

## Ep #21: Avoid These 3 Exam Day Mishaps



### 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, hey friends. This episode is going to be released in the summertime because it is the biggest and most exciting time of the year for many of my student listeners. Y'all it's graduation time. What a beautiful time, but also what an intimidating time for many of you out there while you start the process of taking your board exam, getting your license, and starting the job hunt if you haven't already.

However, to start this big, momentous transition, the first step is always going to be your board exam. In order to practice, and in some states in order to even apply for that license, your certification through AANP or ANCC has to come first. And since I know the exam weighs so heavy on so many of your minds, I wanted to dedicate an entire episode to what I feel like are the top three mistakes I have seen students make over the last year.

Let this quick episode be your guide to learn from not only the mistakes of the students in my communities, but also from my own personal mistakes as well, because you guys know I have been there. There was so much guidance that I was lacking in the final months before taking my exam that I truly want to share with you today.

And if you're out there listening and one of these mistakes that we're going to talk about is something you've been doing, please absolutely do not feel bad. I want to validate you and make it abundantly clear that it is such a learning curve once you graduate from nurse practitioner school.

The truth of the matter is, school does get us to this point. But ultimately, there's not a lot of direction from school after you get here. That lack of direction can be difficult for our brains to wrap around. And we find ourselves reverting to our experiences with NCLEX or other certification exams we might have taken along the way.

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But these nurse practitioner board exams are different because you've now up leveled and you're about to be a real deal provider. The decision process is more complex, and the questions are at a much higher level. Therefore, likely your studying process for your RN exam is going to be a lot different than what you're going to need to do for your nurse practitioner board exam.

Also, one last thing before we deep dive into my top three mistakes. And actually, I won't even call them mistakes because I think that's kind of a harsh word with kind of a harsh connotation. And so let's use mishaps instead. So, before we dive into my top three mishaps, if you are someone out there listening who hasn't checked out episode nine yet about which exam to take, that should be your next stop after this episode.

Even if you already have chose an exam and you think you have a solid idea of what you might choose, it's still an episode that you're going to want to check out. Because, spoiler alert, there are lots of rumors out there and you want to make sure you haven't fallen into some of those rumors inadvertently.

So the first mishap I see students out there doing, and it breaks my heart every time y'all, is buying a thousand review courses. Okay, maybe not a literal thousand, but definitely a solid five or six different ones. And I know that y'all do this because I was so guilty of it myself. And every time I purchased a new review course before boards I almost instantaneously regretted it. And then I found myself doing it again.

I truly recommend that you stick to one, at most two, different review courses. Refrain from panic buying. Hear that one more time loud and clear, refrain from panic buying. I know it is so easy to panic buy when you're stressed, and you're overwhelmed, and you desperately want to pass boards. But I can assure you that every time I opened up another review course it only overwhelmed my brain even more than it already was.

Every review out there has their own method of teaching and presenting the material. And I know that I would have retained a lot more information if

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I had stuck with one or two reviews instead of flitting around between five separate reviews. When you're trying to absorb that much information from that many sources it gets super confusing super quickly.

And the more confused that you become, the harder it is to get yourself to really commit to your board preparation process. You then will start to procrastinate because honestly, you'll have no earthly idea where to start. So commit yourself to the review you have purchased and get yourself to work guys.

Then when you have that one solid review course down, that's when you can visit the idea of purchasing potentially one more course if need be. And the reason that I include that caveat is because sometimes the review that you purchase on the first time is not going to be the right fit for you.

So as an extra aside to mishap number one, if you feel awful after doing a review course, that review course did not serve its purpose for you. Not every student out there can vibe with every review course. And I know there was one in particular for me that I absolutely did not vibe with in any shape or form. If I had stuck with that review that made me feel terrible about myself and my knowledge base, I would have been in a tizzy before boards and I never would have passed.

So if this is you, do some thorough research before you commit to your next review and take a look at how people are feeling once they complete that review. Are they feeling good about getting ready to take the test? Or are they feeling down on themselves and the entire process? Use that feel as a way to guide yourself into the review course that's going to be the right fit for you.

So, mishap number two, and something that so many of us are guilty of is getting lost in the details. I see students doing this every single day in my Facebook group. Remember that your board exam wants to ensure that you will be a competent novice nurse practitioner. They do not care, nor will they test you about the gray area. And so a lot of you are probably asking,

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what does this mysterious gray area look like on the exam? This is when two sets of guidelines slightly vary.

For example, one might suggest starting a screening at age 45 and another might suggest starting a screening at age 50. Your exam is not going to try and trick you; I promise you. They won't say, "Well, the patient today is 47 years old and so we're going to make you choose between these two guidelines." Instead, they're going to make it black and white for you and say, "Hey, this patient's 55 years old, should we screen?" Yes, because this patient fits into both guidelines.

This is part of where students get confused doing multiple reviews as well. One review might give you the 45 year old guideline, another review may give you the 50 year old guideline and both are technically correct. And so do yourself a massive favor and do not get lost in a plethora of details. Just consistently tell yourself, "My exam is not going to ask me about the gray area. The gray area is not going to help the exam decide if I will be a competent novice nurse practitioner."

And mishap number three, the biggest mishap of all in my opinion, is not having a game plan for your exam day anxiety. Y'all, this makes me so, so sad, every time. There have been students who have ended up on my group after failing their exam. And they're now looking at my review, and what to do next, and how to make a plan.

And whenever they reach out to me, I always ask, number one, "Are you okay?" And once I've established that they're okay and they're ready to talk, number two is, "What was your preparation for boards and what was your anxiety plan?" And about 90% of the people who fail will tell me they never had an anxiety plan because they didn't feel like they were anxious.

In fact, I had a student once who told me how she got so dizzy during the exam she went and dry heaved in the bathroom halfway through. But she was like, "You know, I'm not an anxious person. I wasn't that anxious during the test."

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And so the thing is, we might not always be aware of it, but it can definitely pop up on your exam day. It's almost inevitable. This is a big exam with a lot of power in regards to how you're able to move forward in your career. It is imperative that you are not blindsided by a massive anxiety attack in the middle of your exam.

When you get that flustered, it is so hard to gain that control again and gain that focus again. Then you end up spiraling in your exam. And by the time you finish, you're not even sure what's happened to you. For a lot of students, they'll come out of their exam and say I checked to make sure I was in the right test. As soon as I hear that sentence, I know their anxiety was on level 1 million.

And that is why I spend so much time harping within my review courses on how to establish an anxiety plan and also how to figure out if you're feeling a little bit of normal exam day jitters or if you're starting to teeter on the edge of panic level anxiety. Because those of you on the latter end are going to need a little extra support, which is 1,000% okay.

Never be ashamed to ask what you need and get that additional support. Because that was exactly where I was at when I tested too. For almost everyone who fails their exam, anxiety is a large component of why. And that's why it's become my mission to help as many of you as possible build up your confidence prior to testing. Because that's how we drive that anxiety down. It is amazing what a little confidence boost and anxiety work can do to impact your exam results.

So to recap this episode, I want to reiterate that if you're guilty of one of these three mishaps, please don't worry. I myself was guilty of all of them at some point or another in my board prep process. But the wonderful thing is, you absolutely have time to turn it around. Because you're now aware of it, truly. Awareness is the first step, especially when it comes to mishap number three.

And now that you're aware of it, reflect on where you can take this guidance and truly ask yourself, what can I do differently in my board

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preparation process? It can be as simple as reaching out to your primary care provider for a little additional anxiety support. Or closing down some of those review courses that are just not working for you. It can be really pushing yourself to stop grinding out the details and reminding yourself that your board exam is testing a basic knowledge base, not the gray area and not the nitty gritty.

Regardless of where you fall within these mishaps, I want to finish out this episode reminding you that you are capable, you can do this. And as always, you will pass. I have the utmost faith in you and so don't forget to also have that faith in yourself. You have everything that you need to succeed, and our entire community cannot wait to celebrate you and uplift you when you post about passing.

And so that's it for this episode, guys, and I'll be talking to you next week.

As an extra bonus friends, if you're looking for support no matter what phase of your nurse practitioner journey that you're currently in, I have communities available for both students and new nurse practitioners. In these communities we work to uplift one another and grow this profession together every single day. Links to join will be included for you in the show notes.

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.