“Select All That Apply” Test Questions

Tests and quizzes can be stressful. Typical types of questions like multiple choice, true-false, matching, and fill-in the blank are bad enough, but the “select all that apply” (SATA) questions seem really terrifying. Is there a way to attack these types of questions?

Nursing instructors will tell you that SATA format questions are very much like a “True & False” quiz and that there is no short cut to preparing for the SATA questions; you just have to know enough content. OCampo (2013) says, “NCSBN item development writers love adding SATA questions to the NCLEX test bank; primarily, because in one question, a comprehensive evaluation of how well the candidate knows the topic can be tested” (para. 2).

Here are some tips to help you answer the SATA questions you encounter in class and on the NCLEX:

- **Extract Topic & Stem:** Spend the time to first understand what the question is asking by identifying the topic and stem. What about the topic does the question want you to illustrate? Spend more time looking and processing the question than looking over the options. This is important so you have a clear goal in mind before you proceed with comparing each option against your goal (Ocampo, 2013).

- **Attack One-by-One:** SATA questions are a “true or false,” “yes or no” type of question; thus, you start by comparing the options with your formulated topic and stem one at a time. Go straight down the list, and respond with “yes” or “no,” “applies,” or “doesn’t apply.” Pay attention to every detail of the option like frequency (qd, bid, q4 hrs., q2hrs., q shift, etc.); length of time (2-3 days, 4-6 months); and absolutes or extremes (at all times, complete restriction). If you cannot recall the information and/or it doesn’t make sense, it’s probably wrong (Ocampo, 2013).

- **Do Not Change Your Answer:** Don’t overthink and go back to change your answer. SATA questions are typically not application or analysis level questions so usually it does not need you to factor in anything and modify your response. Unless there is something obvious you overlooked (like they were looking for negative responses, or “what is wrong,” vs. “what is right”), do not go back and change the answer. You either know the information or you don’t (Ocampo, 2013). **Your first instinct is almost always right.**

- **Prepare Mentally:** Anticipate SATA questions on all of your tests, and certainly on the NCLEX. Knowing that there will be some may help minimize your test anxiety (Ocampo, 2013).

The Assessment Technologies Institute or ATI (2013) provides tips from nurse educators for answering SATA questions including this one from Harris: Look at each distractor (choices that look correct but are actually wrong) individually and rationally. Determine what it has to do with the question. Critically thinking through each distractor, as if that is the only piece of information being considered, increases your success on these type of questions from a psychological standpoint (as cited in ATI, 2013).
Additional tips for answering “select all that apply” questions include:

- Look at the specific words as sometimes they are a key to a wrong answer. The sentence can be 90 percent right, but one little word can make it a wrong choice. If any part of the answer is false, then the whole answer is false. That’s why reading the answer and all choices completely and independently is so important!

- Identify clues in the stem—a key word or phrase in the stem may provide a hint for choosing the correct answer.

- Identify key words in the stem that set a priority—read the stem carefully while looking for key words such as first, initially, best, priority, safest, and most. These words modify what is being asked. This type of question requires you to put a value on each option and then place them in rank order.

Keep in mind that to be successful when answering SATA questions, there is no substitute for knowing the material. If you know the material, you can narrow down your choices. Start by analyzing the question and determine what is really being asked. Eliminate the extraneous or non-essential information from the question. Once you feel you have a good handle on what the question is, think about potential answers before looking at the options, and then look at the answer choices. If your answer is there, choose it. Don’t second-guess yourself.

**NCLEX Resources in the Library**

There are many resources in the library to help you prepare for the NCLEX, including test taking strategies and practice questions. If you spend some time looking at these resources and take one or more of the practice exams, you’ll know what to expect when it comes time to take the NCLEX, and you’ll be more successful. Don’t wait until your last quarter to begin practicing questions; start today!

To access these resources, log in to CAMS or Sakai, click on the link to the library, and then click on the NCLEX & HESI tab (in green below) at the top of the page (tabs are outlined in red below). Some of these resources include:

- **Test Taking Strategies for Students** and **NCLEX and HESI Review Examples and Test Taking Strategies** (2 PowerPoint presentations)

- **BoardVitals** - NCLEX-PN & RN practice questions and review - the PN questions are new!

- **NCLEX-PN and RN Board Exam Questions** on the NursesLab website.

- **Math for Healthcare Professionals - NCLEX Review Questions** - This review covers dosage calculations and the fundamentals of medicine administration.

- Two videos with additional NCLEX tips and strategies from ATI Nurse Educators.

In February, a familiar NCLEX resource will be available again, this time through EBSCO; you’ll hear more about it soon!

Remember that the best way to prepare for the NCLEX is by doing some practice questions every day, beginning today!

References:
