NCLEX test day strategy checklist

Prioritization order

1. Airway, breathing, circulation
2. Maslow: physiological needs, then safety, then belonging and esteem
3. Safety and risk: who could be harmed in the next few minutes?
4. Acute before chronic, unexpected before expected
5. Assess before you act, unless it's an emergency and the right action is obvious

Tiebreaker: which problem would kill the client first?

Next Gen item types

Item type	Scoring	Tactic
Multiple choice	0/1	Rule out, then pick the priority
Select all that apply	+/-	True or false for each option
Matrix	0/1 or +/-	One row at a time
Bowtie	0/1	Condition first
Linked drop-downs	Rationale	Both parts must fit together

Case studies

- Reread the patient record on every screen.
- Note what changed since the last question.
- In highlight items, pick only findings that need follow-up.
- Each item is scored on its own, so don't carry an earlier mistake forward.

Select all that apply

- Ask of each option: is this true for this client, right now?
- Don't compare options with each other.
- Watch for "always" and "never".
- There's no set number of correct answers.
- Each wrong pick costs a point, and an item can't score below zero.

Pacing checkpoints

Five hours includes the introductory screens and any breaks. About two minutes a question.

Time used	Questions done
1 hour	About 30

Time used	Questions done
2 hours	About 60
3.5 hours	About 105
4.5 hours	About 135

Remember

- You can't go back after you submit an answer.
- Unscored pretest questions look the same as scored ones.
- The number of questions you get says nothing about your result.

Source: NCLEX Candidate Bulletin (April 2026) and nclex.com. Checked November 13, 2026.