Maternal-Child Nursing Test Success
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Maternal-Child Nursing Test Success: An Unfolding Case Study Review

*Ruth A. Wittmann-Price, PhD, RN, CNS, CNE*
*Frances H. Cornelius, MSN, PhD, RN-BC, CNE*
This effort, like all efforts of nurse educators, is dedicated to our students!
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To our nursing students and faculty: Dr. Fran Cornelius and I have developed this book to revolutionize studying. This book begins the second generation of Test Success Through Unfolding Case Studies. It contains detailed content as well as evaluative questions in a user-friendly workbook format specific to maternal-child nursing. This book is based on the very successful first NCLEX-RN(R) Excel Test Success Through Unfolding Case Study Review (2010), but this new version is electronically enhanced with hundreds of Web links. Now you can link directly to resources to promote thorough knowledge acquisition, critical thinking, and the development of clinical decision making.

This book is designed to help students to understand, in-depth, maternal-child nursing for classroom exams, standardized tests, and the NCLEX-RN(R). The first chapter has been written by students to give you a bird’s-eye perspective of test preparation. Besides being a wonderful study and review book for students, nurse educators will find this book a delight for simulation experiences, classroom cases, group projects, and clinical conferences.

We know you will enjoy this format of learning and review. It is a fresh new approach that provides a break from the usual question after question review books. Each exercise has the answers with rationales in the back of the chapters, and each chapter is a separate clinical case that can stand alone. The book includes all the relevant conditions for both maternal and child health. Every case is based on a real clinical scenario—a patient condition that you may actually come across in your future clinical practice.

We hope you enjoy the adventure of imagining yourself as the professional nurse caring for and advocating for each patient as you work through the unfolding case studies. Best of luck in your nursing career, and look for the upcoming sequel books of unfolding case studies!

Ruth A. Wittmann-Price
Frances H. Cornelius
We would like to thank nursing students Kelley Moore and Stacy Wiegand for sharing their insights and test preparation tips in the first chapter. They said it better than we ever would have been able to.

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Maternal-Child Nursing Test Success
NCLEX-RN®: Preparation Tips and How We Really Feel

A Guide FOR Students BY Students

Meet us—because we are nursing students too! We began our nursing journey just like most of you. We have had our good times and well, not so good times (we’ll leave it at that). But, with our classmates’ and, of course, our professors’ help, we have been taught some of the best tools in order to succeed—the first time!

This chapter will include the following four topics:

1. **Study Skills and Habits**
   What we learned in our nursing school journey and how we are going to help you prevent our mishaps.

2. **Preparation for NCLEX-RN®**
   Face it, you need to know what to study, how to study, and when to study it—and we are going to tell you just that.

3. **Our Anchors and Lifesavers Section**
   Things we learned along the way that we wished someone had told us much sooner! This section will include some things that we thought anchored us down even though at times our ship almost sank. We will offer you some tips and tricks we learned that helped keep us afloat and what we think can keep you from getting hypoxic with scary reality.

4. **Leading Up to Test Day**
   All about your vacationing up until test day, because face it, you’re probably tired of studying anyway.

What We Like to Call Our “Introduction”

Together we (Stacy and Kelley) have collected more than 15 books to help us prepare for nursing school tests and the most important nursing test of all, the
NCLEX-RN®. We realized in all of our reading, that we never read the “intro” chapter of any book, but why?

- Maybe because it was boring.
- Maybe because it seemed unrealistic.
- Maybe because we did not have the time or energy to read it.
- Or, maybe because we have fluids, electrolytes, cardiac, pharmacology, and other stuff on the brain.

But in skipping those introduction sections, we realized something. We should have read them—many had good tips! Then we decided to write something that is entertaining to read and what we think is realistic in study preparation. You will have to excuse us if we are a little blunt at times, it might be because we are on our last cup of coffee from Starbucks and it’s 0200. Hmmm. Enjoy our roller-coaster, and excuse us if our sleep deprivation begins to affect our writing—at least you understand. Enjoy! Oh, one more thing: we will throw you a lifesaver, so hang on for dear life!

**Study Skills and Habits**

**Bad habits need to kick the bucket.** Studying material for NCLEX-RN® is really an art; it is something you must acquire over time, not something you learn overnight. By now, you should have these habits down. But, in case you don’t, we are here to tell you where we messed up and what we learned along the way. Studying can be evaluated many different ways, such as by your test grades, by successfully passing the NCLEX-RN®, or by feeling prepared for the workforce by remembering most of what you learned in school. It may feel impossible to study efficiently while in nursing school. Because face it, by now you are almost completely sleep deprived. Make yourself a study schedule and be sure to include time for sleep and stick to it! You need your sleep in order to complete nursing school and your pass boards successfully.

**A time management quick fix.** If you plan to stick to a time line, find a friend who is on a study schedule similar to yours, and hold each other accountable. We will admit that we have to keep tabs on each other when we study!

**Eat healthy. Trust us, your stomach will thank you later.** Don’t start studying or take an exam on an empty stomach. It is hard to concentrate when your stomach is yelling at you. Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress. Avoid junk food, fried foods, processed foods, carbonated drinks, and sugar. Eat small, healthy snacks during breaks to help take your mind off of your anxiety (Landsberger, 1996).

**How do you define stress?** If you worry about your test too much, it will negatively impact your test performance because this is virtually the definition of testing anxiety. Anxiety can cause extreme nervousness and memory lapses among other symptoms. If you become nervous during study sessions or during the exam, the best thing to do is to take a few deep breaths to relax
you yourself. Do not let your mind wander; focus on the task at hand. If you begin to look beyond what you are doing at that very moment, it is easy to become overwhelmed. Always, always, remain positive and keep your eye on the prize (McDowell, 2008). “With the NCLEX-RN®, the [prize] is becoming an RN!” (McDowell, 2008).

**Put your stressors aside.** In order to avoid anxiety you need to understand and evaluate what triggers your anxiety. The best way to reduce test anxiety is to prepare and build confidence in your knowledge of the material. Approach the exam with confidence, and view the exam as an opportunity to show to yourself how much you have learned through nursing school. Think of passing the exam as a reward for all of your hard work. We know that the day we pass our boards will be our proudest day ever. So, in order to accomplish this, you need to be able to determine what stresses you out and puts you over the edge. We have already been over the edge a few times, so we will help you out for now on some stressors to avoid, such as:

- Your friends on test days
- Negative attitudes
- Cramming
- All-nighters
- Excess caffeine
- Distractions (TV, children, cell phone, Facebook)
- Prolonged study times without breaks
- Studying in your bedroom
- Procrastination

**What we left out.** Do not isolate yourself from your nursing friends when school is out. It is important to vent about your stressors with someone who understands exactly what you are going through. We are all in the same boat after all. It also helps to swap study tips, talk about NCLEX strategies, exchange information about job searches, and just help each other relax and unwind.

**What motivates you.** You need to assess what gets you excited. It is shown that diversional activities should be included in your personal wellness to reduce stress (McDowell, 2008). So, it looks like it is okay to get sidetracked every once in a while. But, don’t prolong it or let it become a habit.

**Where to start?** You might want to begin with a time line. We know you may have put off studying for NCLEX until the last minute, but that is a bad idea. Our nursing professors tell us that discharge teaching starts when? Yes, that’s right! On admission! So shouldn’t our studying be done the same way? If you begin early, the material becomes more fluent and you are able to retain more (McDowell, 2008). Practice what you preach. We have created a study schedule for you, but feel free to alter it to best fit your needs. If you choose to change this up, be sure to remember that you need to make a schedule that encompasses an adequate amount of time to prepare, is flexible, and allows time to sleep!
Just a quick study blurb. When you are studying NCLEX-style questions, always be sure to read the rationales for all answers. By doing this, you will better understand why the correct answers are correct and why the incorrect answers are incorrect. Makes sense right? We thought so too!

Preparing for NCLEX-RN®

First things first—you have to register for the test. Once you’ve finished your classes and gotten those superior grades we know you’re capable of, your institution should provide you with an application for licensure appropriate for your state board of nursing. You must submit this application to the state board to be eligible to register for NCLEX-RN®. At this point, you need to scrape together some money (post nursing school, nursing books, uniforms, and supplies) because the state board is going to want it. The price of licensure varies from state to state but the actual cost to take the NCLEX is $200 (Dunham, 2008). Whew! Our jaws just dropped, too.

Once you’ve applied for your license, you need to register to take the NCLEX-RN®. Be sure to provide your name exactly as it is printed on your identification that you will show on test day. If you offer an email address when registering, you will no longer receive snail (paper) mail about your testing. Be sure you’re ready, because the $200 fee to register for NCLEX-RN® is absolutely nonrefundable (Dunham, 2008).

So you have completed your part? Now it’s time for you to sit back (study a little more), and wait for your Authorization to Test (also more commonly referred to as your ATT) (Dunham, 2008). We know you are super-anxious to know exactly when you’ll be taking this career-starting test, but first you have to wait for your ATT to arrive. Once your ATT arrives, go ahead and use that opportunity to call and schedule your big day. It is important to call as soon as possible, because the administrators are required to give you available test dates within 30 days of your call (Dunham, 2008).

You’ll want you to be extra prepared to take this test. So, don’t spread yourself thin on time when scheduling your test date unless necessary. ATT is valid only for a limited number of days; the time length varies from state to state (Dunham, 2008). Be sure to schedule your test date within that frame, but don’t wait too long because you don’t want to develop stress-related hypertension.

Okay, you now know where you’re going to take the test and what day, but what about the time? Nursing school has tried to make us early risers, but some of us are still nocturnal. The testing center understands this and will allow you to take an afternoon test! Once you get all of the specifics, write it down! And if you’re super scatter-brained like us, our research revealed that the ATT actually has a place for you to record this information (Dunham, 2008). Thank goodness! On test day, you must bring one form of identification that identically matches your registered name and what now appears on your ATT. Don’t forget your ATT as well. You will not be admitted to the test without these two important things. After the test, you should receive your test scores within one month from the date you took your test (Dunham, 2008). Or you can pay to get them earlier. You can also keep trying the Web site approximately 48–72 hours after testing to see if your name comes up
under the license search for your state board of nursing. The status of RN licenses is public knowledge so it will be accessible on the web.

Use your favorite highlighter (or pencil) for test days. Dress comfortably (without your PJ’s—dressing down too much doesn’t help your confidence).

Get plenty of sleep the night before. Take a shower before the test (to wake you up and, of course, to feel clean). Wear an article of clothing that you have been studying in (it is okay to wash it before test day). Highlight the material you think is the main point to each question (nursing diagnosis, medical diagnosis, signs and symptoms, and other valuable information).

Determine your answer before you read the answer choices. Mark out answers you know are obviously wrong (mark through the entire answer, not just the letter, so that you are not unintentionally telling yourself that that answer is still available). Make notes on your tests and next to answer choices about what you know, even if it is an incorrect answer (give yourself a reason why it is wrong) and take your time, but don’t spend too long on one question.

Trust your gut! Usually your first instinct is right.

Be prepared! Wear a watch on test day. Bring ear plugs so you don’t hear other students. Go to the testing site right on time to avoid listening to other students’ pretest jitters. Bring a few mints with you (they can help concentration).

LISTEN! During test reviews, don’t just mark what you got wrong and right. Divide your studying time into increments (e.g., 30 minutes studying with a 5-minute break, or 50 minutes studying with a 10-minute break). Create visuals when studying (e.g., posters, concept maps). Create auditory help (e.g., sayings like the ones above or make a song to help you remember). BUT the absolute most important tip to reduce test-taking anxiety is—DRUM ROLL PLEASE—that’s right, you guessed it—BE PREPARED!

Sounds easy enough right? Well you have the tools to do it now. So, let’s get to studying! Don’t forget snack breaks and plenty of rest. Review your study timeline. Make sure you check your study timeline frequently before the big day so that you can keep yourself in check. Don’t fall behind or lose track of what you want to cover before the exam.

**YOUR PLAN: Two to Three Months Before the Exam**

- Begin organizing your lecture notes and textbooks from classes.
- Take a comprehensive assessment using a standardized test, or whatever testing service your school has used.
- Determine your strengths and weaknesses in content areas and what you are most insecure about.
- Plan to review your weakest areas first and then save time to do a quick review of these at the end as well.
- Take practice tests that are specific to your area of weakness.
- Learn the format for NCLEX-RN® and become familiar with it.
- Even though you are still in school, try to study NCLEX-RN® for 2–3 days per week for 1–2 hours.
• Decide whether or not you want to join a study group (through standardized testing, a local test prep center, etc.).
• Determine the strategies that best help you reduce anxiety before big tests.

Four to Six Weeks Before the Exam

• Begin practice tests for all content areas.
• Organize your notes by chapter/body system or whatever makes the most sense to you.
• Continue to practice NCLEX-RN®-style questions so you are more familiar with the format.
• Be sure to continue receiving adequate amounts of sleep and exercise, eat appropriately, and balance socializing and working.
• Do not become a study hermit.
• Retake your comprehensive exam to see how well you are improving and what areas still need improvement, if any. After all, a little bit of positive reinforcement never hurt. It feels good to see your studying actually pay off.
• Once you know where you are taking the test, make your arrangements if you plan to stay the night before in a hotel room.

One Week Before the Exam

• Plan for this week to be relaxing and stress free from studying.
• Begin your final review of areas you are still insecure about.
• Retake your comprehensive assessment for the last time to evaluate how well you’ve prepared.
• Review all lab values and calculation formulas.
• Put all of your documents together for test day.
• Again, you need to feel your best, so get plenty of sleep, exercise, and don’t over indulge in food.

Getting to know the test like your best friend. Does being around your best friend bring comfort? We thought so. So why not think of this test as your best friend? If you are prepared for what the test is like, hopefully it will kill some of those stomach butterflies that are stirring. You need to know what to expect from the moment you walk in the door to sign in, to the presentation of the actual test, and what the environment is like while you’re testing. At the end, we will provide you with a checklist of what to bring to the testing center (Dunham, 2008).

Okay, so we all know what our nursing school tests look like and we are already sick of reviewing NCLEX-RN® questions. Well, guess what! There was a reason for the madness: the NCLEX-RN® is no different! By now you should be
familiar with the types of questions that will be presented to you. There will be lots of multiple choice questions, some select all that apply questions, a few prioritization questions, a couple hot-spot questions, and maybe a few math fill-in-the-blank style questions thrown in as well (Dunham, 2008). Now that you know the types of questions for the NCLEX-RN®, you need to know how it will be presented to you. You will be shown one question at a time; even if you’re good at multitasking, you can only answer one question at a time anyway. You must complete the question to move forward, NO SKIPPING (like class). You can’t go back to change answers which is probably a good thing, I know we have been told many times in nursing school, stick to your gut answer and don’t change it. Your first answer is usually right (Dunham, 2008). You will have to complete anywhere from 75–265 questions. The test is made almost specifically for you. The computer will give you a question and if you answer correctly (which we know you will), it will give you something harder. However, if you answer it incorrectly, the computer will generate an easier question. One of our favorite books says, “This dance continues, with the computer providing questions and [you] answering them and the computer deciding what question to display next until it can determine [your] skill level” (Dunham, 2008). If the computer can determine your skill level in the minimum 75 questions, it will cut off. Otherwise, it will continue to ask you questions until it is certain of your skill level (Dunham, 2008).

The key to preparing for NCLEX-RN® is finding the perfect combination of content review and practice questions. You need to be sure to balance out reviewing the mass amounts of information you learned in nursing school and, of course, using your best test-taking skills (Herman, & Johnson, 2009). That is why we are promoting this book, because it gives you both content and questions!

**Anchors and Lifesavers**

**TIP How to approach those nasty questions.** The main goal of NCLEX-RN® is to test the student’s use of critical-thinking skills rather than just recall factual information. So, remember when you’re studying to not focus on small details, but try and understand overall concepts (McDowell, 2008). Having a general understanding of the information will allow you to be able to think your way through an NCLEX-RN® question critically. If you start off studying every little detail in your lecture notes from nursing school, we can guarantee that you are going to become extremely overwhelmed and frustrated—and quick! It will benefit you more to have a general understanding of the information (McDowell, 2008). But, even if you get a nasty question, take a deep breath and pick out your main clues from the question. Before you look at the answers, formulate your own. Eliminate the answers you can and choose from what you have left. But, be sure you know exactly what the question is asking and read all of the answer choices before making your selection. Before starting the test, tell yourself that you are not going to panic if you are clueless about a question. Just block out everything else and focus in on that single question.

**MNEMONICS and why we like ‘em.** We love mnemonics! We think they are one of the greatest study techniques ever. But if you keep reading we will detail it
even further. Mnemonics simply take the first letter of a group of like things and put those letters together to make a work that you can remember. Here are a few of our favorites:

- **Acid/Base Mnemonic—ROME**

  R-Respiratory O-Opposite M-Metabolic E-Equal.

  So in other words, with Respiratory Alkalosis/Acidosis the pH and PCO2 act opposite of each other, as one increases, the other decreases and vice versa. With Metabolic Alkalosis/Acidosis the pH and PCO2 either increase together or decrease together.

- **Hypertension Nursing Care Mnemonic—DIURETIC**

  D-Daily Weight I-I&o’s U-Urine Output R-Response of B/P E-Electrolytes T-Take Pulses I-Ischemic Episodes (TIA) C-Complications-4C’s (CAD, CRF, CHF, and CVA).

So now that we have given you a few examples, take a moment to write down a few that you have memorized that have helped you study.

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Great! Now we have a few other tidbits to give you while we are talking about ‘em. Mnemonics are great but don’t feel like you have to be told them, make some up on your own to help you study. If you have a lot of information to study, try grouping it together in the mnemonic. For example, ROY G. BIV stands for the color spectrum Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet. Well, say you had to remember some information about each one. You could break them up into three groups of different information. ROY can be group 1, G can be group 2, and BIV can be group 3. This way you don’t have just a mound of information, you have separated it so that if you forget one tiny detail, you don’t lose EVERYTHING! Great idea huh?

A few other little sayings we have grown to love thanks to studying.

- You have 10 fingers total (Use them to count the following letters) C-O-U-M-A-D-I-N (affects your) P-T (and INR) = 10 total
- H-E-P-A-R-I-N (affects your) P-T-T = 10 total
• Beta One/Two Blockers
  You have one heart and two lungs so Beta 1 affects your heart and Beta 2 affects your lungs.

• Blood Sugars
  Hot and Dry = Sugar High, Cold and Clammy = Need Some Candy
  You get the idea! If you need some help with fitting some information to a mnemonic to help remember it, try searching the Web, because odds are someone else has already had the same problem. We would include the 5-P’s for the neurovascular assessment here but hopefully we’ve all heard those ENOUGH! Right? They should be second nature by now. Wait, isn’t that what we are trying to accomplish anyway? Ah ha! It all makes sense now, right? Test day tricks we’ve learned through trial and error. We both have made plenty of mistakes on testing and have decided that the following ideas are the best ones out there. Trust us, we have used them and perfected them! If they don’t work exactly right for you, try tweaking them a little bit to fit your needs.

**Leading Up to Test Day**

**The day before the big test.** If you live more than an hour away from your test site, you might want to book a hotel room the night before. This will eliminate the stress of driving a long distance, getting stuck in traffic, following the wrong directions, or getting a flat tire. It also would be wise to drive by your test site to make sure you know where you’re going, to prevent getting lost. Watch television, go to a movie, go for a walk, or do anything that’s not NCLEX-RN® related to help reduce anxiety and pre-test jitters. There is nothing worse than listening to a fellow student who is not prepared and has a sense of impending doom to stress you out. So, our advice: STAY AWAY. Their negativity will rub off on you and increase your anxiety.

**Get your ducks in a row.** To feel your absolute best about your NCLEX-RN® preparation it is important to feel a balance in your mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional wellness. Double-check that you have all the appropriate documents and identification. You would hate to miss taking your exam because you did not have the right piece of paper. Eat a good dinner and go to bed early so you can feel your best when you wake up. Our biggest goal for you the day before the test is to be relaxed and not stressed about the huge test you are about to take. Just kidding, we know you are going to be stressed and that is okay. Just try to keep it to a minimum because if you don’t, it might make you restless and, in turn, make you sleepless. The most important time to take care of yourself is right before an exam, so you can be at full strength to tackle the test (Gloe, 1999).

**Test Day**

Don’t freak out, test day is FINALLY here (breathe)...WAKE UP! WAKE UP! No matter what time your test is scheduled, get up early and get moving! You are already going to be super-anxious about the test, so let’s not make it any worse.
“On the day of the test, leave sufficiently early that even a tidal wave, earthquake, and Godzilla on the loose combined would not keep you from getting to the testing center on time” (Dunham, 2008). Arrive at your scheduled center at least 30 minutes prior to your test time, but do not congregate with other test takers. This will only increase your anxiety, much like test day in nursing school. If you are more than 30 minutes late for any reason on test day, the center can choose to not let you in to take the test and keep that $200 you worked hard to give them. Once you get to the testing center, be sure to leave all personal items in your car (e.g., hats, gloves, scarves, jackets, pocketbooks, etc.). Some test centers may have a locker storage area for you, but be prepared in case they do not. Once you get to the sign-in desk, you will need to present your ATT and your photo ID. The nice lady (or man) at the desk will get your fingerprints and take your picture to make sure you haven’t hired a genius to come in to take your test for you. She (or he) will make you sign some more paperwork and then give you a dry erase board or some scratch paper for use during the test. You will then get escorted to your cubicle where your entertainment for the next six hours awaits (Dunham, 2008).

If your computer decides to have a meltdown or you forget how to use it, ask someone for help (you’re allowed to get help even after the test begins). To keep you from having your meltdown, here are a few things you might want to avoid. First, the test question number will be provided as the test is going on. For instance, if you are on your 34th question, it will tell you Question number 34. Try not to look at this number in anticipation of the computer cutting off after question number 75. Look at each question individually and focus on that question alone. Forget completely about the questions you have already answered and do not anticipate the future questions that will be asked. You’re not a mind reader; you cannot predict what is coming up next. Second, depending on the location you take your test, you may not be completely isolated. You may notice people coming in and out of the testing room, some taking much less time than you. Understand that these testing centers may offer many more tests in addition to the NCLEX-RN®, and that other individuals may be taking a different test. You have a total of 6 hours, so relax and don’t rush. But, you definitely do not need to stay too long on any one question. This is why nursing school tries to adapt us to answering about one question per 1.3 minutes (Dunham, 2008).

**Awaiting your test results and where to find them.** It may take several weeks, usually about four, for your test results to be mailed to you. Your state board will either send you your license because you passed or a letter stating you were not successful. Most states now offer other options to receive a quicker response. If you can fork over a little bit more moolah, you might be able to get your test scores on the Internet in a few days. Either way, it’s going to seem like eternity, but if you’ve made it this far, what is a couple more days or weeks? (Dunham, 2008).

Once you get that license (because that is what it’s going to be) the job search starts. Hopefully, you were able to network some in clinical to allow yourself to know what areas of care you like and dislike and what type of facilities you prefer. Another good thing to obtain during clinical is references. Your clinical instructors should know your abilities and hopefully will speak very highly of you. Once you get that job offer, some things you might want to consider are sign-on bonuses, health care benefits, vacation time, sick time, and patient-to-nurse ratio, to name just a few concerns.
Day of Test Checklist.
- Bring ATT.
- Bring photo identification (driver’s license).
- Bring ear plugs.
- Dress comfortably (possibly something you wore studying).
- Bring your brain.
- Eat a good breakfast.
- Say a quick prayer.
- Have a talk with yourself and be proud of what you have accomplished before you walk in, and leave those jitters at the door.
- Bring any other documentation/forms necessary for your state board of nursing.
- Talk to a friend to keep you calm before the test.

As if you haven’t heard enough from us already. We will keep this to a minimum because we have been talking too much already. We hope you can use some of these tips and tricks when studying for the NCLEX-RN® or even your nursing tests for that matter. We have included some humor along the way because it is much easier to retain some information if you remember laughing about it. Think about how much you learn from all of those crazy clinical stories you have accumulated thus far. The disease processes that were going on with those patients are probably the ones you understand the most. Not only do we hope that you’ve learned something from us, but we hope that you will also be able to apply what we taught you. You can never learn too much, so do not stop with studying for NCLEX-RN®. Try pushing your brain a little further by reading updated nursing journal articles and changes to evidence-based practices, or maybe even go back to school to further your nursing education. Whatever you do, don’t be afraid! You have the tips and tricks to succeed THE FIRST TIME!

Sincerely,
Your Nursing Student Buddies, Kelley & Stacy

References