

Ep #33: My Preparation for Boards



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.

Hello my wonderful friends. Today I thought I would do a little bit more of a transparent episode and give you a little inside review of where I was at before I was in my own board exam.

I think there are a lot of you out there who assume I had it all figured out and I was super calm and collected before my exam. And while I definitely wish that were the case, it most definitely was not.

A lot of the tips and tools I tell you to utilize today are truly from my own experience and things I wish I had known or things I wish I had executed just a little bit better.

What is wonderful for you guys is that when I was initially going through this, I was literally doing review courses that told me test anxiety didn't exist. And it was absolutely gut wrenching to feel as if I was all alone and no one was feeling how I was feeling.

And what I have actually found, this is the good part, is that there are so many of us out there with test anxiety. And I really feel as if we have been able to congregate together and support one another in this journey within my Facebook community.

We are so much stronger together as nurse practitioners and nurse practitioner students than we could ever be alone, which is such a beautiful thing, guys. It literally tears me up if I think about our community for too long.

And so in an attempt to avoid tears I want to jump right into this episode, and I really want to paint you a picture of how I was looking like and how I was feeling right before my board exam.

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I had started preparing for boards lightly about six months in advance. I went into an absolutely wonderful nurse practitioner school. But being anxious, I wanted to be sure that I had a solid head start way ahead of my exam.

And so I started by doing practice questions. And y'all, I love practice questions and I love practice questions for a lot of reasons. The biggest of which is that they have always made me feel good about myself. And it is super important to feel as good and intelligent as possible before ever even thinking about walking into that exam room.

And so I used the strategy that worked for me in NCLEX. For my NCLEX I had been tutoring full time for almost a year and I actually didn't even do a review course, and instead I just did 1,000 practice questions and took my exam. And so I knew for me that method could work.

But like I said, this episode is full transparency and so to be totally blunt and honest with you, I became a little bit obsessive with those practice questions. At first, I was doing 10 to 20 a day in between teaching clinicals or when I had breaks in my other job, et cetera.

But when it got to a month before my exam, I had completed all of my practice question banks at least three times. And I did them all a fourth time around before I tested. And so that means that by the time I was done repeating all those I had done over 10,000 practice questions.

You definitely do not need to do 10,000 practice questions to pass this exam. If that's what it takes to give you the confidence, then so be it, do it. I usually suggest, though, a bare minimum of 1,000 practice questions, just to make sure that you are aware of how questions are asked, and how that information needs to be applied. But also so you can be mentally prepared for the fatigue of a 150 or 175 question exam.

And so I started with those practice questions. And as the time for my exam grew closer, I decided that unlike my NCLEX days, I was going to do a review course this time around. Since I had never done a review course before I'm not totally sure what my expectation was from the course.

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I think I had built it up in my head to be like this massive confidence building session where I would leave this long weekend totally sure of myself and just ready to roll right into that exam. Because that was really how I'd felt when I completed those 1,000 NCLEX review questions. And naively, I thought this would be even better since it was a real course this time.

Instead, I found myself overwhelmed with the amount of content just being constantly shoveled at me for two full days. I'm usually a pretty attentive student and I'm a pretty avid note taker too. But I found that after about that four to six hour mark of straight content, I wasn't really keeping my focus anymore.

All of a sudden, I had all of this guilt about the money I had invested in this review that I couldn't even maintain my focus on. And on the second day of the review, I literally fell asleep on my office floor at one point, and I burst into tears when I woke up because I knew there was no way to rewind and get that content I had missed.

That weekend turned me into a shambled mess. And I only had a couple weeks left before my exam at that point. And that is when I went down the rabbit hole of buying more review courses, because I felt I was literally at a point of desperation. I was looking for any little thing that will give me that mental go ahead to say, "I can actually do this, I can actually be a nurse practitioner."

This was a time that I should have taken a pause, I should have turned inward. But I didn't have that perspective then, I was simply too lost in the moment. But the best thing that I did for myself then is something that I now instruct all of my students to do before their exams. And I created this little list that I call my list of tangibles.

A tangible is something you can hold on to. It's something you can come back to when you need it. And I was desperately in need of something to hold on to and those last few weeks. And so for those of you who haven't done a list of tangibles before, I want you to take a quick pause in this

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episode right here after I explain it, just for a moment, and I want you to make your own list. I promise you'll feel better if you do it.

And so this list should consist of anything and everything that got you to this moment. My list included things like both of my master's degrees, my nursing experience, my nurse practitioner clinical rotations, all those practice questions I completed, the tutoring I had done in the past, my work ethic, my drive, my ambition, and determination, et cetera.

There are no right or wrong tangibles. It is truly whatever sticks out to you as reasoning as to why you deserve to have this success and have this moment. And then cling to that list when you need that little pick me up. So many students tell me they even write their list along with a sweet little you will pass on their scrap paper of their exam to let themselves know that they are ready to do this.

I promise y'all, it works. Take the moment to do it. That list of tangibles and my affirmation, "you will pass" carried me through that exam more than really about anything else. And as a bonus, when that inevitable imposter syndrome sneaks up on you when you're a nurse practitioner someday, you will have that list ready to pull out to remind yourself of why you're here and how you made it here. It is truly an invaluable tool that does not have an expiration date.

But to get back on topic here. I just had a pause to talk about the list of tangibles because it's my favorite. But the most stressful part of your preparation for me, was definitely having my exam rescheduled multiple times. And I know this has happened to a lot of you out there.

I would gear myself up, I would feel as if I was as ready as I could possibly be to go take that exam. And then I will find out I was canceled, and it needed to be postponed. And I think those moments threw me for a tailspin almost more so than anything else in my board preparation process.

You work so hard to get to your moment. And then they say, "Not today, schedule again sometime soon." And it turned into a sick game of sorts, where I sat on hold on the phone for hours on end with customer support.

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And my exam would get pushed out weeks and weeks past when I originally had scheduled it. This is no exaggeration.

But one time because I was canceled multiple times. But one time when I was canceled, I was literally rescheduled to a testing center in Dubai. Literally an entirely different country. And I had the awfulest time getting it rescheduled. And then when I finally did, I had my next exam date canceled about 30 minutes before it was supposed to start.

And so I felt like a ball of anxiety and tears for weeks that had no true end in sight. There was no light at the end of that tunnel. And every time I would be canceled, that only left me more time to study and more time to get myself all worked up all over again.

And at one point my hair was literally starting to fall out just because I was so stressed about this exam. I was an absolute mess, not because I wasn't ready. That's the important part. I was a mess because of my anxiety alone.

But here's the thing, guys. Here's what I wish I had known in all those stressful, tear filled weeks that felt like they would never end. While I obviously didn't have the confidence in myself, I did have all of the education and knowledge base that are needed to take that exam. I truly genuinely did.

I definitely did not need to complete five review courses. And I also did not need to do 10,000 plus practice questions. By graduating nurse practitioner school, I was ready. What I really needed in those last few weeks was just a simple confidence boost. That's it.

I needed a little faith in myself. But my test anxiety took over. test anxiety is real. And test anxiety can be a monster when it's untamed. That's why every single thing that I create for you guys is geared towards showing you how much you already know. You have so much in your brains. And when I passed AN CC in less than an hour, I remember being stunned at how much I knew.

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I was blown away that had had it in me all along. The test wasn't hard because I was prepared for it. And at the end of the day, all that you can truly control about your exam is how you personally prepare. That is it. It doesn't matter what your friend, or your preceptor, or your colleague, or whoever else says about these exams.

The root of your control and the root of your confidence all lies within you and you alone. And so you need to be your number one cheerleader in those final few weeks, reminding yourself all along the way that you can do this. And you are absolutely meant to do this. You have been preparing for this moment for years. And it is here, and it is time to own it.

And so with that, I implore you to ask yourself the question I didn't know to ask myself when I was preparing for my board exam. What am I hoping to achieve with my board preparation? What do I need to get out of whatever I'm doing to know that I am ready?

I needed someone to tell me my anxiety was okay. That I wasn't the only one out there feeling this way. I needed someone to remind me of how much I already knew. And while I didn't have those things at that time, you can always find that wholeheartedly with me, even just within our free community on Facebook.

The community that we have together will always be there to show you that you are surrounded by those just like you. And you have a whole team that I never had that is out there rooting for your success. You can walk into your exam with a totally different mindset and attitude than I did. You can walk in knowing that you are ready for success, and you are ready to finally become a real deal nurse practitioner. It is all there waiting for you. You just have to be ready to show up for it and to do it. And that's it for this week, guys.

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

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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. See you next week.