



National League for Nursing
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CRITICAL THINKING IN CLINICAL NURSING PRACTICE/RN EXAMINATION

INTRODUCTION

In response to widespread requests from nursing faculty from all types of nursing programs, the National League for Nursing (NLN) has developed two tests to measure the critical thinking ability of nursing students. The RN exam is for graduating students who are preparing to become registered nurses and the LPN exam is for graduating students who are preparing to become licensed practical nurses. As a first step in developing these tests, the NLN brought nursing experts in critical thinking from across the country to form a Think Tank on critical thinking. This Think Tank, held in August of 2000, was jointly funded by the NLN, Cross Country Staffing/TravCorps, and Cross Country University.

Think Tank participants were charged with defining critical thinking in nursing and identifying the behaviors that operationalize the definition. Twenty-one (21) critical thinking behaviors were ultimately delineated. The consensus of the Think Tank members was that critical thinking in nursing should be measured within the context of nursing practice. Therefore, the NLN conducted national surveys of nurse educators in programs that prepare both registered and practical nurses to identify the categories that form the content basis for each of the tests.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of these tests is to measure the construct of critical thinking as defined by the NLN Think Tank on critical thinking. All questions are framed in terms of the nursing process and are designed to measure the critical thinking skills of interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, and explanation, as defined by Facione in *The Delphi Report* (1990). These skills are operationally defined for the practice of nursing by the 21 critical thinking behaviors identified by the NLN Think Tank on critical thinking.

PURPOSE

To provide nursing faculty with a standardized examination that can be used as an integral component of a comprehensive plan for the assessment of the critical thinking ability of graduating nursing students.

DEFINITION OF CRITICAL THINKING IN CLINICAL NURSING PRACTICE

Critical thinking in nursing practice is a discipline specific, reflective reasoning process that guides a nurse in generating, implementing, and evaluating approaches for dealing with client care and professional concerns.

Application of critical thinking to nursing practice is demonstrated by the ability to:

A. Interpret: Recognize, classify, and describe the significance of data

1. Asks relevant questions/Explores ideas
2. Validates data
3. Recognizes issues and concerns

B. Analyze: Identify the intended and inferential meaning of, and relationships among, data

4. Interprets evidence
5. Considers viewpoints/Recognizes assumptions
6. Identifies missing information

C. Evaluate: Judge the credibility of information

7. Detects bias
8. Considers legal/ethical standards
9. Uses reflective skepticism
10. Examines alternatives
11. Judges worth of evidence

D. Infer: Derive reasonable conclusions from the evidence

12. Predicts consequences
13. Applies deductive/inductive reasoning
14. Supports conclusions with evidence
15. Sets priorities
16. Plans approaches
17. Modifies/individualizes interventions
18. Applies research in practice

E. Explain: Justify the results of reasoning activity based on cogent arguments

19. Determines outcome attainment
20. Revises plans
21. Identifies client's perception of results

RN TEST DESCRIPTION

The 120 individual items on the RN test are framed in terms of the nursing process and assess the critical thinking ability of nursing students who are near completion of their coursework in diploma, associate, and baccalaureate nursing programs. The test items assess the construct of critical thinking as defined by the NLN Think Tank on critical thinking. These tests require a sound understanding of theory basic to the practice of nursing in clinical settings related to adult health, women's health, child health, and mental health in the nine content areas identified by the survey of nurse educators.

NURSING CONTENT AREAS

1. Research:

- Identifies research topics
- Reviews/interprets research
- Uses research in clinical practice

2. Legal/Ethical:

- Acts as a client advocate
- Maintains client privacy
- Applies legal and ethical standards to client care
- Upholds ethical principles

3. Therapeutic Communication Skills:

- Utilizes appropriate interviewing techniques
- Applies communication principles in interpersonal relations
- Collaborate with clients, families, and health team members
- Documents appropriately

4. Health Care Systems:

- Utilizes resources
- Considers third-party payer issues
- Manages client care within the context of the practice setting

5. Cultural/Spiritual Considerations:

- Considers client perspectives
- Solicits client opinions
- Demonstrates flexibility in approach to client care
- Recognizes the impact of cultural diversity and spirituality on health care issues

6. Leadership/Management:

- Delegates health care responsibilities appropriately
- Applies appropriate principles of motivation
- Initiates staff development
- Manages conflict appropriately

7. Quality Improvement:

- Participates in risk management
- Identifies variations and institutes change
- Upholds standards

8. Health Promotion/Illness Management:

- Identifies risk factors
- Intervenes to reduce risk and promote health
- Sets priorities
- Identifies safe practice

9. Client Education and Empowerment:

- Uses creative teaching approaches
- Applies the principles of teaching and learning
- Respects and adapts to individual learning styles
- Promotes client autonomy

ADMINISTRATION

This test should be given near the completion of the basic RN nursing program. Test administration requires approximately two and one-half hours. Students record their answers on an optical scan sheet, which is provided with the test.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort must be made to maintain the confidentiality of the test. Only test administrators are authorized to view the test questions. Immediately after the test is given an administrator should use the address label that is provided with the test to return the test booklets to the NLN for destruction.

DISCLAIMERS

These tests were developed independently by the Assessment & Evaluation Unit of the NLN without any input from the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC). The NLNAC Board of Commissioners independently and separately makes accreditation decisions. Using NLN tests will not influence NLNAC accreditation decisions in any manner whatsoever.

Critical thinking is a complex construct that requires a multidimensional assessment approach. Therefore, it follows that no one instrument would suffice as the sole measure of an individual's proficiency in critical thinking. These tests are not designed to be used as the single measure of a student's critical thinking ability. Educators are directed to use this test as an important component of a comprehensive assessment of student critical thinking ability.

RN TEST SCORING

120 items are scored. Every item addresses nursing process, critical thinking skills, and nursing content. Sixty-seven of the items relate to safety issues in the practice of nursing. Test scores are based on the number of questions answered correctly. A total score and four subscores are provided:

1. Critical Thinking Skills	
Interpretation	24 items
Analysis	24 items
Evaluation	24 items
Inference	25 items
Explanation	23 items
2. Nursing Content	
Research	13 items
Legal/Ethical	10 items
Therapeutic Communication	12 items
Health Care Systems	9 items
Cultural/Spiritual Systems	11 items
Leadership/Management	11 items
Quality Improvement	11 items
Health Promotion/Illness Management	27 items
Client Education and Empowerment	16 items
3. Nursing Process	
Assessment	27 items
Analysis	29 items
Planning/Implementation	34 items
Evaluation	30 items
4. Safe, Effective Care Environment	67 items

SCORING AND NORMS

Norms have been computed so that faculty can compare the performance of their students with that of students in other programs throughout the country. The test report for the Critical Thinking in Clinical Nursing Practice/RN exam consists of a total score and four subscores. Since no test is a perfect predictor, these scores should not be used in isolation for decision-making purposes. The report provides the total number correct, the percentage correct, and the corresponding percentile rank. The percentile rank indicates the percentage of students falling at or below a specific score in the normative sample. This enables faculty to compare the performance of their students with a national sample. Subscores are reported to provide diagnostic information and to suggest areas that may require further study.

Two copies of each individual diagnostic profile are routinely provided, one for the examinee and one for faculty analysis. A summary report for the group is also furnished, together with a record of each examinee's incorrect and omitted responses. Item descriptors for all test questions are provided. When ten or more students take the test at a given time, the report from NLN will include an analysis of the responses of that particular group. For each item, the report will indicate the number of students in the group who answered the question correctly, the number of students who answered the question incorrectly, and the number of students who omitted the question. Item descriptors for all test questions will accompany the test report.

BLUEPRINTS OF TEST CONTENT
Nursing Process/CT Skills Blueprint

ITEMS	Assessment (27)	Analysis (29)	Plan/Implement (34)	Evaluate (30)	TOTAL (120)
Interpretation (24)	18	-	6	-	24
Analysis (24)	9	15	-	-	24
Evaluation (24)	-	6	10	8	24
Inference (25)	-	8	13	4	25
Explanation (23)	-	-	5	18	23
TOTAL (120)	27	29	34	30	120

Nursing Process/Content Blueprint

ITEMS	Assessment (27)	Analysis (29)	Plan/Implement (34)	Evaluate (30)	TOTAL (120)
Research (13)	1	4	1	7	13
Legal/Ethical (10)	1	2	5	2	10
Therapeutic Communication Skills (12)	5	1	2	4	12
Health Care Systems (9)	1	2	3	3	9
Cultural/Spiritual Considerations (11)	5	1	4	1	11
Leadership/Management (11)	2	3	4	2	11
Quality Improvement (11)	1	3	6	1	11
Health Promotion/ Illness Management (27)	6	12	5	4	27
Education, Empowerment, & Satisfaction (16)	5	1	4	6	16
TOTAL	27	29	34	30	120

CT Skills/Content Blueprint

ITEMS	Interpret (24)	Analysis (24)	Evaluation (24)	Inference (25)	Explanation (23)	Total (120)
Research (13)	2	3	4	3	1	13
Legal/Ethical (10)	1	1	6	1	1	10
Therapeutic Communication Skills (12)	5	1	1	1	4	12
Health Care Systems (9)	2	2	1	1	3	9
Cultural/Spiritual Considerations (11)	4	3	1	1	2	11
Leadership/ Management (11)	1	1	3	4	2	11
Quality Improvement (11)	1	1	2	6	1	11
Health Promotion/ Illness Management (27)	6	8	3	7	3	27
Education, Empowerment, & Satisfaction (16)	2	4	3	1	6	16
TOTAL (120)	24	24	24	25	23	120

Critical Thinking Behaviors Blueprint

A. Interpret	24
1. Asks relevant questions/Explores ideas	9
2. Validates data	7
3. Recognizes issues and concerns	8
B. Analysis	24
4. Interprets evidence	13
5. Considers viewpoints/Recognizes assumptions	6
6. Identifies missing information	5
C. Evaluation	24
7. Detects Bias	4
8. Considers legal/ethical standards	7
9. Uses reflective skepticism	3
10. Examines alternatives	6
11. Judges worth of evidence	4
D. Inference	25
12. Predicts consequences	4
13. Applies deductive/inductive reasoning	3
14. Supports conclusions with evidence	3
15. Sets priorities	4
16. Plans approaches	5
17. Modifies/individualizes interventions	3
18. Applies research in practice	3
E. Explanation	23
19. Determines outcome attainment	10
20. Revises plans	6
21. Identifies client's perception of results	7
TOTAL	120

STATISTICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEST

Norms are based on the experimental version of the Critical Thinking in Clinical Nursing Practice/RN exam administered to 1,161 students in RN programs in the spring of 2001.

	Number of Items	Raw Score Mean ¹	Standard Deviation ²	Mean p ³ (%)	Reliability ⁴	Standard Error of Measurement ⁵
Total Test Score	120	86.6	13.43	72.17	0.88	4.58
Critical Thinking Skills						
Interpretation	24	17.77	3.17	74.03	0.61	1.97
Analysis	24	17.15	3.19	71.46	0.58	2.07
Evaluation	24	17.76	3.41	73.99	0.65	2.02
Inference	25	17.34	3.15	69.38	0.54	2.14
Explanation	23	16.58	3.34	72.10	0.63	2.03
Nursing Process						
Assessment	27	20.30	3.60	75.20	0.67	2.07
Analysis	29	20.30	3.63	70.01	0.60	2.30
Plan/Implementation	34	24.53	4.48	72.13	0.71	2.43
Evaluation	30	21.47	3.96	71.56	0.65	2.34
Content Areas						
Research	13	8.90	2.37	68.43	0.60	1.50
Legal/Ethical	10	7.94	1.60	79.44	0.42	1.21
Communication	12	8.75	2.04	72.89	0.53	1.4
Health Care Systems	9	6.44	1.56	71.53	0.30	1.31
Cultural/Spiritual	11	8.41	1.94	76.41	0.55	1.31
Leadership/Management	11	7.78	2.01	70.68	0.53	1.38
Quality Improvement	11	7.73	1.82	70.24	0.40	1.41
Health Promotion/Illness Management	27	19.03	3.23	70.50	0.53	2.22
Education & Empowerment	16	11.63	2.42	72.71	0.51	1.68
Safety	67	48.28	7.63	72.06	0.80	3.42

- 1, 2 The mean and the standard deviation are based on the raw score, i.e., the number of items answered correctly.

- 3 The mean p is the average percentage for each test and subtest. This is found by dividing the mean score by the number of items for that test or subtest. This value is the same as the average difficulty value of the test, expressed as a percentage.

- 4 The reliability coefficient is an estimate of the consistency with which the trait under consideration is being measured. The reliability estimate reported here is Cronbach's Alpha. The range of the coefficient is between 0 and +1. This estimate is based on inter-item consistency, requiring only one administration of the test.

- 5 The standard error of measurement (SEM) is reported to help assess the accuracy of measurement of an individual's score. The SEM estimates the variation in a score one would expect to see if an individual were tested repeatedly. In practice it is estimated (with 68 percent confidence) that an individual's true score will fall within ± 1 SEM of the observed, or actual, score on a test. Therefore, small differences are not likely to indicate significant differences among the performances of students. (To obtain the value of the SEM, we employ values of the standard deviation and reliability that have greater precision than shown in the above table.)

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Nursing experts from across the country participated in the development of items within the framework of the NLN test blueprint. Critical thinking behaviors and content areas were assigned and writers followed NLN guidelines to create nursing process multiple-choice items that addressed the blueprint of the test. The NLN acknowledges the contributions of the following individuals who developed items for this test in cooperation with the NLN Assessment and Evaluation staff.

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As part of the test development process faculty in nursing education programs throughout the United States extensively reviewed this test for content validity. The faculty reviewed each item for content accuracy and assessed the items for relevance to the critical thinking definition. The NLN acknowledges the assistance of the following faculty:

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PILOT EXAM

The NLN gratefully acknowledges the participation of the students at the Long Island College Hospital School of Nursing, Brooklyn, NY who took the preliminary pilot form of the test.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

The NLN gratefully acknowledges the schools who contributed to the quality of this exam by administering the experimental form of the test to their students:

Alabama

Wallace College, Dothan

Arizona

Phillips County Community College,
Helena

California

Southwestern College, Chula Vista
Imperial Valley College, Imperial
Sacramento City College, Sacramento

Connecticut

Bridgeport Hospital, Bridgeport
School of Nursing, New Haven

Florida

Manatee Community College, Bradenton

Guam

College of Nursing, Mangilao

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Chicago State University, Chicago
Richard J Daley College, Chicago
Millikin University, Decatur
St. Francis Medical Center, Peoria

Kentucky

Hazard Community College, Hazard

Massachusetts

Becker College, Worcester
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Maine

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Missouri

Three Rivers Community College,
Poplar Bluff

Mississippi

Jones County Junior College, Ellisville
Meridian Community College, Meridian
Alcorn State University, Natchez
Pearl River Community College,
Poplarville

North Carolina

Richmond Community College, Hamlet
Central Carolina Community College,
Sanford

North Dakota

Minot State College, Minot

New Jersey

Capital Health System, Trenton

New York

Monroe Community College, Rochester

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Virginia

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Lynchburg General Hospital, Lynchburg

Virgin Islands

College of the Virgin Islands, St. Thomas

Washington

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