge base |
| **Strategies** | **Related discussion points, as applicable**  |
| Have access to the textbooks |  |
| Consult dictionaries | Medical, English, English to foreign language  |
| Attend every class, lab/seminar | * Attend means participate actively
* Sit where you can see/hear the teacher
* Pay attention: teachers will emphasize what is most important

Ask permission to record the class if you find it helpful to listen again later |
| Prepare for class | * Read the text according to the Learning Outcomes in the Course Manual
* Skim assigned readings for main ideas
* Refer back to previous notes, if applicable*; e.g., when preparing for a class on Coronary Artery Disease, review your notes on the structure and function of the heart from your Anatomy class*

When using online resources, verify for reliability of scientific data |
| Make your own notes | * This keeps you active and helps you to express yourself in writing
* When unsure about something, look it up
* Add to your notes as you participate in class

Keep your notes organized in a way that works for you |
| Review class notes and readings | * The more you review, the more you retain

Review your notes; *e.g., the same evening, on the weekend, again the following weekend*  |
| See your teacher as a resource | * Ask questions in class
* Contact teachers via email when you have specific questions; this is a good exercise for expressing yourself in a clear and concise fashion

Make an appointment if you need to see your teacher one-on-one |
| Eat and sleep well | A rested, well-nourished brain learns better |
| Focus: Applying theory |
| Learn to *understand* rather than memorize | * Understanding the material helps you apply what you are learning
* Build on what you already know
* Approach new content step-by-step
* Reflect: ask yourself questions
* Summarize
 |
| Practise making links | Making links between pathophysiology and nursing activities helps you develop your clinical reasoning skills; *e.g.,* *if you* *understand bronchospasm in Asthma, you can figure out why a bronchodilator is administered* |
| Study actively | * Ask yourself questions
* Answer the questions provided at the end of a chapter
* Work through case studies

Work with a study group; this helps with application of theory, because you have to express yourself within the group |
| Participate actively in seminar and small group sessions | * Look for solutions instead of waiting for answers to be given

Share your thoughts and ideas |
| Look for additional application exercises | * Answer case studies in your text, if provided

Search for more cases online |
| Teach others | Teaching others – *e.g., family members, friends* – helps you express yourself, review your knowledge base and recognize gaps in your knowledge |
| Relate theory to clinical practice | This makes the theory come alive and makes it meaningful; *e.g.,* *having learned about Complete Blood Count (CBC) in class, look up your client’s results and try to explain what they mean*  |

Strategies for help with Test-Taking

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| Focus: Preparing for the test |
| **Strategies** | **Related discussion points, as applicable**  |
| Come prepared (please refer to Suggested Study Schedule) | * Keep up with class material on a weekly basis; this lessens the need for concentrated study time
* Make a written schedule to cover all topics, and stick to it (template of study schedule)
* Focus your efforts where the most marks are allocated (if you have been provided with the blueprint for the test)
* Start with the topics that you find most difficult, or allot more time to these
* Leave an extra time block for reviewing topics you did not finish

Try to finish reviewing all topics 1 to 2 days before the test  |
| Find a quiet place to study | * Have a good light source

Take a brief break every 1 to 2 hours, or sooner if you cannot concentrate |
| Study according to the Learning Outcomes | * Read your notes
* Refer to the text, as necessary, to fill in knowledge gaps

Ask yourself questions that you think could appear on the test and answer them  |
| Study related topics together | *E.g., Coronary Artery Disease with Heart Failure; pain management with opioids in pharmacological class* |
| Practise answering sample questions | Answer any sample questions or tests that you have access to in the course; this shows you what to expect on the test |
| Take care of yourself | * Eat well
* Go to bed at a reasonable hour
* Reward yourself, if you have scheduled well, by taking the last evening off; *e.g., watch a movie, go for a run or do something you have not had time to enjoy*

Prepare for the test the same way you prepare for a clinical day; *e.g., the night before, pack your bag with everything you need for the test* |
| Focus: Preparing for Assessment-type questions |
| **Strategies** | **Related discussion points, as applicable**  |
| Make links between pathophysiology and signs/symptoms  | * *E.g., if you understand how the heart functions when it is failing, you can deduce why peripheral edema is a sign of right-sided heart failure*
 |
| Identify the difference between a sign and a symptom | * Differentiate your assessment findings according to signs/symptoms; this helps you to be more specific when preparing for a test. *E.g., dry mucous membranes (sign) vs. “I feel thirsty” (symptom)*
 |
| Make links between pathophysiology and etiology | * *E.g., cigarette smoking and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)*
 |
| Practise identifying the nursing problem  | * Differentiate between an “actual,” “potential” and “possible” nursing problem
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| Focus: Preparing for Intervention-type questions |
| **Strategies** | **Related discussion points, as applicable**  |
| Make links between pathophysiology and related treatments  | *E.g., if you understand the pathophysiology of left-sided heart failure and respiratory distress, you can deduce why furosemide (Lasix) is the pharmacological agent of choice*  |
| Practise how to prioritize interventions | Identify the pool of interventions for a given disease process based on the pathophysiology; *e.g., in left-sided heart failure with respiratory distress, the pool of interventions includes the following: providing oxygen, positioning, and administering medications*This prepares you choose the priority intervention when presented with a case situation; *e.g., given the case, is it most appropriate to first provide oxygen, position the client, or administer ordered medications?* |
| Focus: Performing on Test day |
| **Strategies** | **Related discussion points, as applicable**  |
| Arrive ahead of time  | * Resist being distracted by friends before entering the room; *e.g., wear headphones and listen to music*

Choose a seat where you feel the most comfortable; *e.g., front, back, aisle*  |
| Manage your time  | * Follow these simple steps:
* Note the amount of time allotted for the test
* Allow some time at the end for review
* Divide the remaining time into two
* Assign half of the test to the first time block and the other half to the second time block
 |
| Improve your approach to taking case-based tests | * Use the information in the clinical situation; it is there for a reason
* Spend a few minutes looking at each clinical situation and decide where to start
* Move to an easier clinical situation when you are faced with a more challenging one; find a strategy that reminds you to go back and finish all unanswered questions
* Read the whole clinical situation through; then take a moment to highlight, underline, or circle key words
* Before you answer, take time to read the question and understand what is being asked
* Avoid being misled by linking details from clinical experience that are not necessarily applicable to the question you are answering
* Immediately following the test, if you found yourself saying, “I didn’t understand what the questions were asking,” seek help from college resources to find possible causes
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| Focus: Strategies for Short-Answer Format |
| **Strategies** | **Related discussion points, as applicable**  |
| Follow the rules for answering test questions  | *E.g., if you are asked for one answer and you give two, only the first answer is marked*  |
| Be as specific as possible | *E.g., Coumadin takes 3 to 5 days to work vs. Coumadin takes a few days to work* |
| Be cautious when using abbreviations | If in doubt, write it out in full |
| Write a rough draft of your answer | When composing a complicated answer – *e.g., teaching a client about a medication* – use the blank back of the test page |
| Focus: Strategies for Multiple-Choice Format |
| **Strategies** | **Related discussion points, as applicable**  |
| Follow the rules for answering test questions  | Choose the best answer; there may be a number of good answers, but only one is the best |
| Read all options carefully | Decide on the best answer:* cross out all options that you know are wrong
* pick the best answer from the remaining options
* If you cannot decide on an option, mark the question in the margin so you can go back to it later

If you do not know the answer, guess (unless there is a penalty for wrong answers) |
| Try not to change your answers | Keep in mind that your first instinct is probably correct (OIIQ Prep Guide, 2018) |

“Advanced” Strategies for Preparing for the Test

We came to realize how much we, as teachers, learned over the years by writing test questions. So, we wondered: What if we asked our students to formulate their own test questions? Would it help them to better understand what the questions on a test were asking?

We call these “advanced” strategies, because students need some exposure to this type of testing before they are able to develop their own questions. When deciding whether to use these strategies, take into account the fact that it is a time-consuming and challenging task. Choose students who are highly motivated and willing to dedicate the time to it.

Let us show you strategies that you can use for One-on-One and Small Group/Entire Class.

One-on-One

We recommend this strategy for students who have completed at least three semesters in Nursing.

We ask the student to:

* pick a topic that they found difficult
* create a short Clinical Situation on that topic
* formulate four or five test questions (e.g., 2 Assessment, 2 Intervention, 1 Continuity of Care)
* for short-answer format, write the answer to each question
* for multiple-choice format, write the answer and plausible distractors
* for each answer, include a textbook reference
* submit Clinical Situations, questions and answers to the teacher for feedback
* re-submit their Clinical Situations, questions and answers after incorporating the feedback provided by the teacher

Small Group/Entire Class

Because this is a complex, time-consuming strategy that can take weeks to implement, we recommend it only for students who are preparing for their professional licensing exam.

We ask the students to:

* form a study group (approximately 4 students per group)
* assign one topic to each group member
* create a short Clinical Situation on each topic
* formulate four or five test questions per topic (e.g., 2 Assessment, 2 Intervention, 1 Continuity of Care)
* for short-answer format, write the answer to each question
* for multiple-choice format, write the answer and plausible distractors
* for each answer, include a textbook reference
* submit Clinical Situations, questions and answers to the teacher for feedback\*
* re-submit the Clinical Situations, questions and answers after incorporating the teacher’s feedback\*
* distribute their Clinical Situation and questions to the other group members
* answer the questions to each Clinical Situation distributed to them from the other group members
* collect and correct the answers to the Clinical Situations from the other group members
* hold a debriefing session for all members of the group to discuss the answers

\* You, as the teacher, can be as involved as you choose to be. However, the more feedback the students receive, the more refined their sample Clinical Situations will be. Do keep in mind that the more groups there are, the more time the teacher will have to spend reviewing the Clinical Situations.

We tell students that, although this process entails a lot of work, they should remember:

* when you create a Clinical Situation, you are studying
* when you create answers for a Clinical Situation, you are studying
* when you answer someone else’s Clinical Situation, you are studying
* when you correct someone else’s answers, you are studying

Overall, we found that students who wrote their own Clinical Situations and test questions performed better on those particular topics in subsequent tests. We have not studied this sufficiently to know if students do better on other topics as well. However, we believe it is an effective strategy, because when students write their own questions they have a better understanding of what the teacher is asking.