

# Study Tips from NSNA Members

Over the summer, NSNA requested that members and faculty e-mail the *Imprint* editors the study tips that have helped them the most during the course of nursing school. Following are the highlights from the many submissions received. Thanks to all who submitted...and good luck with your studying!

## Ways to stay ahead...

**Keep up with the subject** throughout the semester so that when finals come you're not overwhelmed. Also, forming a study group helps – members of the group can provide input on topics you may not understand, or that you may have

skipped over. After all, two heads (or five) are better than one! Also, take notes with you to campus and pull them out whenever you have a break between classes. Make note cards and take them with you to the gym. Always keep easy-to-prepare foods in the house, especially fruits and vegetables. Stay mentally healthy by including time to do other things besides studying.

Jancie Webb  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, NC

**I always have an NCLEX book with me while I study.**

This allows me to compare what I think are the most important points of a section to what I need to know for the NCLEX. My NCLEX books also contain NCLEX-style questions. I find this has better prepared me for classroom tests and for the licensure exam.

Jennifer S. Peecher Parker  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, KY

**After just one semester, I have learned how different** studying for nursing exams is compared with our pre-requisite courses. In addition to getting at least 8 hours

## Sticking to the schedule

of sleep every night, exercising 3-5 times weekly, drinking plenty of water, and taking vitamins, it is imperative to make a study schedule and stick to it! At the beginning of the semester, I write all my exams, return demonstrations, projects, quizzes, clinicals and finals in my day planner. I highlight those important dates and schedule the rest of my week around studying. Treating school like a full time job helps me prioritize free time.

Melissa Campbell  
Valencia Community College  
Orlando, FL

**Getting enough sleep is the key to success in school, and life!** Recently, I found a very simple solution – getting to bed by 10 p.m., before my “second wind” kicks in. Typically, I would stay up until anywhere from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m., waiting to get sleepy. Even then, sometimes I couldn't fall asleep. Now, I discipline myself to get ready for bed around 9:30 p.m. and to be in bed by 10. After a few minutes of light reading, I start yawning and getting sleepy. I'm asleep very shortly after turning off the lamp, sleep all night, and wake up rested.

Sarah Lockwood  
Lake-Sumter Community College  
Leesburg, FL

## Create a study sheet

**Creating a study sheet after** each lecture is helpful for a number of reasons. Writing down the information forces you to focus on what you believe is most relevant. Also, it is much easier to carry one sheet of paper than a thousand note cards, and it is easier psychologically to learn all the information on one page. I have shared this tip with a couple of my classmates and they have seen their test scores improve.

Anna Harman, TUSNA VP  
University of Tulsa  
Tulsa, OK

## Record your notes!

I am currently working toward a BSN. I have been an LPN for 21 years, but decided I wanted more, so I went back to school. All my prerequisites went smoothly. Then came pathophysiology and pharmacology, and no matter how I studied or

how much I studied, I had a very difficult time passing weekly exams. My son, a college student himself, bought me a micro recorder. I tried taping the professor's lectures, but it still didn't help. Then I decided I would tape myself reading the text and listen to it while driving to and from work and school. I also listened to it an hour each evening. I started receiving excellent exam scores, and passed the course!

Terri Barnhart  
Mountain State University  
Beckley, WV

## Get organized!

Get organized and stay that way. When you are organized it gives you a sense of control, which boosts your confidence level. Keep a three-ring binder with side pockets and dividers for the syllabus, notes, handouts, projects, and grade sheet

for each class. The syllabus usually contains a schedule of topics and when they will be covered, and I like to put a tab on that page so that I can refer back to it easily and stay on track. In addition, the syllabus has a breakdown of how you will be graded, and I use that to make myself a grade sheet. For the notes section, print out the PowerPoint file in handout form before class, and date it. You should also date any handouts you receive, and keep them in the folder's pockets until you have access to a hole puncher. A little extra work at the beginning of the semester will save you a lot of time and headaches later.

Kortney E. Green  
University of Texas Health Science Center  
Houston, TX

## Quiz Yourself!

When I need to study for an exam, I get copies of all of the old quizzes and tests that I did earlier in the class, and make a note card out for each question. Then I quiz myself with the note cards, and make two piles, one for the ones I get

right and one for the ones I get wrong. Once I go all the way through the pile, I keep going through the wrong pile until I get every one right. Then, I go through the entire stack of note cards and repeat the process until I can get all the answers right.

Jessica Phelan  
University of Wisconsin  
Milwaukee, WI

The first two weeks of class, you need to hit the ground running. Read everything you are assigned, and try to finish your assignments early. This will get you into a regular study routine that will carry you through the rest of the semester.

Shawn Coltharp  
Butler Community College  
El Dorado, KS

## Review! Review! Review!

1. Use colored index cards, which help you more easily recall information than plain white paper. 2. Record your instructors' lectures (get permission first), and listen to them while exercising, laying in bed, driving in the car, or

while waiting for class. Repetition helps. 3. Study groups are a great idea, allowing everyone to explain concepts in their own way. 4. REVIEW, REVIEW, REVIEW! I can't stress how important it is to stay ahead of the game and review your material every night. 5. Eat right. Avoid greasy cafeteria food and pack a lunch instead. Try a healthy sandwich, fruit, vegetables, and yogurt. Drink lots of water, avoid sweets, and don't skip breakfast. 6. Try to exercise at least 3 days a week for at least 30 minutes.

Danielle Kolesar  
Kankakee Community College  
Kankakee, IL



**I run after class to allow myself some alone time. This gives my mind a chance to rest and get reenergized. I run before I study so that I can get blood and oxygen pumping through my system. This helps me stay alert**

and focus on my studies, not to mention keeping me in shape.

Derek Scott  
Jackson State Community College  
Jackson, TN

**I like to highlight in my book as the instructor is lecturing.**

For each set of test materials, I use a different color highlighter. That way, when I flip through my book, I can tell at a glance which material goes with the test I need to study. This is also handy for finals, because you can easily study for the test you did worst on. Just look for the right color!

Kambra Cantrell  
North Arkansas College  
Harrison, AR

**Pick good study spots**

**Having four dogs, being the mother of a teenager, and wife of a very labor-intensive husband, I found studying at home worked for me while doing my prerequisites, but *not* for the kind of studying required for nursing school.**

Time management is the key to accomplishing the studying I need to do, so I had to learn not to feel guilty about leaving the house to do it! Three hours of studying time in the school library is the equivalent of eight hours of trying to study at home - and it's truly *quality* study time!

Nancy Meek  
Yavapai College  
Prescott, AZ

**I find that creating a "goal oriented and task completion schedule" around my daily activities has been incredibly helpful! When you wake up every morning, set a goal for that day, and think about how to go about achieving this goal. First, come up with a list of all activities you do from the time you wake up, until the time you go back to sleep. Group similar activities and allocate enough time to complete them. Break up your study hours into morning**

and evening, and incorporate them into your day. Studying in the morning and evening or at two different times will reduce the stress of accumulating material and cramming all at once. Each study period of two/three hours should have at least 2 ten-minute breaks. With such a detailed schedule, you will be able to create a balance between nursing school and your hectic daily schedule.

Pawla Wenga  
Essex County College  
Newark, NJ

**One tip that helps students focus and think clearly when**

studying for examinations is to create a ritual of restfulness. This requires setting some "comfort cues" that trigger rest at about the same time each day, and allows at least 6 hours of renewing sleep. Hygiene rituals, music, scented candles, journaling, massage, reading a "brain-candy" novel, and learning deep-breathing with head-to-toe relaxation and imagery, are all tips that can enhance the cycle of rest while creating a refreshed and focused mind for studying.

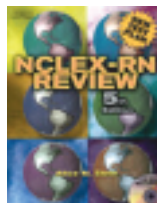
Marty Downey, RN, MSN, CCRN, AHN-BC  
Associate Professor, Department of Nursing  
Boise State University  
Boise, ID

**Plan ahead**

**One of the things I have found most helpful is planning ahead. I go through my syllabi at the beginning of the semester and I write in my planner the due dates for everything. That way, I can anticipate which weeks will be rough**

and which will be more relaxed. This also helps avoid overscheduling. Make sure to leave some time in that busy schedule to sleep, it's something we could all use a little more of in nursing school!

Cristina Stroie  
University of Akron  
Akron, OH



**I use the NSNA NCLEX-RN Review book to prepare for my exams. I find this beneficial because I am reviewing material covered in class while getting comfortable with the material in a test format. I have actually encountered several questions on exams that were very similar to those in the review**

book. Even if the NCLEX seems far off in the distance, I think that investing in a review book is an excellent study tool for nursing school exams.

DeAnna Duff  
Cox College of Nursing and Health Sciences  
Springfield, MO

Hey, visual learners!

I make flash cards for the subject that I have a test on. I usually write a key word or phrase on one side of the flash card and the answer on the other side. Sometimes, I even add a picture on the front to help me remember the card and what it relates

to. Making flash cards makes you write the notes over again, and it is an easy way to study by yourself or with another student. This method is especially helpful if you are a visual learner!

Kristin LaRochelle  
Colby-Sawyer College  
New London, NH



There are several study tips that get us through the semester successfully, but one that I use to combine them all is to purchase a full size executive date book. This date book shows time slots for each day from 7am to 7pm, and incorporates a block for every 15 minutes. When I receive my class

schedule, I take a colorful highlighter and fill in the blocks of time that I am in school/clinicals. Using a different color, I then highlight family responsibilities. Lastly, I color in my time for study and exercise along with mealtimes.

Lily Ann C. Todd  
Montgomery County Community College  
Blue Bell, PA

Don't play catch up

Keep up with your school work from the beginning of each course, and do not wait until the night before an exam to begin your reading. Get tutoring for anything you do not understand, and realize that material that is not on a test

may help you save someone's life in the future. Beyond any

test, you are preparing for a profession, so allow yourself enough time and opportunity to learn well.

Carol Toussie Weingarten, PhD, RN  
Faculty Adviser  
Villanova University  
Villanova, PA

Instead of creating an outline of each chapter, I write detailed questions. For example, if the text states, "The first step of the nursing process is assessment," I write on one side of a flashcard, "What is the first step of the nursing process?" On the other side of the flashcard, I write the original sentence. This method allows me to quiz myself in a style that forces me to recall the information. I think the key is recall – I was not having much success in writing an outline and just reading it over and over.

Tandie Askan  
Yavapai Community College  
Clarkdale, AZ

For every topic being studied, ask yourself "why?" or "so what?" This helps to clarify the meaning and purpose behind the topic, and helps develop ever-important critical thinking skills.

Mary Helgemo  
University of North Alabama  
Florence, AL

When you are studying, always keep in mind the steps needed to answer the questions: 1. Airway, Breathing, Circulation are considered first. 2. Nursing Process (assessment, diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating) in that order, are considered second. 3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs are considered third. 4. If all else fails, grab a chocolate bar and take a good guess!

Cheryle Traish  
Faculty Advisor, SNA  
Nash Community College  
Rocky Mount, NC

The 15 minute power nap!

One of the biggest problems for nursing students is not getting enough sleep. I have found that taking a 15 minute power nap when returning home from school really helps to refresh me. And when I feel refreshed, I am able to hit the

books for the evening. I know 15 minutes doesn't seem like a lot of time, but if you can train your body to do this, you will see how good you really feel! Try not to sleep past the 15 minutes, because I have found that just makes you feel groggy.

Tamara Wyers  
Tyler Junior College ADN Program  
Tyler, TX

**Study in a brightly lit room, sitting up at a table or desk.**  
Never study in bed. Light a citrus-scented candle to help keep your senses awake.

Amy Kroening  
Bellin College of Nursing  
Green Bay, WI

**I have been a nursing student** for three years, and therefore, have some experience in taking nursing exams. First of all, test-taking is not my best skill, so I have to study hard to successfully take an exam. I have learned that I benefit most by decreasing my anxiety before an exam. There are three main tactics I use to calm my pre-exam nerves. First, I give myself positive feedback and recognize the progress I make while studying. Second, I try to complete all of the assigned readings ahead of time. This way I only have to study my notes and re-read problem sections. Third, it is helpful for me to start studying a few days in advance. This helps me feel less rushed and makes me more comfortable with the material.

Shaundra Keske  
College of Saint Benedict  
St. Joseph, MN

## Here are 7 "N-U-R-S-I-N-G" tips!

- N:** Nutrition (Eat healthy)
- U:** Unity (Work together to help each other and to help our patients)
- R:** Rest (Plenty of sleep before clinicals, exams, and classes)
- S:** Study (To succeed in our classes and further our knowledge)
- I:** *Imprint* (Our favorite magazine to read for helpful hints relaxation, and new information)
- N:** Nurture (Top priority for our patients, ourselves, and each other)
- G:** Grades (Pass all our classes so we can move to boards and finally become nurses)

Shae Lee Clark  
Clarke College  
Dubuque, IA



1. Drink a glass of water upon waking and *drink at least 64 ozs. of water throughout the day. Avoid sodas and caffeine – they make you hungry.*

2. Always eat breakfast, preferably whole grains, fruit and quality protein sources such as milk or eggs. Not a breakfast person, or too rushed in the morning? *Have a breakfast smoothie - mix fruit, milk, a scoop of protein powder and ice in a blender and go.*



3. Stick to 3 balanced meals a day and avoid snacking. If you have to snack, make sure to pack your book bag with *healthy snacks i.e., fresh fruit, carrot sticks, raisins, boiled egg, or whole grain crackers* and avoid the snack machines at all cost.

4. Don't forget about oral hygiene. Pack a travel toothbrush and toothpaste in your bookbag and brush after meals. *Brushing after meals not only keeps you healthy, but it sends a message to your brain that your meal is over.*

5. Make sure to schedule 30 minutes to an hour out of your day just as if it were an appointment or a class and get out and walk, bike, jog, or go to the gym. Most schools have gyms with free or very low-cost memberships that can be calculated into the cost of tuition. *Can't exercise, gotta study? Tape the lectures - you can study while you exercise.*

**Stay active  
and  
positive!**

6. Get at least 6-8 hours of sleep a night. Rest is as important as diet and exercise, as our bodies need this time to rejuvenate. Having trouble sleeping worrying about clinicals or the next test? *A cup of chamomile tea, warm milk, or*

*slow deep breathing right before you close your eyes at night helps to relax your mind and body.*

7. Last but not least, say positive affirmations every day. Tell yourself what an intelligent, competent, compassionate future nurse you are. *Once you believe and know how wonderful you are, it will be obvious to everyone!*

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