



NCLEX FAQs

November 2015

Is the exam content Canadian or American?

The content of the exam is neither “Canadian” nor “American,” but about nursing competencies. It is not testing the writer’s knowledge of a particular health care system, history or legislation. Not only do such items vary by province and territory in Canada, but they vary across states in the US. So, while a nurse working in any specific jurisdiction would have to know about the health care system in which they are working, including its legislation, testing for that is not the purpose of the NCLEX-RN. Several reviews of the exam content have been conducted and the findings showed that none of the content showed a bias toward Canada or the United States.

Why doesn’t the exam test all of entry-level competencies expected of a new registered nurse?

It would be impossible to test of all the entry-level competencies expected of a new registered nurse. The exam tests those competencies which can be tested in an exam format. It determines if applicants have the competencies needed for their first year of practice, such as: pain management, medication administration, basic care and comfort, safety and infection control and health promotion and maintenance.

Who has reviewed the exam content?

Canadians have reviewed the content. A large bank of exam questions has been created over time. However, only those questions drawn from the bank — and thoroughly reviewed by Canadians — are being used in the current exam. As part of that review, all questions are removed that are determined by the Canadian review team of nurses and clinical educators to be unsuitable for Canadian writers.

It is the nurse regulator’s responsibility to ensure that the entry exam tests an applicant for basic competencies — competencies which are taught in Canada’s nursing programs. A national Canadian practice analysis identified the knowledge, skills and abilities required of Canadian nurses in the first year of practice, and confirmed that the NCLEX-RN is a valid test of these competencies. This practice analysis will continue to be conducted every three years to ensure the exam keeps pace with changes in entry-level nursing practice.

Why aren’t educators teaching to the exam?

Educators shouldn’t teach to the exam; they should continue teaching to the required competencies.

Because the NCLEX-RN is a test of the competencies deemed necessary for a new registered nurse to provide safe care, the same exam is used for Canadian and U.S. entry to nursing practice. Those basic competencies are the same regardless of where the nurse is located.

As the regulator, our requirement for this entry-to-practice exam is not to test all that educators have taught in a four-year curriculum. The NCLEX-RN meets our requirements for a national entry exam that determines if applicants have the competencies needed in their first year of nursing practice, such as: pain management; medication administration; basic care and comfort; safety and infection control; and, health promotion and maintenance.

I’ve heard the French translation has been poorly done. Is that true?

The translation process and the steps taken to ensure equivalence of measurement between the anglophone and francophone populations is rigorous. Translation of NCLEX-RN items is conducted by a Canadian company using

federal translation standards. Translated items are reviewed by a translation panel consisting of three to six Canadian bilingual nurses. These nurses are required to be fluent in French and English, and to be practising in a bilingual facility or setting. Their participation is approved by the national nursing regulatory body (CCRN). Any items not approved by the translation panels are removed from the French version of the NCLEX-RN exam.

All items that appear on an English version of the exam at any given period have been translated into French. We have not translated all of the NCLEX-RN items in the exam bank. This is because doing so would have required the immediate translation of thousands of items. The method we chose was to build an anglophone version of the NCLEX-RN and then translate the entirety of those items into French, thus ensuring identical items and measurement parameters.

Should writers use third-party NCLEX prep material?

We are aware of “American” content in prep courses being offered by third-parties. These courses are not associated with or endorsed by Canadian RN regulators or the exam provider. We believe that the misconception that there is “American” content in the exam is not coming from the exam itself, but rather from some prep materials. No third party has access to the NCLEX-RN question bank, and students should be wary of any party claiming to have such access.

Are writers passing the exam?

Yes, writers are passing the exam with pass rates varying among programs. It’s important to remember that the data we have received so far is preliminary. Because of the inconsistencies in the number of writing attempts across regulatory jurisdictions and nursing programs across the country, as well as the small number of writers from some programs, the six months do not provide a set of data from which evidence-based conclusions can be drawn.

A lower-than-expected pass rate does not mean the exam is testing the wrong competencies. Canada’s current nursing education should prepare students to write the NCLEX-RN since the exam is testing the competencies agreed upon and set by the regulatory bodies of Canada, and upon which nursing programs base their curriculum.