

NERC Certification Test Preparation Tips (Courtesy of Otter Tail Power)

The following are proven strategies that have helped many students improve test scores and prepare more effectively for exams.

Do Not Procrastinate – Do Not Cram

It seems like some students thrive on last-minute cramming. But most experts agree that cramming is not effective. The biggest problem with cramming, according to UCLA professor of psychiatry Andrew Fuligni, is that cramming causes students to sacrifice sleep time in order to study. While it's not possible to perform well on a test without the required knowledge, sleep is critical for academic success. Sacrificing sleep for an additional 3 or 4 hours of study the night before an exam is counterproductive.

One of the most important test preparation tips we can give you is to give yourself enough time to study. Don't procrastinate! It's best to begin preparing long before the day of a test. Make it a habit to complete reading assignments on time and frequently review lecture notes. If you're preparing for this professional credential, you'll want to organize your time so you can dedicate more time to this exam, as it has much riding on your efforts to pass the exam. Think of the time and money your employer has invested, not to mention your contributions to this effort. REMEMBER.....life does not stop if you are unsuccessful at your first attempt. Many students take a test multiple times before success, especially if their background in electrical theory and operations is not real deep.

Plan Your Study Time

Make time for studying. Setting aside regular time to study is critical for achieving high test performance. We recommend preparing a term calendar, weekly schedule and daily schedule that includes regular study sessions. It's so easy for work and other activities to quickly take precedence over studying, so plan your study time in advance. As you progress through the term it's okay to amend your study schedule to meet your needs, but make sure you plan study sessions in advance – and that you stick with them.

Ask Your Instructor for Direction

We'd even suggest asking your instructor directly the best way to study for the test. Many teachers are open to sharing with student's suggestions, even secrets, as to how to best prepare for their exams. Don't be scared to admit to your areas of concern; also, be open regarding any known learning disabilities or anxiety issues. Both issues have tips and tricks to reduce their impact in your NERC Certification efforts that your training staff or instructors can help you with.

Arrive Early on Test Day

Ensure you arrive early at the testing location (practice your route the day before), this allows you to rest the day before as you know the driving directions/time to testing facility & reduces stress. Leave yourself 1 extra hour for arrival at the testing facility to your test start time. This allows for life's happenings and also provides time for you to review your crib-sheet before your testing time (again reducing stress).

Review Early, Review With a Group, Include the "Right" Experts

Start a final review of all your notes, reading assignments, and other class materials that will help you prepare, a couple months before the test. You can do this review by yourself or as part of a study group. Working as part of a study group is an excellent way to review in preparation for an exam. Reviewing in preparation for a test as part of a study group allows you to improve your notes, fill in any gaps in your understanding, more fully explore complex concepts (like power distribution factors), maximize your time, cover more material, gain additional knowledge about what might be on the test, and provide you with a support system. Do not be afraid to ask the correct Subject Matter Expert (SME). Do not simply rely on who is available, as the exam some took twenty years ago is not the same test you face today. Do not focus on how you do it within your shop, concentrate on "grid-wide" applications, as regionally based questions are not on the exam.

Prepare an Outline & Crib-Sheet

Prepare an outline of the main topics and concepts that will be covered during an exam, then use this outline to study. This helps you memorize key facts and other information you will be tested on. Create a list or crib-sheet of the topical areas you don't know, or are not yet comfortable with. Then ensure you repeat the authoring (copying) of your crib-sheet 2 times a day, morning and evening. This ensures you memorize the concepts and formulas you feel you are weak in. Then, upon entering the testing center, write down your "crib sheet" at the test center on your blank sheet of paper. This allows you to relax, as the areas of concern are now in black and white sitting in front of you to reference and utilize on the exam.

Use Visual Aids

Visual aids, including charts, diagrams and graphs are great study helps – especially if you're a visual learner. Organizing information into diagrams and charts helps to condense information and improves recall at test time. Draw the solution out on the testing day and during practice tests. You will always be more successful engaging more senses in the evaluation process, it's science. Eyes and mind work well together to check logic.

Stay Healthy for the Exam

Getting plenty of rest and exercising regularly enhances your ability to perform well on a test. Eat a nutritious meal prior to taking a test to be alert and focused. Stay away from junk food.

Eating junk food or sugar prior to a test causes your energy levels to deplete quickly and can impact your ability to focus.

Get Plenty of Sleep

It is unwise to stay up all night studying prior to test day. Get plenty of sleep the night before a test. Although spending extra time preparing seems like it will improve your score, you never want to show up to a test tired. Studies show that students who spend more time upfront studying and less time cramming the night before typically perform better on tests. Go to bed a half hour earlier; wake up a half hour earlier.

Stay Hydrated and Use the Restroom

Be sure to use the restroom before the test begins. If you must visit the restroom during the test, you are wasting test time. It can also be extremely uncomfortable and distract your concentration; however, it's also important that you stay hydrated. If possible, bring a bottle of water with you to the exam.

Read the Question as Written, Not as You Want it to Be

Be sure to read the question as authored. You have seen many exam preparation test questions, that were authored to be “like” test questions, but not exact exam questions, so read them as they are written, as just a word or two can change the whole outcome of the correct response. Also, for long worded questions, pick “B”, mark it and return to it after you have responded to all the test questions. A simply worded question has the same point value as a paragraph question, get the low hanging fruit first. Once you have completed all the “low fruit” you will then lower your stress knowing that you now have completed the questions you know, now you have 60 minutes to go to complete the remaining ten or so paragraph long questions. Most importantly, read the paragraph question from the “bottom up”. Read the last sentence, the last sentence is typically the key sentence, then once you know what you need to “solve” the question, read the rest of the paragraph. Failing to do so wastes precious test time and add to frustration with wordy problems.

To Summarize

- Take the day before your test and do something you enjoy.
- Write down your crib-sheet three times each day leading up to the test day.
- Write down your crib-sheet before you start the test, ask if you can do this before the test center staff explains how to do the computer testing.
- Answer the low hanging fruit first, guess “B” and mark the paragraph long questions and move to the next question.
- When doing paragraph long questions, read the last line first. Often, test questions written provide a lot of extra information in the paragraph that you do not need to answer the questions.

- Use the whole time (three hours) provided for the test...go over your answers. When going over your test, before your time is up, do not change an answer unless you can prove why your original answer is wrong.