

## Ep #9: AANP vs ANCC: Which Exam Should I Take?



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Sarah Michelle**

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Hey, friends, as I've said before, my ultimate goal with this podcast is to make your transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. And I don't think I would be doing my students any justice unless I recorded this very episode about one of the most hotly debated topics of all time.

And the topic that it seems like so many of you out there are so anxious and so torn about is which exam to take to even be able to become a nurse practitioner. Which I do want to point out, by the way, is totally fair. What a bizarre world that we live in as nurse practitioners, where we can choose between two certification exams, either the AANP or ANCC.

It's not like the days of becoming an RN, and the NCLEX where there's only one exam that everyone is forced to take. But here we are with these two exams. And I really want to help you decide. By the end of this quick little podcast episode, I really want to push you to sit down, look these two exams over and make a choice.

And I do want to point out here too, even if you've already chosen your exam, but you haven't tested yet, definitely do not skip out on this episode. There are so many exam rumors and misconceptions out there. And so I want to be absolutely sure that you have all the correct knowledge that you need about your chosen exam before you ever walk through the door to take it.

Being knowledgeable and prepared about your exam is a fantastic way to dampen down those exam day jitters. And anyone who's completed my board review courses knows that while I believe knowing the content is half the battle to passing your exam, I believe the other half of that battle is managing those anxiety levels. You're going to be anxious enough leading up to your board exam. And so let's eliminate what we can today in this

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episode. That's what I'm here for, as well as what this podcast is here for too.

Now to get started into this discussion, and just to be honest, I think part of that anxiety and confusion lies in the fact that these exams, both the AANP and the ANCC are always evolving. I'm sure eventually I might even have to redo this podcast just because things frequently update. And what I mean by frequently update by the way, is every two to three years. So don't get lost in the idea that these exams change every month or even every year because that is not the case.

But to get back on track a little bit here's the good news for you guys. I've taken both exams personally. And so I am here to tell you today there is no need to stress over which exam to take. And there is definitely no need to be dual certified, just in my personal opinion.

While I think it's a little unfair of me to lean you towards one exam or the other, I think it's gonna be pretty obvious by the end of this episode, what my personal preference is on certification. However, that is just my personal preference. The choice is ultimately yours. Which is why today, I'm going to give you three solid tips, plus maybe a little bonus tip or two, on how to decide which exam is best for you.

I genuinely believe by the end of this podcast you are going to be on solid footing to make your best personal decision about these two exams. And before we really dive headfirst into these two exams, which we're about to do by the way, I also want to include a little caveat here too. That while my courses are also used by the AGNP students and not just by my FNP students, this podcast today will be about my own experience within the family nurse practitioner exam specifically.

So to talk about the two exams I think we first really just need to cover some very basic and generic information. I've learned very quickly to not make assumptions about what you guys know about the two exams. And part of that is because I feel like schools really don't cover this type of information very well.

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Many of you out there graduate and are like, “Wait, which exam should I apply for? How do I apply? Does it matter which one I take?” etc. And if you're a member of my Facebook study group, you will see these sorts of posts several times a week by students. And so here is a very quick down and dirty rundown of the two exams.

AANP is a shorter exam currently, and it contains only multiple-choice questions. AANP is 150 straight multiple-choice questions with nothing extra in there. And 15 of those questions are trial questions that do not count towards your score. So that means that your score is being calculated on 135 of those 150 questions. A passing score on AANP is going to be 500 out of 800. And all the questions are weighted differently.

ANCC is the longer exam, but only about 25 questions. And so that makes it a total of 175 questions. It also has those pesky trial questions and so only 150 of those 175 questions actually count for your score. And a passing score on ANCC is going to be 350 out of 500. And ANCC is also the exam that has that wide variety of question types. Whether that be select all that apply, drag and drop, hot spots, pictures, etc. This information right here is the absolute nitty gritty to wrap your head around for these two exams.

Now, let's jump into my three tips for deciding because we have all this basic information down. Tip number one, please, please, please do not get lost in the common rumors and misconceptions about these two exams. This may honestly be the most important tip of all. And it's the one that I'm going to spend the most time here discussing.

A lot of the misinformation that I see floating around our study group is when people listen to their preceptor or their friend about their particular exam experience. But remember, like I said before, these exams are frequently evolving. And so your preceptor's exam experience will likely be totally different from yours, even if your preceptor tested as early as two years ago.

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So along with this tip, I think it's best to just stop at this point and address a few of those rumors and misconceptions head on. Let's conquer that confusion beast and make sure that we have all the correct information.

Rumor number one, maybe your friend said to you, "I'm going to take AANP because it's all clinical content." I'm really sorry if you've heard that, but that's technically not true.

If you check out AANPs testing outline, which is available on their website for you, they do have the ability to ask you about some of that professional role content. I definitely had several on my AANP exam. And so you don't want to skip over that section in your studying. It's also why I have an entire video dedicated to that content for you in my courses.

Rumor number two, maybe someone has told you ANCC has tons of professional role content, and it's the majority of the exam. Wrong again. If you check their testing outline, you're going to see that it's only 10% of the 175 total questions. Which boils down to only 15 questions total since that last exam update in 2019.

Prior to 2019, there was more non-clinical content asked. And usually when I hear feedback from students that it was more than 15 questions that's a really big red flag to me that they got flustered during the exam itself. And they weren't looking at those questions clearly anymore.

And number three, another big rumor. You may have heard AANP is easier because it only has multiple choice questions. I actually don't agree with this one. For me, personally, AANP was a shorter exam. But to me, it actually felt longer because there was nothing to break up the monotony of the questions. With ANCC the pictures and that question variety along the way kind of woke my brain back up and I actually finished that exam faster, despite it actually being longer.

Plus, at least from my experience ANCC was more colorful and engaging just as a software. And I know that's a really weird thing to note, but these are long exams. And so those little things can really add up.

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Oh, and by the way, if you're sitting on the fence right now, and you're terrified of that question type variety with ANCC, I do want to include that it's nothing like when you take your NCLEX. The select all that apply questions even tell you how many answer choices to choose. So for example, it'll say choose three of the following answer choices that apply. Even that little piece alone made those questions so much easier than they ever were in nursing school. And so definitely don't let that question variety scare you off.

Alright guys, deep breath with me. If you're feeling a smidge overwhelmed with everything you've been hearing with these rumors addressing tip number one, I'm going to offer you a little expert tip here. Check out these types of details for yourself on the AANP and ANCC websites. They provide so much great information about these exams that a lot of students really just gloss over or never even look at in the first place. But going in knowing what to expect will make your exam experience so much smoother, and you'll definitely be more likely to pass.

For example, I cannot tell you how many students will test with AANP, and then reach out to me and say, "Sarah, my goodness, I cannot believe how many geriatric and frail elderly questions that I had on my exam." But if you check out the testing outline for AANP, you're going to see that they're almost 40 questions, aka almost one third of the exam, about the geriatric and frail elderly populations. Which is exactly why I provide the entire geriatric video for you guys in my courses.

And along those same lines, if you're ever curious what resources that the exams are using to make those exam questions, both AANP and ANCC make that public knowledge. You can look up the guidelines that they are using to make sure that you're always studying the right material. Because oftentimes, what's going to happen is practice guidelines might be updated for a year or two before they actually get incorporated into those exams. Your exams are usually a little bit behind.

Okay, finally, moving on to tip number two since tip number one was such a big one. Tip number two is to choose the exam that will be the best fit for

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your future in practice. This might sound like a little bit of an odd tip. But before I made that decision to take both exams, I looked at what it would take to renew my certification later on.

Currently with AANP, you need to practice at least 1000 hours within some capacity prior to being able to renew your certification in five years. Now, there is a little bit of flexibility in there for volunteer work and stuff like that. But for me, personally, I'd already started into my teaching career before I ever became a nurse practitioner. And I knew there might be a point in the future where I might not actively practice anymore.

And the thing with AANP is, if you don't meet your practice hour requirement, you have to take the test again in five years. And while retesting now doesn't really seem like a big deal anymore, back then it wasn't something that I really had in my plans at all.

On the flip side ANCC offers a lot more flexibility with their renewal options at that five-year mark. You can renew with practice hours. But if you don't meet your practice hour requirement, you can renew through doing things like presentations, going back to school, evidence-based projects, preceptor hours. They offer so much variety without actually having to take the exam again. And I know a lot of you are not going to want to retest because it was stressful enough to test the first time around. I get it.

Another point that I want to make here is that a true source of contention on the page is that some employers are actually going to prefer ANCC. It's rare, and it tends to occur more in certain regions of the US like New York. But that is a possibility to keep in mind. That's another one of those things that you don't want to be blindsided by when you're looking for a job, because I've definitely seen it happen with my students. And I hate it when it does.

And I do just want to clarify one more time. This is rare, so don't panic if you're planning on taking AANP. And usually, you know, when this happens, people just simply need to go back and take the test again with



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ANCC for that specific job. And so it really all depends on if you want to risk having to take that exam again in the future.

And onto our final tip here. Tip number three, make your own choice about the exam that you want to take. And don't let anyone else, including me, decide for you. Yes, I have my own preference. But that doesn't mean it has to be your preference. And that also means that your friend's preference, or your preceptor's preference shouldn't decide for you either. Look at the facts, look at all the details. And truly decide which exam that you feel will be the best fit for you.

However, I do want to give you a little nudge and a little push to not let your fear and anxiety overtake you here. I sat at home agonizing with myself when choosing my first exam because I had heard all those rumors that ANCC was harder because of that question variety. I wish I knew then what I know now. I wish I could tell my student self back then, "Don't beat yourself up over this decision." And so please hear me when I say to you today, don't beat yourself up over this, guys.

Whichever exam that you take, you are still going to be a board-certified nurse practitioner and you are still going to be able to practice. That's what it all boils down to at the end of the day. Passing your exam and getting into practice. And both AANP and ANCC are going to allow you to do just that when you pass.

So now I do want to add in a little extra bonus tip about these two exams. Definitely back up to episode three if you haven't listened already, but if you fail your exam and you pass the other exam, you are still a nurse practitioner. Hear that again with me in case you closed your ears for a second. Let's say you fail AANP, but then you pass ANCC after it. You are still a nurse practitioner. You are still just as much of a real deal as any of your peers around you that passed the first time around. You just have to be certified by one or the other.

AANP and ANCC are totally independent from one another. No one's going to know that you have failed whichever exam unless you choose to tell



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them. Employers are not going to look at you any differently. And that's because your employer will have no way of knowing unless you tell them.

And guys, while I hate to talk about failing, because I know it makes a lot of you shudder. And it definitely makes me shudder a little bit too. I just want to make this point abundantly clear. It's another one of those big sources of angst in the student group and it doesn't have to be. All you have to do is pass one exam and you my friend are the real deal. You are a nurse practitioner.

To sum up our tips here, tip number one, don't get lost in the rumors. Do your own research and be your own advocate when you're picking between these two exams. The decision is yours and getting the right information is going to be crucial.

Tip number two, choose what's going to be best for your future in practice. You know, maybe ANCC is a better fit for you if you don't plan to practice as much in the future. Or maybe AANP is a better fit if you always plan to practice in some capacity. Only you can know what your future plans are within this wonderful profession.

And tip number three, make your own choice. Do not let anyone else decide for you. This episode is intended to serve as a guide for you to make your own decision regarding these two exams. Because what it all boils down to at the end of the day, is the fact that there isn't a wrong choice.

There is not a wrong decision when it comes to deciding between these two exams. So while I personally did both exams, that does not mean that I believe that you should take both exams, there's really not going to be an edge to being dual certified. And in my opinion, it doesn't glorify your resume either. Employers are just going to see that you're a new nurse practitioner. And being dual certified doesn't really increase your value in the way that you might think it is, because you are new.

The only time that I see taking both exams as having value is if you're super anxious, and you have a job lined up after graduation, you have to

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pass so you can start your job. That is truly the only time that I would ever flip and encourage you to consider taking both.

Alright guys, with all this new information in mind, I'm now going to heavily push you and encourage you to think it over in the next 24 hours and make what you feel is going to be the best decision for you. Don't let anyone steer you or scare you about their exam or their particular experience. Because instead you need to figure out what your best fit is going to be. I think I've said that like seven times during this episode.

And you know, maybe you need to relisten to this episode. And if so, that is totally fine because I know this was a lot of information to kind of take in along the way. And honestly, it's a lot to consider. But I sincerely believe if you listen to these three tips, plus the little bonus tips, the choice is purely going to be easy to make. You probably already know which exam that you're leaning towards.

Then it's time to apply for your exam, get signed up for my courses, prepare yourself for any of that exam day anxiety, and then pass whichever exam that you chose so that you too can finally be a real deal nurse practitioner. Finishing school and choosing your exam are truly the very first steps to starting this process to becoming the real deal. And I cannot wait for you to join our new NP club when you do. And I'll see you next week.

Now, to celebrate the launch of the show, I'm going to be giving away a Medelita gift card which will allow you to go buy a gorgeous white coat when you're ready. Now, I'm going to be giving away a gift card to two lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on iTunes. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I really do hope you love the show. I want your honest feedback so I can continue creating a show that provides tons of value for you guys as nurse practitioners.

Visit [stressfreenp.com/podcastlaunch](http://stressfreenp.com/podcastlaunch) to learn more about the contest and how to enter. And I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode.

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Thanks for listening to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit [stressfreenp.com](http://stressfreenp.com). See you next week.