How to Break Down NCLEX Style Test Questions

Step 1: Read the entire question and break down the question into its parts
 Analyze the main question, removing extra information that is unnecessary
 Breakdown of parts of NCLEX Questions:

  Item – the entire question and answer given

  Stem – the question, what is being asked

   Positive Stem – asks what answer is true (I.e., Appropriate, Understand, True)

   Negative Stem – asks you to look for what is false (I.e., Least, Not, Avoid, Except, Never, Further, Contraindicated)

   Qualifiers – keywords that dictate your answers (I.e., best, essential, priority, refute, decreased, increase, support)

  Options – possible answers for the stem

   The Case – the situation or scenario, the correct answer

   Distractors – incorrect or not the best answers

Step 2: Identify Keywords and Repeated Words

 Keywords in the Stem will help you identify exactly what is being asked. This can identify how to approach the question. This is tied to Bloom's Taxonomy.

  "Remember" – recall information from a list, definition, etc.
   I.e., list, name, recall, match, define, order

  "Understand" – be able to explain a concept or idea
   I.e., describe, explain, select, identify, interpret

  "Apply" – demonstrate understanding through explanation, recognizing specifics, reporting, and paraphrasing.
   I.e., calculate, solve, predict, choose, determine, perform, prepare, sequence

  "Analyze" – demonstrate your understanding by choosing the best answer, interpreting information, or solving a problem.
   I.e., examine, determine, compare, detect, calculate, categorize, investigate

  "Evaluating" – be able to defend, judge, or support an answer.
   I.e., support, relate, contrast, justify, grade, evaluate, determine, rank

  "Create" – assemble information to create or design a new pathway or decision.
   I.e., plan, propose, develop, modify, prepare, design, manage, specify, create

 If there are repeated words in the stem or choices, consider them carefully
 If choices have absolutes, consider if absolutes are correct – these are usually wrong

Step 3: Look for Opposite or Repeated Answers

      If two answers are opposites, analyze if one is correct and one is incorrect

      If two answers are repetitive, ask if they are correct or if one is a better answer

Step 4: Eliminate Distractors

      Incorrect or answers that aren't the best answer to narrow down your choices

      Identify specifically WHY these are not the best answer/incorrect

Step 5: Utilize Prioritization in Answers

      ABCs (Airway, Breathing, and Circulation)

      Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

      Nursing Process (Assessment, Diagnosis/Analysis, Planning, Implementation, Evaluation)

      Safety Measures (patient safety and hospital regulations)

References:

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