

Ep #168: Top NP Board Prep Questions Answered with Caroline G



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Anna Miller

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Anna: Welcome to the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*, the podcast for nurses who are ready to pass their boards and thrive in their careers as real deal nurse practitioners. I'm Anna, and I'm the Director of Nursing Content at Blueprint Test Prep. Whether you're deep in exam prep or stepping into practice, I've got you. It is time to become the confident, knowledgeable NP that you're meant to be. Let's dive in.

Hey everyone. Welcome back to the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club* Podcast. I'm Anna and I have my friend Caroline here today who is one of our very loved NP instructors.

Caroline: Hey everyone. I'm Caroline. I'm so excited to be here with you today.

Anna: Now, both Caroline and I have been teaching and doing board prep for many years together now. And today we're going to talk about the top questions we get from NP students preparing for boards. Honestly, if you've had one of these questions, you're definitely not alone.

Caroline: Yes, good point, Anna. And we answer these every single week inside of our courses, our Facebook groups, our one-on-one readiness sessions, and of course, our live study group community. So, what is our first question, Anna?

Anna: Yeah, let's start with probably the most common, and spoiler alert, we have a whole podcast episode about this question alone, but that question is going to be, which exam should I take?

Caroline: Yes, we hear that one all the time. And the good news is that there usually isn't a wrong answer. So, whether you're deciding between the ANCC or the AANP, for example, both exams lead to the same end result, becoming a board-certified nurse practitioner. Generally speaking, AANP tends to be slightly more clinically focused, while ANCC includes a little bit more of the professional role content.

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Anna: Yeah, and my advice is always to talk to your program, look at those exam blueprints, and just choose the exam that feels like the best fit for your personal learning style. And no, you do not need to take both exams. I get that question also. And, you know what? If you don't pass one, we always recommend taking the other. Sometimes one style of exam, it just works better than the other for you.

All right, what's another common question you get, Caroline?

Caroline: Yes, so students often ask when they should start the application to test process. So our recommendation is usually earlier than you would think. So as soon as your school provides guidance and you're eligible to begin the process, start gathering your documents. Waiting until graduation can create that unnecessary stress that we do not want.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. And remember, applying and testing are two different things. You can often get much of the paperwork underway while you're still finishing the program, even if your program doesn't allow testing prior to graduation. And that kind of brings me to another big question, which is when should I take my boards? When should I take this test? So what do you say to that one, Caroline?

Caroline: Yeah, that's a great question. And our general recommendation is to test while your knowledge is still fresh. So for many students, that means somewhere within the first few weeks to a couple of months after graduation, but everyone's situation is different, as you know. So if you need a little extra study time, that is totally okay too. The goal isn't to test as fast as possible, of course. The goal is to test when you are prepared.

Anna: Absolutely. That's a really big distinction. Make sure you give yourself adequate prep time. And there's so much happening at that time, right? You're finishing school, you're finishing clinicals. You're often still working as a nurse and then you have the added stress of finding a job as an NP. And so this can cause a lot of anxiety. We get asked a lot here, do I need to have that job lined up before I pass my boards?

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Caroline: Yeah, that's a great question. So my answer there is absolutely not. Now, some students secure jobs before testing, especially if they have secured it within a past clinical rotation, but some don't start applying until after they pass, and both paths are completely normal. Many employers understand that students are waiting on certification and of course their licensure.

Anna: Yeah, and honestly, passing boards often opens up even more opportunities because then employers know like you are ready to begin that credentialing process, which just as a heads up, can take months. I'm talking months after you actually land that first NP job. Now, Caroline, another thing I see in our Facebook group, I think I see this like daily is, hey, I just passed. Woohoo. Now what?

Caroline: Yes, I see that every day as well. So first of all, celebrate. Seriously, you did it. Take a deep breath. Enjoy the moment. You worked so incredibly hard for this.

Anna: Absolutely. You definitely deserve to take just like a little bit of time and celebrate. And then you'll move into the next steps. So you're looking at, you know, state license, your NPI and DEA registration, if applicable. Although I will say a lot of people will wait until they land a job for these. And then you'll begin that credentialing process and job onboarding. And this is when you really get to start practicing as an NP that you've worked so hard to be.

All right, back to a studying related one. How many hours should people be studying each day?

Caroline: Ooh, that one comes up literally all the time. So students want a magic number and unfortunately, there isn't one because studying for a few focused hours is often the more productive route to go than staring at your notes all day for 10 hours. And consistency matters more than super long study sessions, so that's always important to keep in mind as well.

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Anna: Yeah, I always say the quality of studying beats the quantity of studying every single time. Most successful students, they follow a realistic schedule that they can actually maintain. So that consistency like you said, and prioritizing your mental health alongside that content review is really the key here. So, now let's say you're talking with someone, they have their study plan, but life happens and they fall behind. What should they do?

Caroline: Yeah, so can we just normalize something here Anna, because almost everyone falls behind at some point. Life happens. You have work, you may have kids, you may be exhausted. And one of the biggest mistakes that students make is assuming that one bad week means they've ruined their entire board prep process. You haven't. Don't spend energy feeling guilty. Just restart, adjust your schedule, and keep moving forward. And I love how our program allows students to do that so easily.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. That's really why our study planner in our course is dynamic and it's adaptable. Like you literally just have to hit a button and it's going to help get you back on track.

All right, now let's talk review courses while we're talking about our course and our study planner. So often students fall into that trap of feeling like they need to do all of the review courses. They're going to say, should I do five different courses or five different question banks? And okay, first, like, please don't do that to yourself. And what do you think about this?

Caroline: Yeah, I always tell students we are a one-stop shop. One of the biggest causes of board prep overwhelm is resource overload. Students end up jumping between multiple courses, multiple study guides, multiple question banks, and they never finish any of them. They just end up very very stressed.

Our recommendation, pick a quality resource. I recommend the live study group because that's what I use to pass on my first try and trust the process. Practice applying the content and don't forget an anxiety management plan right alongside it. It is so incredibly important. I always

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tell students that is 50% of the board prep process right there is staying calm and believing in yourself.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. And we didn't mention it at the beginning of this podcast, but a very fun fact is Caroline was a past live study group student and then she went on and is now one of our wonderful instructors. And like she said, like sometimes less really is more. There's such a gray area in healthcare that sometimes you know one resource says one thing and another resource says something else and both could be correct, but it leads to some confusion in our learners. But the exams aren't testing you on that gray area, so really sticking with one, max two resources is going to be your best plan there.

Now another question that you know Alex and Kaitlyn answered in a past minisode that we did, but I want to ask it again and get your take is what is a good score on practice questions?

Caroline: Oh, I get that one every day from students. So, this question honestly makes students nervous, but ultimately it depends on where you're at in your board prep process. Early on, we do not expect perfection. You're learning and you should be focusing more on that rather than trying to achieve a perfect score.

Anna: Yeah, absolutely. And you're never expected to get 100% or a perfect score. I want to like set that precedent right now. We often tell our students that scores in the 70s and above on those board style questions are generally reassuring, especially later on in the studying process.

Caroline: Yeah, and I love that you mentioned that because that was really hard for me to grasp and come to terms with because as nurses and nurse practitioners you know going through school, a 70% is not a good score. It's often a failing grade. So it definitely took me a while to realize that it is okay to get a 70%. It is good. It is encouraged.

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So don't obsess over the percentage on these practice sets. I really just recommend focusing on understanding why you got questions right or wrong, reviewing the rationales, which ours are incredible because that is where the magic really happens and when it all starts to come together and make sense.

Anna: Yeah, understanding why you got it wrong or why the answer is correct is way more important than that overall score. All right, last little question here that I can think of, when should students start taking practice exams?

Caroline: Yes, so a lot of students like to save them until the end because they want to make sure that they have all the information down, but really you should start earlier than you probably think because practice questions are not just an assessment tool, they're a learning tool and you don't need to wait until you finish studying every single topic.

Anna: Exactly. I always recommend topic specific quizzing every step of the way to really reinforce what you are studying. And then when it comes to those full-length exams, we usually recommend incorporating those all throughout and then especially as you get closer to test day. But really think of them as like dress rehearsals.

Even when you don't have all the content ready, even when you're earlier on in your studying process, they are helping you build endurance. 150 to 175 questions, it is a really long exam and the mental fatigue is real. And then they are also going to help identify you know weak areas. They're going to help you get comfortable with the testing experience and the platform and all those little tools like striking out or highlighting.

Caroline: Absolutely. And I actually have one more question before we end. I think we have to end with this one because it's a fear that almost every student encounters. So, that is, what do I do if I fail? What would you say, Anna?

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Anna: Yeah, that's a really really great question. And first, I want you all to know that like failing an exam does not define the kind of NP you're going to become. We have worked with incredible nurse practitioners or nurses who didn't pass on their first attempt. It happens. And if it happens, you regroup, you make a plan, and you keep going.

Caroline: Yeah, such a great point there. And one exam result does not erase years of education, clinical experience, all of the hard work, and your future potential. Your story is so much bigger than just one single testing day.

Anna: Yeah, and if you are studying for boards right now, no matter where you are at in your journey, whether this is your first time testing, a repeat time testing, I hope this episode helped answer a few of those lingering questions you may have.

And remember, there's no perfect study schedule. There's no perfect score or perfect timeline. Focus on progress. Focus on consistency. And trust the process, but really trust yourself. You are capable. And if you're looking for additional support, check out our review courses and our question banks and those one-on-one readiness sessions you mentioned at the beginning at npreviews.com.

Caroline: Yes, and I also highly encourage you all to join our free Facebook community and follow us on Instagram at SMNP reviews official for more board prep tips, encouragement, Instagram lives, all the fun stuff.

Anna: All the free content we do on there. And just remember, you've got this. And we will talk to you next time on the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*.

Thanks for listening to another episode of the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*. If you want more information about the different types of support that we offer to students and new nurse practitioners, you can visit npreviews.com. We'll see you next week.