



EPISODE 13: Studying and Test Taking Tips: How to Pass the RD Exam the First Time

Transcript

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My college dorm roommate and one of my first friends in the United States was a nursing student. Her and I were “Juniors”. If you could see me right now, I’d be using air quotes. I had no idea what that was. This was one of those things I had to get used to. Are you a sophomore? I’d look around. Everyone around me seemed ok with the question. I remember asking, “What’s a sophomore again?” Um, what year are you in? Oh, I’m in my 3rd year. Except it never made sense to me. Sure I was in my 3rd year of college but I switched majors during my first year. So technically, my second year really counted as my first year didn’t it? I never figured it out and fortunately for me, I didn’t need this bit of information to be successful in life. And the truth of the matter is, a lot of the information on the exam or what you learn in school will not be used in your day to day life.

So my college roommate was also in her 3rd year of school and had just transferred to Cal State Long Beach for nursing school. I was in school to be a dietitian, also in my third year. We were perfectly matched. She became my interpreter that first year too. I’d go to her when people would laugh at my accent, asking her to explain what I said differently than everyone else and tell me how Americans said it. But beyond the social stuff, we were both focused and determined to get through school in the shortest amount of time. We had a destination in mind, goals we wanted to achieve and jobs we wanted to have so we hung out and had fun but we also studied A LOT. I’d watch her in our dorm. She’d sit in her chair, elbow resting on her leg, her hand under her chin and she’d push her knuckles into her chin and crack them one by one. It never bothered me - the sound almost became a comfort to me. Something familiar when I was in such an unfamiliar place. But this is what worked for her. She would read her textbook and nail every exam. Straight A’s every time. Simply by reading her textbook. I never studied like that. I had to write everything out. If I read my giant nutrition books for the tests, I’d fail every single time. By the time I finished a chapter, I would’ve thought about anything and everything other than what I was reading. I’d sit and realize I have no clue what I just read. For me, I had to write things out. Read it, write it, review it. It was always a 3 step process. I used my books as a reference but focused on my notes instead. I’m easily distracted when studying. My friend would invite me to meet her at the local coffee shop to study. I’d go because why not. But she’d leave feeling great because she finished a chapter and all I accomplished was a ton of people watching. I wonder what their story is? Where are they going? Where are they from? What do they do? I was always curious about peoples stories. Maybe that’s why I love telling stories now. It’s interesting. Reading a textbook around people, not so interesting. She’s now a neonatal nurse practitioner. Super smart and still one of my dear friends today. She made it through nursing school and the nurse practitioner program by reading her

textbooks. And I made it through my bachelors and masters program by reading, writing and reviewing my notes. I tried her studying method once and started to panic the day before my exam because I realized I didn't remember anything I had read. So I crammed for the test, reading, writing and reviewing my notes and managed to pull off an A on the exam. Reading her textbook worked for her. It didn't work for me. Another friend of mine in college, this friend was in the nutrition program with me, was that student who always set the curve and made everyone so frustrated because she always got straight A's. She missed 1 or 2 points on the exam so the curve would barely help everyone else. I liked her though. She was a good person. Very misunderstood. We were very different people. Very different backgrounds but she was a good person and I enjoyed her company. I remember one time we were preparing for an exam that covered glycolysis. I was feeling so overwhelmed by the whole process. I asked her to tutor me. I went to her dorm room and she grabbed a poster board from under her bed. She had started drawing glycolysis. The whole pathway. She studied like me. It was colored coordinated with markers - red, blue, green and fuchsia. We went over the pathway together, I redid the pathway myself and it stuck. Both of my friends were straight A students. Both of them studied very differently. One was more visual, had to write things out, draw things out and the other could simply read a chapter in a textbook and process it in her brain. The point is, there's no one way to study. You have to do what works best for you.

[Music and Intro]

Hey there friend. I'm so excited you tuned in today. I've recently had students ask for tips on how to study for the RD exam. So I decided to dedicate an episode to just that. As you can see from the opening story, there's no right or wrong way to study. Everyone studies differently. But there are some things you can do to help you through this process so that's what I'm gonna focus on and share with you in this episode.

Let's start with studying tips before going into test taking tips.

Study how you've always studied

The first thing I'd like to emphasize and remind you is that you didn't make it this far by fluke. You studied hard. You worked hard. You tried hard. And it's paid off my friend. Look at everything you've done to get to this point. Which also means, you've studied a lot. And how you've studied has obviously worked for you. So this is my first tip. Don't change your studying process. If you study best by reading notes, then read your notes. Don't change things up for this exam. Stay consistent and true to yourself. If you're someone who likes to use index cards to test yourself, do that. It's never worked for me. Writing things out over and over helped me best. Reading a

textbook helped my friend be successful. And if writing index cards helps you, then do you! Keep doing what you've done to get you to this point. Don't get fancy. Don't change your strategy. Be consistent.

Schedule your exam

Once you get all your paperwork and are able to schedule your exam, I recommend you do so. Don't take too long to schedule your test and don't schedule it too far out. You're in the student mode. Keep going. You're almost there. Jump into studying and cross the finish line. You've made it this far. Schedule your test. It's really important to know what your time frame is for studying. The amount of time you need to study really depends on your situation but I don't recommend you rush. Cramming is an awful feeling so give yourself enough time. If you're not working and you plan to just study everyday, you may feel comfortable scheduling your exam sooner. I would say, give yourself at least a month to study. I studied around 6-7 weeks before I took the RD Exam. Part of that time I was working full-time so my studying was limited to night time. You want to make sure you have enough time so it's better to give yourself a little more time to study than to feel rushed and panicked that you didn't give yourself the time you needed. It's good to have a time frame because it's easier to then plan.

Which brings me to the topic of Creating a Study Schedule

When you know your exam date, then you can create a study schedule. It's really, really important to have a study schedule in place. I suggest you create daily and weekly schedules to keep yourself accountable to study those days. You can even outline the domains you're going to study each day. There's 4 domains on the exam. I'll go over this in more detail in a bit so stay with me. For now, I really want you to stay focused. If you need help, I created a document for you that has a daily and weekly outline for you to plug in what you're going to study. It's practical and FREE. I have the link for you to grab your study schedule in the show notes. And if you want to learn more about creating a study schedule, check out episode 2 where I go over creating a study schedule. When you write things down, it's easier to hold yourself accountable. I have a friend whose become a special person in my life and someone I owe a lot too. She's my accountability friend. We check in and talk to each other, on Skype, every 2-3 weeks. I like the face to face interaction. It's more personal and feels more supportive. I also know that she's gonna see my face when I talk and I don't have a good poker face so I better have something good to share with her. We set goals for ourselves and write down each others goals. Then we follow-up and check in to see where each others at. It's so helpful because it pushes me along. I can't make excuses because I know I'm gonna check in with her and she's gonna ask me how I did with the goals I set for myself over the past couple weeks. I recommend you do the same thing. Find someone who's currently studying for the exam or maybe a family member or friend you trust and ask them if they want to be your accountability friend. This way, it will be harder

for you to push studying off to another day when you know you're going to check in with them. I wouldn't recommend 2-3 weeks. For the RD exam, I recommend you check in every day or every other day. I understand this strategy may not work for everyone but if you're someone that tends to push things aside and can get easily side tracked or you just don't feel like studying so you keep pushing it off, this may be something you want to try in order to push you along.

Start with your least favorite or the hardest topic for you first

The reality is, many of us have an area of nutrition we find a little more interesting than the rest. This doesn't mean it's gonna be like this forever. All we're focusing on is right now. So here you are, getting ready to take the exam and you have a bunch of material you're going to review. When you first start studying, you're likely gonna have more energy than when you're weeks into studying. It's human nature. So if you know there's a topic that's a lot harder for you or maybe you're not as interested in it, I recommend you start studying that content first. That way, you learn and get through the material when you're feeling more motivated. As your motivation decreases and you start feeling tired and a little over studying, the easier material or the material that's more interesting to you won't feel so heavy. Remember to do a review each day of the material you covered the day before and just keep moving forward.

Work through practice questions

Practice questions are wonderful. When you do them though, I want you to approach them a little differently. Instead of just doing the practice questions and memorizing the answers, I want you to look at the answers and make sure you understand the possible answers. Then I want you to break down the question further. Look at the choice of wording. What exactly is the question asking. Very rarely are the practice questions out there on the exam. No one knows exactly what's on the exam or what you're going to be asked. So don't plan to memorize the question and answers, you might be disappointed. You can use any practice questions to also highlight your weaker areas. If the options in a question are confusing to you, make sure you look them up and learn what they mean. I'm an advocate for study questions and do them myself, but make sure you get the full benefit from study questions. If you find yourself thinking, "I don't know what that means" then stop what you're doing and look it up. Learn what it means. Write it down. The way, if it shows up on the RD exam, you'll know how to answer the question.

Focus on knowing and understand instead of memorize. There are going to be things you just need to memorize. But I still encourage you to approach from a place of curiosity and ask why. The more you understand, the better you'll do.

If you're given a scenario question, you can't memorize the answer. Instead, think of it like a story. In what order would the options go in. What exactly is the question asking. If it's asking what you'd do first, well you've put the options in order so you now choose the first best option. I can't emphasize this enough. Don't go through the study questions and memorize each and every one of them thinking these questions will be on the exam. I've had students tell me they knew all the answers but didn't pass the exam. Please make sure you understand the concept - you under the why and what's being asked in each question.

Listen to podcast episodes

And lastly, listen to the podcast episodes on the go or any other material you can listen to. I teach college students and have my lessons recorded so they can listen to them whenever they want. A lot of students listen to the lectures when they're out for a walk. They find their head is clearer while walking and they can focus on the lectures. I've also had several listeners of this podcast tell me they listen to the podcast when out for walks. Moving your body has been proven to clear your mind so if you're struggling to stay focused, go out for a walk. You can listen on your walk or go for a walk and fully clear your mind, then get back to studying. You know what you need and what works for you. Studying should be fun. This is why I love to teach through stories. Stories are much more memorable than memorizing facts. You're much more likely to remember a good story and no matter how old you are, everyone loves a good story.

As a creative and content creator, I sometimes have days where I look at the page and can't think of anything to write. For me, if I hop on my Peloton or go for a walk, I find I'm ready to get back to writing and creating with a clear mind. So give it a try.

TEST TAKING TIPS

So now that you have some tips on studying, let's go over test taking tips. If you don't know the answer, make an educated and best guess.

Sometimes, you might not know what they're asking. You don't need to find the perfect option, you need to pick or choose the best option. You may think something else should be done instead. And you might be right but

your job when taking the exam is to pass, not prove you're right. You don't have the option to do that. You just need to get in and get out and pass the exam. So pick the best answer out of the options available. If you have no clue what the answer is, choose the first answer that came to mind. It's often the right answer.

Speaking of making an educated guess, remember to use your critical thinking skills.

So what does Critical Thinking mean? Well, thinking critically is purposeful, it's reasoned, it involves making a decision. Critical thinking is active thinking which you need for the exam. The exam and dietetics is so much more than memorization. When you're working in the clinical setting, you can't separate all the things going on with the patient. The patient is one unit. They're one person. Each condition affects other conditions. Each system in the body is connected to other systems. The mind is not separate from the body. Mental health affects physical health and physical health affects mental health. So you need to be able to apply the information you learned. Memorization only takes you so far. The RD Exam as well as other exams tests to see if you can apply the information - not just memorize. Sure, there are things you just need to memorize. For example, I'd say the internal cooking temperature of different foods is something you'd memorize but you also need to apply the information. If you understand why you need to cook food to that particular temperature, then it will make more sense when you need to know what shelf to put food on. The longer you have to cook the food, the lower the shelf the food should be stored on. Critical thinking is not reactive but instead requires deliberate thought. A really helpful model for using critical thinking when taking exams is the RACE Model by Nugent and Vitale. It's been used in nursing exams and I think it's a great strategy for test taking.

RACE is the acronym but it has nothing to do with race and ethnicity. So let's break it down.

R stands for Recognize. When taking the test, recognize keywords in the question. Some questions might be long but just like word problems in math, you need to break down the question and take out the important key words which will let you know what type of math problem it is. You've been doing math problems since elementary school so apply the same principle. Recognize the keywords in the question.

A stands for Ask. What is the question asking? If the question is really long, go to the last sentence that has the actual question and scan the answers. Then go back and read the question again. Sometimes, the questions can be long and it can be hard to remember everything by the time you get to the actual question being asked. If you're someone who has a hard time with that like I do, go to the actual question, look at your options in the multiple choice answers and then go back and read the question so you have an idea what to look for. The

answers are often in the question or at least there's hint to help you along the way. So don't forget to figure out what the question is asking.

C stands for Critically analyze each option and relate it back to the question. So what does this mean? It means read each of the possible answers in the multiple choice question and then see if each answer has much to do with the question being asked. Look at the rationale for each option. Then compare and contrast each of the options to the question. If you have a scenario question, which there are many on the exam, look at each option in the multiple choice question and see if the option makes sense based on what the question is asking.

And then E stands for Eliminate. So eliminate the wrong options. Once you've critically analyze all the options, eliminate the ones you know are wrong. Most of the time, multiple choice questions have an obvious outlier so eliminate that option. The less you're focussing on, the better. Eliminate them one at a time.

In scenario questions, start by looking at the big picture. What is the question even asking. What is it about. Then work your way inward to the details, identifying the keywords. Keywords are so important and are often hints. So don't ignore them. Of course, the question won't give you a hint. You need to determine what the keywords are and I know you can do that. Read the question and write down on your scrap paper you'll have in the exam what the keywords are. Then look at the available options for you.

The night before your exam, be sure to get a good nights sleep. Cramming last minute isn't gonna help. I know we've all done it but you're way better off getting a good nights sleep than you are to stay up late and cram the last bit of material. Remember, you know more than you think you know and you need to use critical thinking skills on application based questions. Memorization won't help but thankfully, you have the knowledge and the ability to choose the right answer. So give yourself the gift of sleep.

On the day of your exam, make sure you eat something before the exam. You don't want to be hungry and remember, you studied nutrition and you know you need to fuel your brain for optimal thinking. So eat a well-balanced diet with all the macronutrients before your exam. One time I was sitting with an HR consultant and he was telling me how he hates having meetings before lunch time because his stomach starts acting up and putting on a loud show. A few weeks went by and we ended up being in a meeting before lunch and sure enough, his stomach was super loud. I was cracking up. He warned me. So don't let your stomach get in the way and distract you during the exam. Have a full belly, and a fueled brain.

Before we go, I wanted to go over some information you should know about the RD Exam.

You'll be given a piece of paper and pencil so use them. Write things out. Use the tools you're given. On any of the math questions, write them out. Don't try to do them in your head.

There are a total of 125 questions with a possibility of getting 145 questions on the exam. Some of the questions are pre-test questions so they're unscored. You won't know which ones those are. Also, some questions weigh more than other questions - they count for more. Don't try to figure out which ones. Just focus on the question in front of you. No one knows except for those who developed the exam. You have 2 and a half hours to complete the exam and you must finish it in the time you're given. If you don't finish the exam in time, you won't pass the exam. So you'll need to pace yourself. As I'm saying this, I can sense there might be some nervous stomachs listening right now. Breathe. You'll get through it. 2 and a half hours is a good amount of time for 125 questions. That's 150 minutes. So you have slightly more than a minute a question. Some questions, you'll know the answer to right away. It will take you seconds to answer it. Others will take longer. It will balance out. And all the questions are multiple choice which means, the right answer is there. Cross out the answers you know for sure are wrong and work through the other answers. You need a score of 25 to pass. The max you can get is 50. I've never met anyone who scored a 50 on the exam although I also don't go around asking people what they scored on the exam. And I've never asked an RD I was hiring or met a hiring manager that asked an RD what they scored on the RD exam. The only thing that matters is if they passed and have their credential to work as a Registered Dietitian. A pass is a pass is a pass.

You can find this information on the website but I wanted to summarize it for you here too. As of 2022, this is the exam breakdown by domain:

Domain 1 covers Principles of Dietetics and makes up 21% of the exam.

Domain II covers Nutrition Care for Individuals and Groups and makes up 45% of the exam

Domain III covers Management of Food and Nutrition Programs and Services and makes up 21% of the exam. And;

Domain IV covers Foodservice Systems and makes up 13% of the exam.

I've attached a link to the CDR website in the show notes where you can download the breakdown of each domain.

A couple other things to know. The computer will turn off when the test has enough information to determine if you passed or not. So don't leave the exam unless you've answered all the questions. On the RD Exam, you can't go back and review your answers. You have to answer the question before moving forward and you can't go

back. So do your best to answer the question, and click next. Once you've moved onto the next question, don't think about the previous question. If you realized you answered the question incorrectly, just keep moving forward. You can miss some questions. That's why there's a range. You just need 25 to pass. I know, it sucks when you've answered a question and realize you answered it wrong. It's happened to all of us. But don't get fixated on it because if all you do is worry about the question you just answered incorrectly, you're more likely to mess up on the questions going forward. So stay focused. I love the saying, "Don't look back. You're not going that way". You're moving forward. So keep doing that. One question at a time until you get to the end which is when the test will shut off. And about that, I remember not liking that feeling. I didn't like that the test just shut off. It was abrupt especially for someone like me where I like to know how many more questions I need to answer. You won't have that information because you won't know how many questions you'll have. I want you to feel prepared. Knowledge is power and so is awareness. So now that you're aware, I hope that you go in and don't worry about what question you're on. Stay laser focused on answering the question directly in front of you. When you click next, only focus on that question.

Remember this is an entry-level exam. You need to know the basics of a lot of different areas of nutrition. There's 4 domains on the exam which we reviewed and I've attached a link to the CDR website so you can download it for yourself. You need to know the basics of each domain. Rely on your critical thinking skills. You know how to think critically. You do it every single day. Think about it. If you lose something, what do you do to find it? You think through where you were last. You might retrace your steps. You may stop and breathe so you stop panicking. Maybe you lost your phone. You might use your other device to track your phone. Approach the test in the same way. Work through the problem until you find an answer. And choose the best answer.

Stay on top of your study game. There's no limits to achieving the success you so deeply desire. Until next time.

[Music and Outro]

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