

## Ep #44: Am I Ready to Test?



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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, all my beautiful friends out there. Let's talk together today about the hottest topic in board preparation I think there is. This question is emailed to me, messaged to me, and posted on my Facebook group what feels like daily. And this magical question is, how will I know if I'm ready to test?

Every time I receive this question I let out a little sigh and I want to send whoever asked it a virtual hug. Because that feeling of self-doubt and overwhelm that truly exists at the core of this question feels almost palpable. I know that feeling so well from my own board preparation.

And when you're in school to become a nurse practitioner, we really just get all of this validation all the time that what we're doing is right. So we get a high score on an assignment, we ace a class, we get gentle love from our instructor saying, "Hey, you're doing it right, you've got this." But there's nothing like that for board prep.

When you're preparing for boards, for a lot of students it's the first isolation they've had in a while with no one really showing them the exact way. And that right there is why so many students get tangled up in this question, it's so easy to do. And so I want to give you some tangible tools in this episode to know, yes, you are likely right to test. So let me be your cheerleader in this episode so that you can go take that exam and finally get this thing behind you once and for all.

First up, let's start by doing a little reflecting on how you prepared along the way. This is where I want to start. So stop what you're doing, even if you just pause this episode and make this list in your head, and list out everything that you have done to prepare for your board exam.

And guys, everything counts. Going to nurse practitioner school, all the clinical hours you've completed, all the patients that you've helped treat

[Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner Podcast](#) with Sarah Michelle

## Ep #44: Am I Ready to Test?

along the way. The review courses or other courses you've completed. The practice questions you've done. The flashcards you've created if you've done that. There is no right or wrong for this list.

And what you're going to find is that for most of you out there, this list is quite lengthy. You've been putting in a lot of time, effort, and work. It's easy when you're in the thick of it to forget all this effort that you've put in, which is why I always love for students to create this list to wrap their heads around the fact that they have been working so hard for this moment.

And on top of that, this list can be wonderful for when you get to the testing center and your anxiety is super high and you just need that little mental reset. This is a great tool for you to do as you take some deep breaths to regain that mental clarity and levelheadedness that you're going to need to be able to take that exam.

All right, so now that we have that little exercise out of the way let's start taking a look at assessing your readiness. An excellent way to know if you're ready to go is if you're scoring well on practice questions. And what I mean by scoring well is that you're scoring at least 80% or higher on an easier question source, and 65 to 70% on a harder question source.

These are the scores that I've seen students have success with again and again and again and again. There have been thousands of you, I've seen this over and over. And what you have to remember, that the exam is only going to require around 70% to demonstrate competency. And so if you're scoring this high, you must know your stuff, right?

And here's the other thing, I'm looking at overall score when it comes to practice questions. So not just one exam, or just one set of questions. I'm saying if there are 1000 questions in your question bank, let's hope for 80% or more.

But if you're not at 80% or more when you complete all those questions, then you can reset your app, reboot, and start over. So don't beat yourself up if you're not there quite yet. But it could indicate if you're not there yet

## Ep #44: Am I Ready to Test?

that you're not fully ready to test or you might be on the fence. And so let's get those scores up as much as we can before your big day.

Another tool to assess your readiness is by seeing how you handle a full length practice test session. So take whatever question source you're using, it doesn't matter which. Set it to either 150 or 175 questions on your computer and see how you're able to manage yourself and your mind while doing questions for that long.

I frequently tell my students that if you haven't tried this out at least once I don't consider you ready to test. And the reason behind this is that these exams are long, they are so mentally fatiguing, and you need to see where you stand when your brain is tired.

It also helps you figure out are you a fast test taker and maybe you miss those key words like inappropriate or except? Are you a slow test taker, are you running out of time? Did you maybe get flustered when there was a difficult question and then you got derailed for several questions after that, even if they were easy and straightforward?

You can find the answer to all these questions about yourself and your test taking style by completing a full length practice tests. If you can get through a full 150 or 175 questions without losing your mind, without running out of time, and get a decent score on top of it, then that can be a great indicator that you've been preparing well and could definitely be ready to take your test.

This can definitely be a pitfall for some students, especially those of you out there that are slower test takers. If you're a slower test taker in particular, maybe you do two, three, or four of these full length sessions to really be mentally prepared for what you're going to experience on exam day. The more you can simulate your exam day ahead of time, truly the better off that you're going to be.

Alongside the full length practice test become a big but important way to assess your readiness. And that is if your anxiety game plan has been put into place, in practice at least once if not twice. The reason this comes

## Ep #44: Am I Ready to Test?

alongside a full length practice test is that it is a wonderful time to trial whatever your anxiety plan is. See if brain dumping, taking breaks, utilizing test taking strategies, affirmations, whatever it is that you plan to do for your anxiety on exam day, see if those tools work before the big exam day.

If you've practiced that anxiety game plan and fine-tuned it, that's an excellent way to be sure that you're ready to go for your big day. The last thing you want to do is go in and think, "Okay, I'm going to take breaks, that's going to work best." And then quickly find out when you get flustered that wasn't actually your best anxiety plan.

Just like the full length test this is definitely something I would love everyone to practice before their big day no matter what. I promise it is worthwhile and you can do it at the same time you do that practice session. So you can knock out both at once and make sure that you're actually going to be able to manage your mind and your anxiety when the time comes.

Another big way to assess your readiness is how you're doing in my courses or whatever review materials that you're using. I am jazzed when I read passing posts where students say, "I was shouting the answers to Sarah's courses before she could even finish the question." If you're that absorbed in the material, aka, if you're tired of hearing my voice from the review courses, there's a really great chance that you're actually ready to take the test.

There's no way that you're shouting out correct answers at home and don't know your content, right? If you have stuck with my courses and watched through them multiple times, and were sure to pause on any content that you needed to beef up a little bit more, you're doing all the right things.

If you're using the hope method, however, preparing, aka I hope they don't ask me about murmurs. I hope they don't ask me about COPD. I hope they don't ask me about asthma. Odds are you're not there yet and you have a little bit more work to do, which is no big deal. Just be honest and

## Ep #44: Am I Ready to Test?

transparent with yourself about where you're at and how you are truly doing.

I think when it comes down to truly doing a self-assessment of your readiness, deeply truly the biggest hurdle is just being honest with yourself. That's where some students start to fall into the gray area. For example, some students will say, "I did your crash course." And then when I pull up their course they only completed half of the videos.

So utilize and make the best of any and all sources that you have. If you have 1000 question bank, be sure to complete it. If you're taking review courses, be sure to complete them and even re-watch them if you can.

You really can't approach board preparation with one foot in and one foot out because that is really where students start to run into trouble. And my goal is for every student who finishes nurse practitioner school to be successful because you've already proven that you deserve that nurse practitioner title. Now you just have to prove that to the exam.

The last point I want to make in this episode is if you're not feeling 100% ready to take your exam, that's normal and to be expected. Even the people out there who have studied for months and months and have done a review course and thousands of questions, they still don't always feel fully ready. So be sure that you're not mentally beating yourself up if this is how you feel.

It's how I felt before my exam. I had put in all this work and effort, but my anxiety was so big it was almost all consuming. That's where the not feeling ready comes in from. It's not because you're not there yet most of the time, instead it's just that anxiety rearing its ugly head. That's why I wanted to write this episode for you.

I wanted you to know that if you're scoring well in practice questions, you've really utilized your review courses, you've completed a full length set of practice questions, and you've tested out the anxiety game plan, you're likely in a super great spot to test. But you have to look past that anxiety a bit, look at those objective facts. Which is why we started this episode with

## Ep #44: Am I Ready to Test?

creating that mental list, so you can start from the jump with all that you have done and why you deserve this.

And the good news is too, if you're not already meeting one of these milestones I laid out in this episode, no big deal. Don't beat yourself up about that either. That just means there's a little something extra that you can do to prove to yourself, "Okay, yeah, I am likely ready to test, and I am likely ready to become a real deal nurse practitioner."

Whatever that thing is you're missing, these are all for the most part pretty easy fixes. Spend a couple of days doing whatever it is that would give you that extra validation and then go take that test. If you've done all of these things, go take that test.

I know it can be scary to do so, but you can do this and I'm here rooting for you always. While you'll never feel 100% ready, you can feel 90% with all of these tools and get this thing behind you. So here's to hoping that your day to become a real deal nurse practitioner comes so, so soon. And I'll talk to you guys 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.