

Ep #36: Setting Up Your Study Calendar



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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, my friends. Today is going to be another episode for my student friends. Because I felt like over the summer, we talked a lot to the new nurse practitioners out there. And so now I'm doing just a little bit of catching up to make sure that you all are just as loved and supported too as those new nurse practitioners.

And so today I'm tackling a huge debate within my student community, which is how in the world do you set up a study calendar in order to be successful on your board exam?

Now, while there is no exact perfect formula that is going to uniformly meet each and every student out there, there are definitely some basic guidelines you can use and follow to set yourself up for success. Then, if need be, you can tweak some of these along the way to really best fit you and your needs from your study plan.

Which also brings me to the ever important caveat that I'm always mentioning that how you study is ultimately up to you, always. Your plan, your calendar, the whole thing, totally up to you. And you have to figure out something that you are actually going to commit to. Which we're going to talk about that point as well throughout this episode.

And of course, if you're totally overwhelmed with making a study calendar, or you just genuinely don't have the time to figure one out, because I know there's some of you out there feeling that way right now, you can always just join into the live study group program where that calendar piece and the setup is all done for you.

So to start us off, to be able to set up a calendar in the first place, the number one thing you need to do, decide your timeline. Are you going to start studying quite a way out, like six months before? Because that's wholly going to change and shift how that calendar set up.

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I think when it comes to picking a timeline it really depends on how much time you have to dedicate, but also how anxious you are. I personally went to an excellent nurse practitioner school that I would recommend over and over. I definitely felt like I was over prepared, but I was still super anxious just as a person at baseline and so I did start preparing for boards right around six months out.

But during that six month period, I was not studying full throttle the entire time. I really just started with doing some daily practice questions. And then as that exam date grew closer my studying became more intense, more planned out, definitely more intentional. And I really think that sweet spot on timeline for a lot of students currently, right around six weeks or so.

Six weeks allows for you to study, do practice questions, take breaks, super important too, and still feel prepared to test when that big day comes. But to choose your timeline a great question you can ask yourself is how much time can you dedicate to board preparation?

I see this happen to students all the time, it can be so easy to overestimate the time that you're going to have to dedicate to board prep. You know, so many students out there will tell themselves, "I can study at work," or, "I can have study days when I get home from work before I go to bed." Or "I'll study at my kid's soccer game," whatever else, all those things.

And when you are double committing yourself like that the studying piece is usually the first thing that gets dropped. Because you're going to tell yourself, "Well I can do extra tomorrow. I'll pick this up later tonight," et cetera. And then you don't.

Make sure that you give yourself flexibility and time within your timeline. Because we have a large chunk of live study groupers who end up in the live study group program because they thought they would be able to make themselves commit on their own. And now here we are three to six months or even longer after graduation and they still haven't tested yet.

It's a lot more common than you might think. And it's okay, but ideally the closer that you can test your graduation date, the better off you will be as

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you are likely still going to be in that school grind mode. But you're also going to have all of that school content fresh and available to you in your brain. The further you get out the less of that is available to you and you want every little piece you can get.

And then one last note about timelines before we move on, a popular way to commit yourself to a timeline is to set that testing date and make it non-negotiable. And what I mean by non-negotiable is that once you set that exam date, that is your exam date no matter what. No changing, no shifting, you are committed to that date.

Because that will force you on the long days to still get your studying done. It will give you that tangible goal to work towards. Basically that tiny little motivator to just keep you moving along if you're doing more preparation solo. I really can't recommend setting the date enough. Making that testing date non-negotiable and working towards that goal every single day will push you through.

So after we've settled on a solid timeline, and ideally have said that non-negotiable testing date, what you need to figure out next is how to set up that day by day plan. What I personally feel like is the best way to do it is to set aside a few days or even a week to dedicate to one or two body systems max.

Really commit yourself and deep dive into those body systems in little bite sized segments so you have time to absorb, relearn, and then follow that material practice questions. And we're going to be talking about practice questions in just a minute.

But I really want to emphasize here the importance of not overdoing it with your study. If you give yourself enough time, there is no need to spend even two or three hours a day studying. You can really get into a body system or two in less than two hours per day and give yourself the capacity to ingrain that material that you've already learned and are just now refreshing for your exam day.

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This is something easy for students to fall into, they think that the quantity of their studying relates to the quality of their study. It doesn't. If you're studying for five or six hours a day, you're only overwhelming your brain. Which then makes it hard to even retain the information you do already know and the information you already had down. That's what we want to be avoiding.

We really want you to maximize your brain power in small snippets so you can really focus on what you're trying to learn. I promise you that if you want to feel overwhelmed and as if you'll never feel ready to test, just try spending six hours straight studying, it is the ultimate way to frazzle yourself. The bite sized segments each day really allow you to breathe and makes passing boards and studying feel much more attainable.

Next step is going to be integrating practice questions and practice tests into that study calendar. Both of these pieces are super important for your exam day success. For your day by day calendar usually anywhere from 20 to 50 questions can be sufficient.

An ideal way to set it up is to study your body system for the day and then do those questions directly after. Then you can truly see if you're understanding the content that you're refreshing on or if you need to do a little additional refreshing. Then spend one day a week doing a true practice exam of 150 or 175 straight questions.

You can do this on whatever question app you're already using, just set the total amount. And by doing these practice tests you can see, "Am I moving too slow? Am I moving too fast?" Is my anxiety gain the best of me for a few questions?" et cetera. You want to test out all of that before your exam day comes and just have it be another part of your routine for board prep.

This will allow you to not be surprised by the mental fatigue of such a long exam and will definitely give you an advantage on your exam day because you will be more than prepared to sit there for that long and continue to think critically through questions.

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A lot of students find themselves exhausted after 75 or so questions. And, guys, that's only half the exam. Let's have you prepared to do the entire thing without any issue. And this is exactly how you practice for that.

And the last big piece of your study plan and calendar is remembering to include the ever important break time. It can feel like there's not enough time to take breaks, but you are only hurting your exam preparation process if you don't. If you grind, and grind, and grind, we are right back into that phase of mental exhaustion.

Everything starts running together content wise and you start doubting yourself. It's like your brain turns into a puddle of mush. We do not want you walking into your exam with a mush brain. We want you walking into your exam feeling prepared, as confident as possible, and like you can do this.

And so there should be one to two days every week where you decompress from studying. You leave board preparation behind, and you just live your life. Your body and your mind will thank you and they're going to reward you when you do. The most strung out students are those out there that don't take breaks and have that frantic energy following them into their exam. So don't let that be you. Okay?

And the last piece I want to add into your study calendar is, what should you do if your exam gets rescheduled? I think this is a point in time where a lot of students just feel totally lost. And I know that feeling personally so well because my exam was rescheduled several times. Rescheduling can happen even during non-pandemic times, just due to the weather, computer outage, software updates, et cetera.

And so when this happens, first, allow yourself to feel your feelings. It's okay to be disappointed. It's most definitely okay to be upset. The key part is letting yourself feel those for a day or two, so you don't get trapped in those feelings while you're waiting for that new exam date.

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Usually, if you can get it rescheduled in less than a week, I suggest just doing whatever it is from your studying process that makes you feel your very best and you're most confident.

If it's going to be any longer than a week, depending on where you're at mentally, you may find it beneficial to dive back into doing some true studying. Review again whichever system was your weakest, do some more practice questions. And then tie up that final week in the exact same way of doing whatever it was that makes you feel your very best.

What we want to try to avoid is becoming distraught and distracted over a reschedule exam, because that negative energy will end up following you into your exam, which is the last thing that you want. A rescheduled exam is only the end of the world if you allow it to be. I know it's so stressful when it's happening to you. And I know there are a lot of feelings that came alongside it.

But just remember your exam day is coming and you still will have your success. You still will be able to pass, and you are still going to become a nurse practitioner, it's just going to be on a later date.

So when it comes to creating the study calendar make sure that you have your foundational pieces in place. Set up a day by day plan with a review course and time for practice questions based on your timeline and stick to it, be committed. But you're only going to be committed if you haven't planned to overdo it and if you've included those break days in.

That piece is absolutely crucial. I always want you to be thinking to yourself that the quality of your studying matters so much more than the quantity of your studying. Even write it at the top of your calendar if that helps you ingrain it and make sure that you don't overdo it, okay?

And, of course, if you're struggling with making a plan or sticking to a plan and being accountable, you can always join in the live study group program where those pieces are taken care of for you. That was the whole purpose of creating that live program, to give you all the tools that you need for success in one place.

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But that's it for this week, guys. I'll talk to you soon.

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. See you next week.