

THE DOS AND DON'TS of The PANCE and PANRE Examination

Excerpted from the Lange Q&A Physician Assistant
Examination Board Review Book

DO practice what you will be doing during the exam, that is, answering multiple-choice questions on a computer. Answering these questions is a skill different from knowing clinical information. Get into practice for answering Board questions by actually answering similar questions. This is imperative for the clinician who has not

DO direct your studying to the primary care areas with which you are least familiar. Passing the Boards is best accomplished by achieving a fundamental knowledge level in each medical discipline assessed on the exam. This is especially important for PANRE candidates who have worked in a narrow subspecialty.

DO write your own multiple-choice questions. Not only will you gain insights into the mechanics of test-item writing and correctly answering questions, but also it is likely that many of your items will resemble actual Board exam questions.

DO get adequate sleep and rest before the exam. Some individuals elect to stay at a hotel located near the testing center in order to help get a good night's sleep and to avoid being late due to traffic conditions.

DO dress comfortably in layers that prepare you for temperature extremes, hot or cold. Coats or jackets may not be allowed.

DO arrive alert, calm,
and well-rested.

DO bring beverages, food for lunch, and between-question block snacks. They are not allowed in the exam room but may be checked outside and accessed during breaks.

DO reread instructions provided by the testing agency the night before to ensure you arrive on time, at the right place, and with the right supplies. Recheck directions to the test center.

DO review in detail the information on the PANCE or PANRE content, instructions, and format found at www.nccpa.net

DO remember to bring admissions materials (such as your permit and government-issued identification).

DO examine the computer station you are assigned. Be alert for glare or other lighting problems, and potential traffic flow as others arrive and leave throughout the day.

DO consider that the proctor is there to support you. Ask for any reasonable support or change of computer location that will help you do your best.

DO pace yourself, allowing a calculated amount of time per question. In your time allocation, allow for some extra minutes at the end for returning to items you have marked as unsure.

DO avoid situations that might put you in an unfavorable mindset before the exam. For example, if you anticipate heavy highway traffic, arrive at the exam site a day early. If disturbances bother you during an exam, come early and request a computer in a far corner of the testing room. Let nothing interfere with your best possible

DO relate test questions to your own practice and experience . Test-item writers are people who have derived many of the test questions from their own clinical experience. What would you expect a primary care physician assistant to know? Use this mindset to understand the goal of a question and to keep a positive

DO practice effective stress management techniques daily several weeks before the exam. During the exam, slow breathing always induces a parasympathetic response that will calm the mind and increase your concentration and focus. If you have any tendency for test anxiety, participate in programs designed to help

DO change your answer if you have a good reason to do so. You are twice as likely to change from an incorrect response to a correct one. However, if you are only playing a hunch with no information about the topic at all, your first “gut” reaction might be correct.

DO triage each and every question before selecting your answer . Evaluate it as a question designed: (1) to test knowledge in a “friendly” way; (2) to trap by including common pitfalls; or (3) to evaluate your knowledge about potentially dangerous choices. In the first case, the apparent oversimplification is probably the correct

DO use the process of elimination . Your job is to find the single-best answer. As with a patient's differential diagnosis, this usually is done by elimination. Avoid choosing an answer until after you have considered all of the choices.

DO read the question stem and combine it with each foil to form a sentence. After doing this, use the process of elimination to arrive at the final answer.

DO mark items if you are not sure of the answer. Return to these items when you finish the question block.

DO make educated guesses , if you must guess. Use the information provided in this chapter to help in your decision. By also using your medical knowledge and judgment, your chances will be much improved.

DO be alert for qualifying words such as most, more, usually, often, less, seldom, and few, which will sometimes lead you to the correct answer.

DO eliminate choices containing completely unfamiliar words as distracters. If the choice appears completely unfamiliar, it is probably incorrect.

DO consider “apple pie” choices as probably correct. However, beware that they may also be used to trap.

DO consider choices that are different from the others—the “odd choice.” This may involve the choice having the “odd” meaning or the “odd” length—long or short. The overqualified choice often is correct.

DO select item (C) when purely guessing. It is most frequently the correct response on many one-choice-only multiple-choice questions. If you eliminate (C) as a possibility, (B) is the next most likely choice. This is a “last-ditch” strategy that works more often on classroom tests than on Board exams.

DO select “all the above” or “none of the above” as a last-ditch strategy. When appearing as choices, they are more likely to be correct.

DO consider taking the exam as a positive experience. Keep your motivation high through self-coaching and imaging techniques. Use recommended stress management methods, especially if you are anxious when taking tests.

DO plan to reward yourself for a good performance after the exam. This facilitates a positive attitude.

DON'T cram at the last minute. This kind of preparation will not be adequate for an exam that covers mostly primary care breadth rather than depth.

DON'T eat a large meal within 2 hours of the beginning of the exam. Be well nourished, but not full.

DON'T leave any item blank at the end of the exam. Unanswered items will be counted wrong. DON'T discuss the exam during the administration, during breaks, or after the exam; this adds to anxiety and may result in disqualification or revocation of your certification.

DON'T become irate over seemingly absurd or difficult questions. Answer them to the best of your ability, realizing that they probably are experimental questions that will not affect your score. Other test takers probably will also consider them absurd.

DON'T guess randomly . Even if you are completely unsure of the answer to a question, use the hints suggested in this chapter to increase the probability of guessing the correct response. Make educated, not random, guesses.

DON'T think of anything except the exam in front of you. Think of it as your “operative field.” Concentrate on giving your best possible performance.

DON'T engage in any behavior that could be interpreted by the proctor as cheating or unprofessional conduct. All examination administration irregularities are reported to the NCCCPA and could result in severe sanctions.

Do enjoy the process it
may be painful, but it will
make you a better PA!

www.thepalife.com