

NCLEX-Style Question Starters

24 original prompts for developing nursing practice questions

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Use the starter. Build the complete item.

Replace bracketed text with a fictional scenario and the information needed to answer it. Add response options, a supported answer key, and rationales. These prompts are starting points—not finished or validated assessment items. Use the appropriate RN or PN curriculum and scope of practice.

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Notice and interpret information

- 01** A client presents with [history and findings]. Which finding needs additional follow-up?
- 02** The nurse reviews [a fictional record]. Which detail is most relevant to the stated concern?
- 03** Compared with [baseline findings], which change should the nurse report?
- 04** Before deciding how to respond to [a situation], which additional information should the nurse obtain?

Communicate and document

- 05** A client says, “[concern].” Which nurse response best addresses the client’s stated concern?
- 06** The nurse reports [a specified change]. Which message communicates the relevant information most clearly?
- 07** After [a described event], which documentation entry accurately records the observations and actions?
- 08** During handoff for [a fictional client], which information is needed to support continuity of care?

Writer’s note: Include enough context to justify words such as “most relevant” or “best.” Do not make students guess which unstated detail you intended.

Safety, teaching & priorities

Continue each starter with clinically reviewed client data. Identify the intended role and setting when they affect the answer.

Safety and professional responsibility

- 09 The nurse notices [a specified safety concern]. Which action addresses that concern?
- 10 A client record shows [a discrepancy]. Which information should the nurse clarify before proceeding?
- 11 During [a care activity], which action follows the stated safety procedure?
- 12 A student encounters [a fictional confidentiality situation]. Which response protects the client's privacy?

Teaching and understanding

- 13 After teaching about [a topic], which client statement accurately reflects the information provided?
- 14 The client explains [a plan] in their own words. Which statement identifies a misunderstanding?
- 15 The client describes [a learning need or barrier]. Which adjustment best supports the stated need?
- 16 The nurse reinforces instruction about [a topic]. Which question invites the client to explain their understanding?

Priorities and team responsibilities

- 17 Given [complete findings and timing], which concern requires attention first?
- 18 For [a defined client condition and setting], which task is appropriate for [a specified team member]?

Make priority questions answerable

State the findings, timing, relevant orders or procedures, and available resources when needed. A “first action” question should have one defensible priority for the circumstances given.

For delegation questions, verify the jurisdiction's rules, institutional policy, client stability, and team member's preparation. Do not assume a task is universally permitted for every nursing role.

For multiple-response items, state exactly how students should respond and how you will score the item. Judge every option independently against the stem. Do not label a classroom scoring rule as official NCLEX scoring.

Calculations, outcomes & an example

Calculation and evaluation starters

- 19** An order specifies [quantity] and the available concentration is [quantity per volume]. What volume represents the ordered amount? Give the answer in [unit].
- 20** Using [complete numerical information], which setup produces an answer in [target unit]?
- 21** A student calculates [result] from [complete problem data]. Which step in the shown work needs correction?
- 22** Following [an intervention], which finding supports progress toward [a stated outcome]?
- 23** The client's response changes from [baseline] to [new findings]. Which information indicates that the plan needs review?
- 24** The nurse reviews [follow-up findings]. Which observation supports the conclusion that [a stated goal] has been met?

Original fictional example: single best answer

Learning objective: calculate a volume from an ordered amount and supplied concentration.

For classroom calculation practice, an order specifies 250 mg. The supplied concentration is 125 mg in 5 mL. What volume represents 250 mg?

- A. 2 mL
- B. 5 mL
- C. 10 mL
- D. 20 mL

Key: C. The ordered amount is twice 125 mg. Two 5 mL portions equal 10 mL.

Option review: A confuses the number of portions with the volume. B represents only 125 mg. D represents 500 mg at this concentration. Each option has a specific rationale that faculty can review.

This calculation example does not establish that a dose is clinically appropriate. For clinical items, verify the medication, indication, client data, dose limits, orders, and current references separately.

Adapt across the curriculum

Use communication prompts in foundations or mental health; teaching prompts in pediatric or maternity cases; and observation or outcome prompts in medical-surgical scenarios. Change the clinical content and difficulty to match what students have been taught. Faculty must verify every resulting item.

Draft, review & revise

Your item-writing worksheet

Course / RN or PN level: _____

Learning objective: _____

Starter number / concept: _____

Fictional client data needed: _____

Complete stem: _____

Response options / response instructions: _____

Key and rationale for each option: _____

Clinical reference / date checked: _____

Peer reviewer / revision needed: _____

Faculty review checklist

- ☐ The item assesses a taught objective at the intended learner level.
- ☐ The stem asks a clear question and provides the necessary context.
- ☐ The key is supported; alternatives are plausible and defensibly incorrect for a single-answer item.
- ☐ Options use parallel wording and do not reveal the key through length, grammar, or repeated phrases.
- ☐ Unnecessary negatives, tricks, stereotypes, and irrelevant details have been removed.
- ☐ Clinical facts, calculations, role boundaries, and references have been checked.
- ☐ A colleague reviewed the item; student responses will inform later revision.

A clear stem alone does not establish fairness, validity, or rigor. Review the completed item, its use in the assessment, and response patterns before drawing conclusions about learner competence.

Reference and further guidance

National Council of State Boards of Nursing. (2026). 2026 NCLEX-PN Test Plan, Appendix B: Item Writing Tips. Use the RN or PN plan appropriate to your course. Both current plans are available at <https://www.nclex.com/test-plans.page>

The official item-writing guidance informs this resource's review process. All 24 starters, the worksheet, and the fictional example are original ELIORA content; they are not official exam questions.

Questions or faculty inquiries: hello@eliora.io

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