Tips for Student Success

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been in a class, looked around and thought that most of the students in the class were learning more, knew more, or were more effective students than you were? Did you think that they had skills that enabled them to study more easily, remember more, and do better on tests? Well, look no longer. It's time for you to start thinking about yourself as a successful and high-achieving student! This Student Success Study Guide, accompanying the text, Medical-Surgical Nursing: Patient-Centered Collaborative Care by Ignatavicius and Workman, will provide you with strategies, tips, and techniques for helping you become an even more successful nursing student. You can further develop or learn to observe, read, write, critically think, and apply your understanding of adult nursing topics to numerous classroom, laboratory, clinical, and professional settings. Becoming an effective student in a nursing program is hard work, but that hard work can be made easier if you can learn to use or continue to develop specific learning and study techniques. You've already proven that you are a capable learner in being admitted to the nursing program. You'll need to apply those skills as well as develop new ones in order to excel in your demanding nursing and clinical classes.

Nursing programs will ask more of you than just refining or learning new study techniques; you'll also be asked to critically think and work with a diverse group of nursing students, instructors, and patients in both academic and clinical settings. Becoming successful in the nursing program is not just important, it is critical to your success in your profession. Consider developing, practicing, and using some of the following student success topics to achieve success in your nursing program:

- Use an “academic tool kit.”
- Be an active listener.
- Take effective notes.
- Learn to mark and take notes in your textbooks.
- Read your textbook—and remember what you’ve read.
- Learn about your learning preferences.
- Improve your memory.
- Be healthy.

YOUR STUDENT SUCCESS “TOOL KIT”

Develop and use an affordable and effective student “tool kit” as you “go to work” in your classes, laboratories, and clinical settings. Being organized and having essential study tools will help you succeed in your nursing program. Basic, essential materials needed to manage the vast amounts of information you will encounter in your nursing courses might include the following supplies:

- Three-ring dedicated notebook for each course
- Subject dividers (Always label them.)
  - Syllabus
  - Class notes
  - Text notes
  - Extra paper
- Loose-leaf paper (three-hole punched)
- Index cards (Colored cards are also available.)
- Mini stapler
- Pencils, pens
- Mini, three-hole paper punch that fits in your binder
- Two contrasting color highlighter pens
- Liquid paper
- Zippered, pencil/pen pouch
- Dictionary—minimum 50,000 entries
Tips for Student Success

• Clear, plastic paper protectors
• Removable (or "sticky") notes and/or page flags
• Adhesive hole reinforcers

Many students create personal study systems that work for them in their home study area, library, or classes. You might consider a way to make your tools portable for use in any study area. Some students carry basic items in a pocket in their backpack; others place everything in a three-ring, zippered pouch inside their notebook. Develop a system for yourself that includes easy access and use of your "student success tools."

An important aspect of using your tool kit successfully is to go through it daily, adding or deleting pages, updating projects, restocking supplies, and organizing it so it's ready for the next day. Your tool kit may be your most important organizational tool. It keeps your materials and supplies at hand so you can use it “at work.” Creating and using your binder effectively can help improve grades, increase participation, and build confidence. Here are some notebook essentials:

Use one binder for each course. You will be taking extensive notes and receiving many handouts for each course. Carrying a semester's worth of notes, handouts, and old quizzes or exams can get heavy.

Identify your binder. Keep your name and phone number on the inside front cover for easy identification in case it gets lost or left behind in class.

Use a calendar. Keep a month-at-a-glance calendar in the front of your binder or in your backpack and refer to it several times a day. Write all assignments on the date they're due. To create more writing space, use removable notes. One problem is that many students keep several calendars. Some have a calendar at home for personal appointments and events, a calendar in their backpack, calendars for separate courses, and some keep a family calendar on the refrigerator. All these calendars can cause confusion. Try to consolidate all your calendars into one master calendar and carry it with you at all times. Refer to that calendar for all events, appointments, class assignments, exams, and personal needs. If necessary, create other calendars for home or work by copying information from your master calendar. Keep your master calendar current and keep it with you at all times, and refer to it several times a day.

Section your binder by using color-tabbed subject dividers. Colored subject dividers help keep your binder and class requirements organized and easily accessible. Label each section. Common section dividers include the following: Course Syllabus, Notes, Homework, Study Group Information, New Paper, and Special Projects.

Use clear vinyl sheet protectors. Protect, organize, and use important course handouts by keeping them in sheet protectors. They won't fall out of your binder or get lost. Frequently referenced handouts stand out and can be used over and over without destroying the page.

Carry a three-hole punch. Place a small notebook-style three-hole punch in the front of your binder. When receiving a course handout, immediately three-hole punch it, date it, and place it in the appropriate section.

Use a zippered plastic pouch or bag. Keep a small zippered bag to store pencils, pens, mini stapler, paperclips, removable notes, index cards, and other organizational tools.

Use loose-leaf paper. With the number of handouts you'll receive in your nursing classes, keeping them organized can be a major task. Use loose-leaf paper in a binder to store notes, handouts, and course materials. Many students choose to use spiral-bound notebooks. Unfortunately, these do not allow for the addition or deletion of notes, handouts, tests, or other class materials. As a result, important course materials can get lost. With a portable three-hole punch and a three-ring binder, you can organize your course paperwork so you can locate essential information and use it when necessary. For example, instructor-prepared handouts can help you understand key concepts and old exams can become important tools when studying for finals.

Carry a dictionary. New, lightweight, binder-sized dictionaries are now available. You can purchase three-hole punched dictionaries for placement in a notebook binder. Make sure it has enough entries for your skill level. In the nursing program, you'll
need a dictionary that has more than 50,000 entries. Improve your vocabulary and writing skills!

**Locate new paper easily.** Dedicate one section of the notebook for new paper. It’s easier to go to one section than thumb through several sections to find a new sheet of paper.

**Use colored, ruled paper.** Some students choose to use colored paper to reduce light glare or to organize different topics or subjects. You might find it easier to locate a specific subject or topic by color. Pastel-colored paper is available at stationery stores.

**Keep quizzes and tests in the same section as the subject.** Don’t lump all quizzes into one “test” section. Old tests can be helpful for review for a future test or final exam. Keeping them in the same section as the topic helps you locate them more easily.

**File your old notes.** When a particular unit or topic is completed, staple together all notes, including tests, and file in a file cabinet or plastic storage box. Don’t throw away old course materials. They can be used for future reference and study.

**Organize and work on your binder daily.** Check your paper supply. Plan ahead for tomorrow’s activities. Keep your notebook up to date.

**Put it where you can find it.** Put your binder in the same place daily after completion of homework or study. Having everything in place before you go to bed makes it easier in the morning to grab your materials and go, knowing that you have everything you’ll need for classes.

Becoming more organized is a key skill that will help you make sense of all the materials and tools you will be using in a nursing program. Research tells us that students who are organized tend to get higher grades. So take some time before the start of the term to get organized. Avoid the crowds, reduce your “beginning-of-the-term” stress by being ready with the tools that will serve you best. Buy the supplies you need and personalize your binder for immediate use the first day of the term. Being organized also impresses your instructors, so impress yourself and your teachers by being ready to take in, use, and remember essential information. Now that you’re organized, you’ll need to use those tools to actively listen to and record class, lab, and clinical notes.

**ACTIVE LISTENING AND NOTE TAKING**

Actively listening and taking effective class notes are two of the most effective keys to academic success. Your notes not only contain lecture content, but may also include course information, text notes, lab notes, diagrams, mind maps, assignments, and review information to prepare for quizzes and exams. Based on the style you use to take notes, the information you write down and remember will largely be the questions you’ll face on quizzes and exams. If you have difficulty taking notes or if you don’t think that your notes are effective, show your notes to your instructor or an academic advisor. Ask him or her if you’re capturing essential lecture information. There are different note-taking styles to help you record and remember critical course information. If your note taking is not as effective as it should be, try a different method and explore styles that you may enjoy using and that will serve you better.

Active listening and note taking are not just handy tools for remembering important information; they are essential job skills. Note taking itself facilitates learning and recall of lecture material.

Dale’s Cone of Learning (see figure, next page) is often used to show how students can retain more information when they become active learners. Active learners are those who get involved in gathering, participating, and remembering essential information. The more you physically do, say, and hear (or mentally rehearse) while learning new information, the more you will remember. We sometimes call this multisensory learning. Examples include speaking while reading, explaining while looking at a diagram or picture, or critically thinking while looking at a slide or visual presentation. Each of these processes helps us connect new information in our brain by stimulating more than one sense. The more you participate, the more you will remember.
The following are active listening strategies that will help you be an attentive, active participant, and to take more effective notes:

**Plan to be an active listener.** You must want to be a better listener and view listening as a participative rather than a passive process. Sit up straight, lean forward, have your essential materials with you, and plan to listen for key or main ideas. Then, if you have enough time, try to add some details or an explanation to the main idea.

**Keep an open mind about the course content.** Students sometimes make up their mind about an idea, procedure, or information being presented before listening to a lecture. You may or may not agree with an idea or you may possibly know something about the topic, but you need to be able to give it your full attention and take notes that will help you understand the concept more fully. Be open to new information, new points of view, different styles of lecturing, and new ideas. Research tells us that if a student
believes that he or she already knows the material, then the student will likely divert his or her attention elsewhere. Such students will stop listening, reading, working, or participating because they believe they already “know the answer” and they stop paying attention. This can happen in lectures or while reading a textbook. Keep your mind open and actively listen for key points.

Observe and pay attention to details. As you listen and take notes, observe your instructor and watch for obvious verbal and nonverbal clues as to what information may be important. If your instructor spends a lot of time talking about a concept, it’s obviously important. If your instructor writes information on the board, uses overhead transparencies, or pays special attention to a diagram, list, or idea, be sure to write down that information. Instructors often raise the level of their voice, smile, move, or get excited when they explain a key concept. Watch them! If it’s important to them, it should be important for you to write down.

Arrive to class a little early. Instructors often talk about the class plans, answer questions, and provide extra information before class. You can also ask questions and prepare yourself for the lecture. Take out your materials, review your notes, open your textbook, if appropriate, and be ready when the lecture starts. Your instructor will notice your efforts!

Determine where and how you learn best. Even before the class starts, you have probably made some subconscious decisions about where and how you take in and learn new information. Become conscious of these decisions and begin to ask yourself a few questions about your study location preferences:

- Where do you usually like to sit in a lecture or lab? Do you tend to sit near the front or back, near a window, near a door, or near friends?
- Where can you best see the instructor and hear the lecture?
- What about lighting? Do you prefer sitting under a light, a dim area, or in the bright light near a window?
- How do you control your temperature? Bring a sweater if it’s cold or sit by an open window if it’s warm.
- Are you hydrated? Bring bottled water with you and sip throughout the lecture, if allowed. Always ask your instructor about bringing water, snacks, or beverages into the classroom or lab.
- What kind of chair do you prefer? Although not always available, some newer classrooms offer adjustable chairs. Feel free to adjust yours to a height and angle that is comfortable.
- Are you able to reduce distractions and noise? For example, even though cell phones are not allowed in clinical settings, students do carry them to class. They have become major distractions for instructors as well as students. As a courtesy to others, turn off your cell phone during class. If necessary, check for phone messages before or after class.

By answering these questions, you will start to consciously make decisions about where and how you like to work in a classroom. We know that students who are actively involved—those who sit near the front of the class, actively make eye contact with the instructor, ask questions, participate in group work, or volunteer to comment—tend to be more successful in classes compared to students who do not actively participate. Be involved, active, and alert! Research shows that students who sit in the front of the class are able to listen more effectively, take better notes, be more involved, and, as a result, receive higher grades.

Participate! More and more, instructors are using critical thinking, collaborative, and problem-solving activities in classes. Groups are often formed to discuss and consider possible solutions to a problem, condition, or nursing situation. Participate in these groups with enthusiasm. You will find that sharing ideas and solving problems in small groups will enhance your learning and create opportunities to discuss nursing practices. It will also help you learn to make clinical decisions that may require critical thinking.

As you learn to actively listen and participate in your classes you will need to pair those skills with actually recording information from lectures, labs, individual study, and study groups. Being able to take effective notes is based on active listening, maintaining a positive and active attitude, and knowing how to use specific note-taking strategies for different types of subjects, topics, and settings. To enhance your ability to take effective notes, consider using some of the popular styles used in adult classrooms today.

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Strategies for Taking Effective Notes

Why take notes? Some students believe they can remember important information presented in classes by simply listening and occasionally jotting down a word or two. Learning how to take effective notes is one of the most powerful memory tools we can acquire and use. As a student, you can learn effective strategies that can improve your ability to “pull out” essential information from a lecture or text, remember more, and help you perform better on quizzes and exams.

You can take notes in a variety of ways. The important thing is to take notes! Students who are actively trying to identify key points or main ideas while listening to a lecture are more successful in recording that information on paper than those who sit back and assume that they will remember everything they heard. We now know that we remember more when we're actively involved.

To record and use your notes for effective study, consider the following:

- Arrive at your class early. Take out your materials. Get ready to take notes.
- Sit where you can see and hear the instructor. Watch the instructor for note-taking clues. For example, if the instructor writes something on the board, write it down. If the instructor presents information on an overhead projector or computerized projector, write it down. If the instructor repeats a concept or point, write it down. If the instructor spends a lot of time explaining a concept, write it down. The key is to recognize that your instructors spend a great deal of time preparing lectures. If they're working hard to present those concepts to you, write them down!
- Use a three-ring binder.
- Label, date, and number each page.
- Use an established system or develop your own.

There are many systems for taking notes. However, no single method is best. Some students make lists, write outlines, draw mind maps, develop concept maps, create diagrams, or tape-record their lectures. Some use more formal systems including the SQ3R System (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) and the Cornell System of Note Taking. Experiment with a variety of systems to find one or more that work well for you. One of the most popular and effective ways to take notes is to use the Cornell System of Note Taking. This system is widely used in schools and colleges. Created by Walter Pauk of Cornell University, it was originally developed for soldiers returning to college after World War II. It has become one of the most used and successful systems developed. It is important to try not only this system, but also other popularly used systems to familiarize yourself with a variety of ways to record and remember information. The following description demonstrates the Cornell System of Note Taking format.

When using the Cornell System, use any standard sheet of paper (see diagram) and redraw your left margin line about an inch to the right of the original red line. You can carefully draw it using a ruler or simply draw a quick freehand line down the paper. This expands the left side of the paper to allow you to write down key words, main points, definitions, mind maps, and important concepts. Use the entire right margin to write details. Summarize notes in one or two sentences at the bottom of the sheet. Develop questions from your main points. These are your exam questions.
### Cornell Note Taking Example

#### Main Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 1/2 inch column</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornell Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this column, write main ideas, key words, important points, definitions, or diagrams.

#### Details

- Organized by main ideas and details
- Helps you listen for and record main ideas
- Easy to use
- Diagrams and mind maps easy to include
- Write only on one side
- Leave lots of white space on page
- When ready to study, remove selected pages and lay them on a table—exposing only the left column. These are your test questions!

#### Create a Mind Map or Concept Map

- Can be used to provide a “big picture” of a chapter, lecture, or lab procedure
- Organized by main ideas and subtopics
- Very visual
- Provides a quick overview
- Promotes clinical correlation mapping

#### Summary:

Write one or two sentences here to summarize the page.

Other important points to remember about taking effective notes follow. Work to develop these skills and you will become more successful in recording and using your notes to study for tests, review important concepts, and create notes for future study and reference.

- Develop a positive attitude.
- Decide which supplies work best for you. Do you prefer pencils, pens, mechanical pens, color highlighters, or specialized paper? Use color, if helpful, but don't create a “coloring book” look to your notes.
- Plan to be active! Look for opportunities to write down a main idea or key points.
- Examine your pencil grip. Do you write with ease? If necessary, learn to adjust your grip to prevent pain and write more effectively. Many of us have forgotten what we learned about handwriting in grade school. Using a three-
finger, gentle hold will allow you to take notes without the “pain.” You can write more effectively if you’re writing with a relaxed, comfortable style.

- Write quickly.
- Write as neatly as possible.
- Use good posture. Try to sit up and lean forward. Keep your feet on the floor.
- Always keep a pen or pencil in your hand. Be ready.
- Listen for and write down key points or ideas.
- Summarize key points.
- Use mind maps. Using pictures and diagrams in your notes helps you remember information as you organize your ideas.
- Draw diagrams or pictures.
- Use arrows to join ideas.
- Write down notes from the board or from charts.
- Use standard abbreviations. Abbreviations can be helpful when your instructor is talking rapidly. Use standard scientific symbols in math and science lectures. Leave out short words such as “a,” “the,” and “and,” or leave out adjectives and word endings.
- Try not to tape-record your lectures or use shorthand unless necessary. Transcribing your notes and listening to tapes takes too long. Generally you won’t have the time. If you have trouble keeping up with the speed of the lecture, talk with your instructor or academic advisor for some suggestions. Also consider asking fellow study group members or other classmates to share a copy of their notes with you.
- Keep your calendar nearby. You will often be asked to write down important dates for tests, important reviews, study group sessions, and the like.

**EFFECTIVELY MARKING AND TAKING NOTES FROM YOUR TEXTBOOKS**

Effectively marking and taking notes from your textbooks can help you more easily read and remember important information as well as to locate key words, important ideas, and concepts. It can also help you save time. You’ll enjoy taking, organizing, and reviewing your text notes when you know they contain essential text information that you can quickly access for test preparation or future reference. Using them for individual and group study or major reviews, your notes will reinforce major concepts and help you remember key information. Marking your textbooks helps you concentrate and be purposeful in your efforts to learn new information. Because you will read vast amounts of information from a variety of nursing and medical texts, it is important to develop and use a system that helps you organize and access specific information from your texts and from your class and lab notes. Marking your textbooks can be important in helping you identify key ideas and improve your retention of a variety of course reading material. Thinking critically as you read is an essential nursing skill. Critical thinking is also important as you read your textbook. You must decide and judge what to highlight, underline, or add in the margins of your textbook.

Marking your text as you read is a multilevel approach to learning. You are using your vision to identify key text, selecting color to stimulate retention, and feeling your muscles move as you write or mark. You might also be verbalizing important information as you mark text. This combined effect can strengthen the retention of important information.

Your job is to be an active and critically thinking learner. That is, you need to use clinical thinking or judgment in a variety of academic and practical settings. Taking effective notes from your textbook is a critical nursing skill that will enable you to more easily locate and retain essential clinical information.

Almost exclusively, nursing students use the popular technique of highlighting to mark their texts. In addition to highlighting your text, there are other strategies you can use to identify and locate key

**REVIEW, REVIEW, REVIEW**

We tend to forget much of what we’ve heard almost immediately. You will remember more if you review several times a day for short periods of time. Develop a system of frequent review. Start to review immediately after class. Actively listening and taking notes in your lectures and labs will help you organize, retrieve, and remember more information. But classtime is not the only time to take notes. Consider marking in and taking notes from your textbooks.
Tips for Student Success

information. Here are some tips to consider when marking and taking notes from your texts:

- **Select just one highlighter pen for highlighting.** You can also use a pen or pencil for underlining, if you choose. Yellow is often best for highlighting. Darker-colored highlighters are often too dark for ease of reading. Frequently they bleed through the page and make the other side of the page difficult to read. Some students are afraid of marking their textbooks because they plan to sell them back to the bookstore at the end of the term. You paid a lot of money for your nursing textbooks. Keep them as valuable investments and part of your professional nursing library. You'll use them over and over for future study and reference. *Mark your texts—make them yours!*

- **Highlight or underline to identify a key word, main idea, passage, or important point that you may want to remember or read again.**

- **If necessary, use a second, contrasting highlighter color for cross-referencing information.** To cross-reference, use a second highlighter color that will allow you to “connect” a similar concept or idea presented in one text to another text. Use a specific-colored highlighter to indicate the importance of a passage. Then use that same colored highlighter in another text passage to indicate that the concepts are related to each other. Cross-referencing helps you organize information between different textbooks, reference books, or other classes or labs. The use of color can be a wonderful learning tool. Use color to help you identify, cross-reference, or remember key concepts.

- **Read before you mark.** Completely read the passage, sentence, or paragraph. Think about what's important to mark or underline before actually marking.

- **Be consistent.** Standardize the use of your highlighting. Use the same color to represent the same level or importance in each chapter, passage, book, or notes.

- **Avoid the “coloring book syndrome.”** Don't highlight everything on the page and don't use every color highlighter you own to mark your text. Using too many highlighter colors can be more confusing than helpful.

- **Avoid highlighting chapter headings.** The headings in your text are already bolded and color-coded for you.

- **Be aware of colored legends and figures used in chapters.** Your text headings, subheadings, and clinical notations are already highlighted or underlined for you. Learn what the text box colors mean. Use them as a guide while you read. There is no need to highlight them again.

- **Survey your textbook format.** Understand the color-coding, highlighting, and use of graphics, charts, tables, boxed information, and “Best Practices” inserts to recognize important information discussed in the body of the text. Refer to the *Guide to Special Features* section, located in the front matter of *Medical-Surgical Nursing: Patient-Centered Collaborative Care*, 6th Edition

- **Use standard abbreviations and symbols in the margins.** Be consistent and use the same abbreviations and symbols in all of your texts and notes to reduce confusion. The following abbreviations may be helpful as you develop a system that allows you to take notes quickly and accurately:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pt.</td>
<td>patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>re:</td>
<td>regarding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g.</td>
<td>for example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rltnshp</td>
<td>relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;</td>
<td>greater than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/o</td>
<td>without</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;</td>
<td>less than</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i.e.</td>
<td>that is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↑</td>
<td>increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sgnft</td>
<td>significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓</td>
<td>decrease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mo</td>
<td>month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mos</td>
<td>months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anlys</td>
<td>analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>in addition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Use removable notes and/or page flags sparingly.** Having too many “stickies” on a page can make your text confusing to read.

- **Simplify your margin notes.** Don't attempt to write everything in the margins. Work to identify and mark key words and points. Consider taking notes from your text by creating “text notes” that are placed in your notebook. Organize these so your lecture notes and text notes are labeled, dated, and placed in the appropriate section of your notebook. When you pull them out of your binder for study, they can easily be identified and later returned to their original location.
• **Create study cards or review sheets.** Attempt to pull out essential information from your text and notes when creating review materials. The process of creating these materials actually strengthens your memory and test-taking skills. Remember to be consistent with the use of color when creating these study tools. To make study cards, use mini (half size) standard 3 × 5 inch or 6 × 8 inch blank index cards. Write only on one side and label each card with the topic and card number (if you drop them or separate them, you can put them in order again). Write clearly and include key words. Carry these cards with you at all times and take advantage of “mini moments” in your day to quickly review essential information. An easy way to organize them is to punch a hole in the upper left-hand corner and put them on a binder ring. These can be snapped open for adding or deleting cards. You can buy binder rings at any stationery store.

• **Be organized!** Keep your text notes in the same section as your class notes. When you review your notes, you’ll have information on the same topic from a variety of sources. This might include class notes, text notes, handouts, or information regarding a nursing procedure.

• **Label each page with the date, text, topic, chapter number, and page numbers.** This helps organize your notes and makes it easier for review and test preparation.

• **Use both your class notes and text notes for studying.** If you’ve taken effective text notes and/or prepared study cards, you won’t have to refer to your text again as you study for the test.

• **Be neat when you take notes from your text.** Take time to write clearly. If your handwriting is hard to read, consider printing.

• **Use colored paper.** Some students prefer to use another color of standard 8½ × 11 inch paper to differentiate their text notes from course notes. Several different pastel colors are available from school supply stores.

• **Use standard or legal-sized paper that is three-hole punched and that fits in your binder.**

Taking notes from your text is an important part of recording and remembering important information. If this technique is new to you, you may find it helpful in organizing and remembering key clinical information. The key to taking notes from your text is to pull out main ideas, major terms, or explanations that will help you recall information for use on exams or for use in a clinical setting. Try to create pictures, drawings, or symbols with your text notes. You can make some information even more memorable by creating a ridiculous picture, mnemonic, or memory trick. Some legal-sized paper has a wider margin on the left that allows you to write down key ideas. Corresponding details are written on the right side. This technique is sometimes called the Cornell Style of Note Taking. (See note-taking section.) The following is an example of how you can take Cornell style notes from your text.
**Notes from Iggy Text p. 849**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Myocardial infarction</th>
<th>Happens when heart tissue is quickly and severely deprived of O₂.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% blood flow reduced</td>
<td>80%-90% then ischemia develops. Can lead to necrosis of MI tissue if blood flow not restored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result of MIs</td>
<td>atherosclerosis of coronary artery rupture of plaque thrombosis occlusion of blood flow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other factors implicated</td>
<td>coronary artery spasm platelet aggregation emboli from mural thrombi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How MIs begin</td>
<td>Infarction (necrosis) of the subendocardial layer of cardiac muscle Cardial layer has longest myofibrils &amp; greatest O₂ demand, poorest O₂ supply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 zones around initial area of infarction</td>
<td>1. zone of injury 2. zone of ischemia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See Figure 40-2 in text</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary** see p. 849 re: zones MI occurs when MC tissue is deprived of O₂. Ischemia devs. Most MIs result of atherosclerosis and other factors.

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Becoming an effective listener and note taker will be essential to your success in the nursing program. You'll need to record information for future course and professional applications. If you haven't developed an effective style that you enjoy using, experiment using other styles. Your program advisor or counselor can help you select a style. Often, your note-taking preference will reflect learning styles that you have developed or used throughout the years.

**YOU’VE GOT STYLE**

You’ve got style, all right—learning style, that is. We all have preferred ways of learning and retaining information. It’s important that you become aware of your preferred style or styles of learning so you can better retain and use information from your classes. It’s also important to know and accept that others, including your instructors, have preferred ways of learning and teaching. We use our learning styles to become aware of information around us. Some of us observe, reflect, think, hear, touch, do, or use our minds and bodies to identify or make sense of information. When we find ourselves naturally using a particular style, it’s a signal that we’re most comfortable learning in that mode. Many of us use more than one mode of learning; that is, *multimodal* or *multisensory learning*.

An easy way to start understanding how you learn best is to take a quick learning preference survey. There are many learning preference surveys and inventories that can help you identify your preferred ways of learning. Some are self-administered and
quick; others require professional application and interpretation. You may have already experienced the opportunity to explore your learning preferences in a previous career or student success class. If so, review the information and put those preferences to work. When you learn in a preferred style, learning will take less effort and you’ll remember more.

You can become a more effective learner when you are aware of how you and others take in and use information. With practice, observations, and effort, you’ll come to understand and successfully use your learning preferences to achieve greater learning—not to mention improved grades! Successful students take responsibility for what and how they learn. Being a “victim” to someone else’s style won’t help you succeed. You’ll need to be flexible and understanding of each of your styles of learning and learning preferences. Understanding and using your learning preferences also has another advantage—you’ll remember more. Many nursing students struggle with the vast amount of information presented to them in a variety of teaching styles in lectures, labs, and clinical classes. Remembering new terminology, lists, details, facts, procedures, and key concepts in nursing is a big challenge. The next section discusses memory tools and techniques that you can develop and use to improve your recall of important course and exam information.

IMPROVE YOUR MEMORY

We’ve all forgotten information we thought we knew—especially on exams. Recalling important information is largely a matter of developing a positive attitude about having a good memory. Many of us apologize because we think we don’t have a good memory. The good news is that you do have a great memory—you just need to believe it. You’ll also need to learn and apply specific memory techniques to the notes and text information you’ve written in your class notes. Fortunately this can be fun and easy to master. Here are some “memory tips” that will make it easier for you to recall information.

• Decide to remember.
• Organize the information (take, use, and file notes).
• Use specific memory strategies.
• Use memory tricks—mnemonics.
• Practice, practice, practice.
• Use your own words to recite, recite, recite!

Decide to Remember

You can remember more by “deciding to remember” and creating a positive attitude about developing a great memory. This might sound a bit odd but
deciding that you want to remember can create the positive attitude that you need to retain and use information. Samuel Johnson once said that “The true art of memory is the art of attention.” If you decide to remember more, pay attention, and focus on specific information of interest to you, you will remember more.

Memory is a process of using a variety of strategies to recall specific past events or information. Your job is to use your preferred learning style to learn the information, then use memory strategies to retrieve that information.

By establishing a positive approach to remembering more, you’ll soon find yourself developing and using effective memory techniques that work for you. The result will be greater personal confidence, higher exam scores, and better grades.

Organize the Information

It’s important to put all your collected notes, course materials, and study materials in some kind of order. By putting your course materials in one binder and labeling the sections, you can find anything you need. Your recall of information will increase when your mind “knows” where specific materials are stored. Some students organize their notes by color coding, highlighting, labeling, filing, or sequencing them for quick access and study.

Use Specific Memory Strategies

Try using some of the following strategies to enhance your learning:

- **Decide what you want to remember.** “Remember to remember.” Make a conscious decision to remember specific information.
- **Develop a positive attitude!** How many of you tell others that you have a “terrible” memory and can’t remember anything? Start telling people that you have an excellent memory! You’ll start believing it too!
- **Stay alert and study in short sessions.** Study for 15 to 20 minutes, then take a break by standing, walking, drinking some water, or stretching. Research tells us that adult students can actively attend for about 15 to 20 minutes at a time. Complete a short study session then take a mini break. These short, focused sessions can be very effective for increasing your opportunities to remember more.
- **Reduce distractions.** “Turn off” common distractions like the TV, radio, or computer and “turn on” your attention. Try to concentrate on just one idea, concept, or procedure for a few minutes of focused studying. A few minutes of studying in a quiet place can be worth a few hours of studying in front of a TV or other distractions. Those of you with children know that this may be the only kind of studying you can do—short, focused study sessions while the children are playing or resting.
- **Use your preferred learning style or study method.**
- **Organize your information by creating mind maps or visual organizers.** Use colored index cards, a summary sheet, flash cards, or lists.
- **Be active and participate in your learning.** Don’t just sit in class—take notes, ask questions. Form or join a study group. Get involved! Study groups, study partners, and other group tutoring offers students an opportunity to “hear” and “speak.” Putting your ideas into your own words can improve your recall by 90%. The more active and involved you are while learning, the more you will be able to recall specific information.
- **Talk out loud to yourself.** You’ll remember more when you’re using more than one learning mode. Practice remembering information by using your own words.
- **Use as many learning modes as you can.** For example, while out walking, practice reciting the main point of a chapter. Consider tutoring a fellow student. You’ll learn more because you’re actively rehearsing and putting the ideas into your own words. Speak while you read; say important points while reading and highlighting in your textbook.
- **Ask yourself questions about what you’ve read in a text or heard in a lecture.**
- **Create visual associations.** Associate a new piece of information with a picture or image to help you create an association. For example, to remember the meaning of an aneurysm, think about a balloon.
- **Spark your interest in a subject.** When you get excited about a topic or idea, you tend to remember more about it.
• **Create and listen to audiotapes.** Tape-record possible exam questions, leave a 5-second silence, and then say the answer. You’ll be able to easily prepare practice tapes that you can listen to in your car or while walking or exercising. Endless loop tapes with different amounts of time are available at a variety of electronics stores.

• **Use note cards.** Frequent review of main points works. Consider drawing a diagram, describing a procedure, or putting a key point on each card.

Use Memory Tricks

Memory tricks or mnemonics can be used to help you remember long lists, dates, numbers, or terminology. Some of the most common forms follow:

**Acronyms.** Examples include:

- SCUBA—self-contained underwater breathing apparatus
- PEMDAS—parentheses, exponents, multiplication, division, addition, and subtraction (the order of operations in math)
- IPMAM—interphase, prophase, metaphase, anaphase, and telophase (the stages of cell division)
- ABC—airway, breathing, circulation

**Rhymes.** Rhymes can be fun to compose and they’re easy to remember. To remember the 12 cranial nerves (CNs), learn this rhyme: On Old Olympus’ Towering Tops A French and German Viewed Some Hops. Each uppercase letter corresponds to the first letter of the 12 cranial nerves. For example, CN I is olfactory, CN II is oculomotor, and so on.

**Acrostics.** The first letters of the words in the sentence “Every good boy does fine” helps us remember the music notes of the lines of the treble clef staff.

**Association.** Try to associate a memorable event with a date. For example, maybe 1995 was the year you graduated from high school. Or, you may remember a phone number because of the way it looks when you press the buttons on the keypad. For example, 321-3669 is easy to remember because when dialed, the buttons you push go across and down. That layout is a visual reminder of the phone number.

**Memory cue.** Choose specific information you want to remember, then create a cue or silly sentence. For example, if you want to remember the three main areas of genetics—that is, biochemical (molecular), mendelian, and population genetics—you could create a silly sentence like this: “Biochemical moles mend their population.” It’s easier to remember a sentence rather than a list. You could also create a memory cue to remember that a cubic foot of water weighs 95 lbs.: “At age 95, I drank a cubic foot of water.”

**Visualize a new piece of information in a ridiculous way.** Exaggerate a mental picture of the information you want to learn or make it out of proportion. Then practice seeing that ridiculous picture mentally throughout the day. You’ll remember it because it stands out in a unique way. For example, when you want to remember the Nutritional Checklist Warning Signs, described by the acronym “DETERMINE,” create an image of a “determined” person whose “look” includes the characteristics in the list: disease, eating poorly, tooth loss, economic hardship, reduced social contact, multiple medicines, involuntary weight loss/gain, needs assistance in self care, elder years older than age 80. “Seeing” that person in your mind associated with characteristics you want to remember will aid you in remembering that long list.

While reading your nursing text, look for opportunities to visualize the boxed features, charts, tables, or diagrams. Try to make them ridiculous. Make them stand out!

**Practice, Practice, Practice**

Review every day! Short, frequent reviews can be more effective than sitting down to study for hours at a time.

**Recite, Recite, Recite**

Talk to yourself out loud. Summarize out loud. Discuss out loud. Sing about it. Talk about it. Be creative about practicing out loud. It works! Practice speaking as you write, create diagrams, draw mind
Tips for Student Success

Creating a positive attitude, organizing your information, using a variety of strategies, and frequently practicing out loud can help you remember more. Having a more effective memory is largely a matter of practice and using techniques that work for you. As you practice using some of these techniques, you’ll find yourself relying on them for lifelong personal and professional applications in the field of nursing.

BE HEALTHY

You’ve made it into the nursing program! Now, you need to survive the demanding requirements to succeed! Maintaining your health and having enough energy to sustain the long class, lab, clinical practice, and study sessions will be extremely important. Actively listening, taking effective notes, participating, remembering incredible amounts of information, and studying daily are energy-draining tasks. Ask yourself if you are regularly eating nutritious foods, sleeping enough to be refreshed, resolving stress issues, and exercising. You’ll need to maintain a balance between school and home demands. We all know about good health habits but we often need to be reminded about some of the simple methods for maintaining good health. Here are some tips to help you maintain good health.

- Eat a variety of nutritious foods that are home prepared (if possible) to control nutrient content and reduce costs.
- Be aware that you need to maintain regular and sufficient sleep.
- Use or develop strategies to reduce stress experienced at work, school, or home.
- Exercise to improve strength, manage your body weight, and maintain good cardiovascular health.

Many nursing students say they don’t have enough time or money to regularly eat a variety of nutritious foods. Are you one of those who hurry to class without eating in the morning? Concentrating on an empty stomach during those long lecture, lab, or clinical classes can be very difficult. Sometimes students just suffer—waiting for a break at lunch. Some rely on vending machines to provide them with quick, generally nonnutritious, and often expensive candy bars, chips, or soft drinks. We all know these snacks are no substitute for healthy foods, so why not start the day with a “Power Smoothie”?

Jumpstart your day with a nutritious, easy-to-make, and low-cost breakfast that will provide you with enough energy to last until lunch. Consider making a Power Smoothie. A recent TV show featuring a member of the Stanford University Men’s Swim Team talked about preparing a breakfast that helped team members compete successfully in and out of the pool. Here’s the recipe. It doesn’t require any special skill—just an interest in staying healthy. Try it for an easy and fun way to eat breakfast “on the go.”

**Equipment:** blender

**Ingredients:**

- 1 to 2 cups juice, milk, water, or yogurt
- 1 banana (can be frozen)
- 1/2 to 1 cup oatmeal
- Any ripe seasonal, frozen, or dried fruits
- 1/4 cup protein powder (any flavor, any brand)
- Ice cubes

**Extras:** Cinnamon, honey, wheat germ, peanut butter, chocolate, etc.

**Note:** The amount of ingredients you use is up to you. You can add several pieces of fruit or just one or two. Include foods that appeal to you. Try to use fruits that are in season.

**Method:** The night before classes, set out your blender. Measure out the oatmeal, protein powder, dried fruits, or other nonliquid ingredients and place them in the blender. In the morning, just add fruits, liquid, ice, and extras. Turn on the blender. Mix for about 30 seconds to 1 minute. Add a straw and you’ve got breakfast in hand. You can even take it with you (although not recommended if you’re driving). If you have a family at home, make an extra blender-full for them.

Almost any combination of the ingredients will do the job. You’ll find that shopping for fruit and other
smoothie ingredients once a week or so will take very little time and the cost will be minimal. Experiment with different fruits, ingredients, and amounts. You can’t make a mistake! Enjoy a quick and nutritious way to start the day.

Other ways to keep your energy going throughout your long days—and sometimes nights—are to pack “trail mix” baggies with nuts, raisins, dried cranberries, and other dried fruits. These are also inexpensive to prepare. Select your favorite nuts, dried fruits, dried coconut, raisins, or other nutritious dried foods to take along for breaks between classes. And don’t forget to take some water with you. Buy a “backpack” style water container. It won’t leak, break, and can be put in the dishwasher. Fill it with water from home and take it with you. You’ll always have something to drink—and it doesn’t cost you anything compared to purchased, bottled water from vending machines.

Preparing nutritious meals and snacks isn’t enough to survive your nursing program demands. Among other health factors, you’ll need to be mindful of getting enough sleep.

According to the Sleep Medicine and Research Center in St. Louis, Missouri, adult sleep requirements can range from 4 to 10 hours per day.

The following questionnaire can help determine whether you’re getting enough sleep.

1. Do you sleep less than 8 hours per night, on the average?
2. Do you have to nap during the day?
3. Do you fall asleep in class?
4. Do you have trouble organizing your thoughts for even simple tasks (like forgetting books or materials)?
5. Do simple assignments like homework seem overwhelming and extremely stressful, causing you to burst into tears or become depressed?
6. Do you overreact to situations then regret your actions the next day?
7. Do you have trouble being creative?
8. Are you excessively forgetful?
9. Are you late to your first class in the morning?
10. Do you have trouble falling asleep?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may be sleep-deprived and not functioning at your fullest capacity. Try going to bed by 9 or 10 PM and getting at least 8 hours of sleep for 3 days. See how you feel. Just being mindful of your need for regular sleep is a start. Make a plan. Work it out with your family to arrange for sufficient sleep. You’ll all benefit from your efforts.

With your busy and stressful life as a nursing student, you’ll also need to consider the problems associated with your demanding work, class, and study schedules. Many of the problems resulting from stress include lack of proper exercise, improper posture, decreased endurance and strength, and, surprisingly, a poor self-image. We all know that we should routinely practice cardiorespiratory (aerobic) endurance exercises. Just 30 minutes four to five times a week of purposeful exercise can keep you in shape. What kind of exercise should you do? It’s easy—just do something that you’re willing to do! It might be walking the dog, going to a gym, performing yoga, stretching, running, dancing, swimming, or doing anything that will “make your back sweat” for 30 minutes. That’s how much time you’ll need to exercise to make a cardiovascular difference. While exercising during that 30 minutes, you should be

ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP?

You may have seen this familiar scenario in your nursing classes. A student’s eyes grow heavy... his head starts to bob... suddenly his head hits the desk. Although we might find this a little humorous, we may have been victims of inadequate sleep ourselves. More and more, students and instructors are starting to wake up to the problem of sleep deprivation and the resulting loss in personal well-being and academic performance.

Here are some signs of sleep deficiency:

- Late arrival for class
- Inability to focus on tasks or assignments
- Reduced reasoning ability
- Increased forgetfulness
- Difficulty producing speech
- Immune system weakness (being sick)
- Higher level of anxiety
- Difficulty thinking creatively

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able to talk. If you can’t talk, your exercise workout is too strenuous.

Try to exercise early in the day—then it’s done! But how can you find the time? One way is to study while you exercise. Try to find ways to make exercising a part of your day. For example, think about exercising with your study group. You can all walk together while discussing course topics. You’ll feel more energized and healthy as a result. You can take a walk and carry your flash cards. Or, think about walking briskly while you listen to prepared audiotapes that contain course information. There are many ways to include purposeful exercise during the day. Be creative in discovering ways to be healthy.

Make a decision to put these basic nutritional, rest, stress reduction, and exercise tips to work. You’ll reduce stress, build strength, be more alert and energized, and be more able to successfully cope with the demands of your nursing program.

Developing and practicing effective strategies to actively learn, record, organize, and study course and text information can be a bit of work to put into place but once you’re using these techniques, studying will become easier and more productive. Combine some of these tips with reading and mastering the information in your textbook and become a successful student—and nurse!

REFERENCES


