

How to Prepare for ANCC Certification Exams

Congratulations!

Why congratulations? If you are reading this, you've taken the first important step toward getting certified and advancing your career. We want to help you navigate critical steps to take as you prepare for an ANCC certification exam. Here are some **important tips and ideas** to keep in mind:

1. Be confident

- **In yourself**

If you are considering ANCC certification, that means **you already have a great deal of knowledge** in the areas that are the focus of the exam you are planning to take. You may need to brush up on this or that content area and gain a deeper understanding of how the exam is structured, but overall, you've got it covered.



- **In your choice of ANCC certification**

Trusted for our commitment to quality, the ANCC Certification Program is nationally renowned as a true gauge of your ability to provide excellent care. Colleagues and employers respect ANCC-certified nurses as experts in their specialties. **Exam content reflects real-world clinical situations.** Exams are designed to objectively assess entry-level competency in advanced practice registered nursing or validate nursing practice specialties, as well as inter-professional practice in specialty fields.

2. Review

- **How the exams are developed and structured**

Review the [General Testing and Renewal Handbook](#). This booklet provides a **general overview of ANCC testing processes and procedures** and an overview of information on maintaining certification. Review it carefully and be sure to bookmark the site so you can refer to it frequently. **This is critical information; it will give you insight into the nature of your test.** ANCC will also send you information about the test site; keep that in a safe place until needed.

- **The Test Content Outline (TCO) for your chosen exam**

For each certification exam, ANCC provides a Test Content Outline that **identifies the areas that are included on the examination.** This is your roadmap to the exam. The percentage and number of questions in each of the major categories of the scored portion of the examination are also shown. Print the TCO and take notes on each objective to guide your study process.

- **All the resources that ANCC provides**

In addition to the TCO, other detailed information related to specific exams is available, including a Test Reference List and sample test questions with answers. Visit ANCC's [Certification](#) website to take advantage of these resources.

- **The Test Reference List**

There are a number of authoritative texts, such as those listed for each certification, that are used to develop the certification examinations. The list is provided to help you prepare for the examination and is not intended to be all inclusive. The hyperlinks are included to help you locate the resources. In the event that the publisher issues a new edition, the hyperlink may change, requiring you to conduct a search for the resource.

- **Sample Test Questions and Answers**

Sample questions are provided that are similar to those on the examination but do not represent the full range of content or levels of difficulty. The answers to the sample questions are provided after the last question. Please note: Taking these or any sample question(s) is not a requirement to sit for an actual certification examination. Completion of these or any other sample question(s) does not imply eligibility for certification or successful performance on any certification examination.

3. Plan

- **Develop a personal study plan**

- Approximately 6 months before you take your exam, write up a formal plan of study.
- Include topics for study, a timetable, resources, and methods of study that work for you.
- Schedule regular times to study. Avoid cramming; it is counterproductive.
- Try to schedule your study periods in one-hour increments.
- **The key is to have a study plan that works for you and follow through on it.**

- **Implement Your Study Plan**

Refer to your study plan regularly. Stick to your schedule. Take breaks when you get tired. If you start procrastinating, get help from a friend or reorganize your study plan. It is not necessary to follow your plan rigidly. Adjust as you learn where you need to spend more time.

4. Study

You must have basic content knowledge. In addition, you must be able to use this information to think critically and make decisions based on facts. Memorize the basics of the content areas you will be required to know.

- **Take a review course**

Taking a review course is an excellent way to assess your knowledge of the test content. **Be sure to take the review course well before the exam date** so you have plenty of time to master any areas of weakness the course uncovers. People have a tendency to study what they know. That will not help you master unfamiliar content. Concentrate on those areas where your knowledge is not as strong.

- **Consider all possible ways to study**

Find a study buddy or group, review current textbooks and articles, review class notes, and join an online community. These additional methods can augment your self-study efforts.

- **Be realistic**

Do not expect to know everything about all the topics in the TCO. Use the percentage and number of questions in each of the major categories to further refine the areas you choose to focus on. The most likely diagnoses, not questions about rare diseases or atypical cases, will be on the exam. Know the most likely presentation and most common therapy.

- **Pace Your Studying**

- Stop studying for the examination when you start to feel overwhelmed and look at what is bothering you.
- Make changes accordingly when you start to feel this way.
- Break overwhelming tasks into smaller tasks that you know you can do.
- Stop and take breaks while studying.

5. Certification Examination Tips

- Look for key points such as age, medical diagnosis, time frame, comorbidity.
- Look for key words such as, except, always, first, best.
- Thoroughly read each question, and answer it, before looking at choices.
- Conserve mental energy.
- Never assume information that is not given.
- All information needed to answer the questions is provided.
- There are 25 questions that are ungraded.
- Answer the easy questions first, mark and return to the difficult questions later.
- Answer **ALL** questions.

6. Day Before Exam

- Don't study.
- Review the [General Testing Handbook](#) as it offers information on the testing center and what to expect.
- Take time for yourself.
- Try yoga or meditation.
- Eat properly throughout the day.
- Get a good night's rest.
- Be sure to bring a government-issued ID card and your [Prometric](#) scheduling confirmation to the test center.
- Have all items requested for testing center laid out.

7. Day of Examination

- Eat a nutritious breakfast.
- Before you leave, check the status of your testing center location by visiting [Prometric's](#) site status page.
- Give yourself plenty of driving time to get to the testing center.