Study Skills 101

So why is studying a problem? You've done it before, right? You've been to high school, maybe college, maybe an LPN program. What could be so hard about learning to be an RN?

The difference for many is the depth of knowledge required, the critical thinking, priority setting, and decision making that is necessary to be a competent registered nurse. It is not enough in nursing school to learn material so that you can regurgitate it on a test. It is necessary to have the knowledge for other classes, for N-CLEX, and for clinical practice. The difference is learning material so that it stays in your long-term memory and can be retrieved and applied in clinical situations.

CLASSES – Go to them. Be there, on time, sit in front, and concentrate. The more you learn during class, the less time you have to spend outside of class trying to learn the material. If there are handouts or lecture notes, make use of them. Follow along, underline, or highlight material that is being emphasized. If you are taking notes, devise a system that works for you.

READ – Everyone learns differently. Some students read the text before class, others read it after class. At least skim the text before class so you know what the session will be focused on. If you see points that are unclear, make a note so you can ask in class. Any material in the text that is emphasized in class, highlight.

GO OVER NOTES – Probably the most helpful thing you can do is to go over your notes from class the same day. Is this time-consuming? Yes. Does it pay off? Yes. Read to understand, not to memorize. It often helps to look at someone else's notes. If you're in a study group, this is easy to do. Someone else may have written something in a way that is clearer to you. If you find material in your notes that is unclear, read what the book says, and if you still don't understand, go back to class and ask the instructor.

WHAT ELSE? - Take another look at any tables, charts or diagrams in your book or lecture notes. Can you explain them in your own words? Look at questions and examples at the end of the chapter in the book. You should be able to answer those questions.

REVIEW SESSIONS – Many instructors will have review sessions or open labs where students can come to practice skills or ask questions. Remember this is for you. The instructor already knows the material, so come prepared. Study before going, make a list of questions you want to ask. If there is information in the book that seems to conflict what was discussed in class, ask about it, but be specific. What is unclear? Don't ask, "Do we need to know this for the test?" Rather, ask what you need to know for clinical practice.

STUDY GROUPS – Generally, study groups are very helpful for most students. Again, we all learn differently so for some, study groups may not be the answer. There is more

to a study group than just getting together, eating pizza, looking over your notes and complaining about the instructor, however. What should you expect from a study group?

- Working together facilitates problem-solving and offers encouragement.
- Camaraderie replaces competition. Your fellow students are not your competition it helps to recognize that. You're all in this together.
- Studying with a group means less chance of overlooking or missing important material. If you do have to miss class you can count on your group for notes.
- The group is a 'working group', not a gossip or complaint group. If your study group is not working for you, find another one.

How to make a study group work:

- Set goals for the group, i.e. "When we meet tomorrow, we will discuss Chapters 4 and 5." Ask each member to come prepared with questions on the material.
- Discuss class notes and readings, look for areas of confusion, relate theory to practice, identify major concepts.
- If questions arise that you can't answer, appoint someone to talk with the instructor and report back to the rest of you.
- Drill each other on your own questions, end-of-chapter questions and N-CLEX review questions.
- Stop at times and summarize what you have covered before moving on to another topic.
- Divide up responsibilities and specify dates for completion.
- Stay on task and be respectful of each other. A great deal of nursing is working with others. Now is a good time to practice those skills.
- Spend a little time at the end socializing and work on boosting each other's spirits. End on a positive note.

Reference

Counseling Services University of Victoria. (2003) *Learning Skills Program.* Retrieved October 9, 2006 from http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/crit.html

NurseZone. (2006) *Study Tips and Tools.* Retrieved October 9, 2006 from http://www.nursezone.com/student_nurse_center/studytips_hall.asp