



# Competency-Based Learning in Nursing Education

Learn the basics of competency-based education, the challenges with implementing it, and how our resources simplify the transition.



# CONTENTS

What Is Competency-Based Education? ..... 2

Benefits of CBE for Nursing Programs ..... 3

Nursing Education for the 21st Century ..... 4

Challenges of Implementing CBE ..... 5

AACN Resources for Your Program's Transition ..... 6

How Your Program Can Be Proactive ..... 6

**How UWorld Nursing’s Resources Can Help ..... 8**

    Improve Learning Outcomes ..... 9

    Increase Student Engagement ..... 10

    Streamline Student Assessment ..... 12

    Empower Faculty ..... 13

    Enhance Curriculum Alignment ..... 14

Your Partner for a Competency-Based Future ..... 15

References ..... 16

# SIGNIFICANT CHANGES ARE COMING TO NURSING EDUCATION

The Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education's ([CCNE](#)) new accreditation requirements for 2025 require nursing programs to adopt a competency-based model that reflects the American Association of Colleges of Nursing's (AACN) 2021 [Essentials](#).

Many universities will have to overhaul their nursing programs to change core instruction methods and how learning outcomes are measured. We will examine the basics of competency-based education, the benefits and challenges associated with incorporating it, and how UWorld Nursing resources can help.

## WHAT IS COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION?

Competency-based education (CBE) “makes the student the center of learning” rather than focusing on the structure and process of the educational system. Instruction, assessment, and reporting better relate curriculum and coursework to students’ lives and professional expectations as they progress through their education.



The AACN will not require nursing programs to move away from organizing their materials by course, but it notes that “accrediting agencies and state boards of nursing may require notification or approval of substantive changes proposed to implement the *Essentials* framework.”



**More than ¼ of RNs plan to leave nursing or retire over the next 5 years.<sup>1</sup>  
CBE will ensure new grads are ready to fill in.**

# BENEFITS OF CBE FOR NURSING PROGRAMS

CBE was designed to improve the quality of nursing education and meet the medical profession's future demands, challenges, and opportunities. It sets clear expectations for all stakeholders but inherently encourages flexibility to address unique situations and student needs.

 STUDENTS	 EDUCATORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Makes students responsible for their own learning</li><li>• Reduces bias by using formative and focused feedback from multiple assessors and methods</li><li>• Improves equity by serving diverse learners</li><li>• Maps specific courses and learning experiences to the development of competencies</li><li>• Relates the curriculum to life and professional expectations better</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moves you into more of a coaching role</li><li>• Clarifies expectations regarding student performance, making it possible for you to hold your students accountable for prior learning</li><li>• Establishes the rigor of your curriculum objectively</li><li>• Offers a cohesive framework for course and program design and development</li><li>• Creates a community of faculty with common expectations and goals for student development</li></ul>

Achieving these benefits requires internal motivation, a collaborative culture, and the continuous use of assessment data and collective wisdom to improve teaching and learning. The result is a greater quality of nursing education that meets the demands, challenges, and opportunities of the future and assures the competence of all graduates.

# NURSING EDUCATION FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

Programs that properly implement CBE put students in a better position to become “work ready,” but what does that look like in modern nursing? The *Essentials* highlights 7 contemporary trends and values to shape the future workforce:<sup>3</sup>

	<b>Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion</b> to address shifting U.S. population demographics, health workforce shortages, and health inequities.
	<b>Four Spheres of Care</b> that go beyond nursing education’s traditional focus on clinical education in acute care.
	<b>Systems-Based Practice</b> to address changing workforce distribution and the requisite knowledge and skills needed to provide care across settings.
	<b>Informatics and Technology</b> given advancements in the sophistication and reach of information technologies throughout care settings to improve patient outcomes.
	<b>Engagement and Experience</b> due to patients becoming more engaged in their healthcare, from managing chronic illness to prevention and wellness efforts.
	<b>Academic-Practice Partnerships</b> to recruit and retain nurses and support mutual research, leadership development, and a commitment to redesign practice environments.
	<b>Career-Long Learning</b> given trends in higher education that focus on supplemental methods of awarding credit and recognition for additional learning.






## CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING CBE

The traditional nursing education model is typically lecture-heavy and exam-focused. In recent years, multiple accreditation bodies have determined that this method falls short in preparing students for the complexities of real-world nursing practice. While competency-based programs address such gaps, successfully transforming traditional programs takes time. A few fundamental challenges include:

- Developing a robust curriculum that aligns with the AACN's competencies
- Finding effective assessment tools that measure skill mastery
- Keeping students engaged and motivated in a self-directed learning environment

All of this must be accomplished while encouraging the development of critical thinking and clinical reasoning skills and preparing students for the NCLEX®.

## Integrating Modern Learning Principles Into Nursing Curricula Is What We Do

		
Lourdes University uses UWorld educator resources to promote <b>active learning strategies</b> such as peer-led NCLEX review sessions!	The University of Michigan-Flint uses UWorld educator resources to provide <b>continuous feedback</b> and improve NCLEX pass rates.	The University of Utah uses UWorld's educator resources to identify knowledge gaps and provide <b>individualized remediation</b> and support.
<a href="#">READ MORE</a>	<a href="#">READ MORE</a>	<a href="#">READ MORE</a>

# AACN RESOURCES FOR YOUR PROGRAM'S TRANSITION

The AACN is taking active measures to be as accessible and transparent as possible to help your program implement the *Essentials* and CBE.



A RoadMap for the Transformation of Nursing Education

[VIEW](#)



Webinars & Programs for Implementing the *Essentials*

[VIEW](#)



The Essentials Tool Kit for Competency-Based Education & Assessment

[VIEW](#)

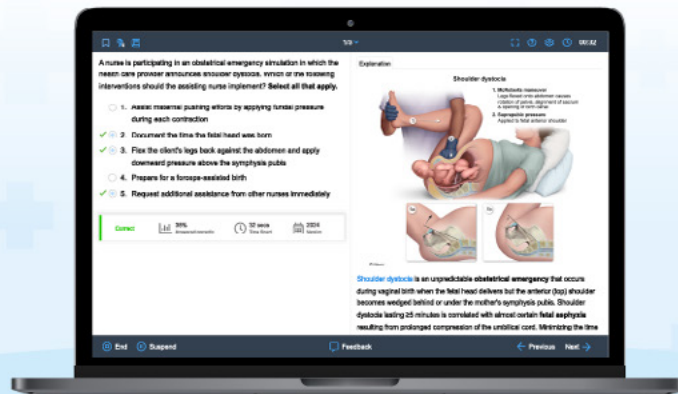
## HOW YOUR PROGRAM CAN BE PROACTIVE

The AACN offers several recommendations for programs that want to get a head start on transitioning to a CBE model:

- Map your current program to the domains, competencies, and sub-competencies outlined in the *Essentials* and note any content gaps.
- Identify in your current curriculum where you provide learning experiences that address the new competencies and how they're integrated across your curriculum.
- Identify specific activities in your current curriculum that promote and assess the achievement of the new competencies.
- Consider how new competencies might be assessed using current or new learning activities.
- Brainstorm ways to evolve your current degree pathways so they align with the new CBE model.
- Make use of the AACN's resources and engage with practice partners to strategize, plan, and implement the *Essentials*.

# The *Essentials* and NCLEX Success Go Hand in Hand

The *Essentials* defines the knowledge, skills, and attitudes future nurses need, while the NCLEX tests these competencies for licensure.





# How UWorld Nursing's Resources Can Help

We offer a suite of digital learning solutions that help LPN/LVN, ADN, BSN, Accelerated BSN, and RN to BSN programs transition from traditional to competency-based instruction methods.

The *Essentials* and Next Generation NCLEX (NGN) emphasize the importance of demonstrating nursing skills rather than merely memorizing knowledge. Through our active learning approach and alignment with the NGN, we'll help you continue to deliver a world-class nursing education. By adopting our resources, your program will be put in a better position to:



Improve learning  
outcomes



Engage diverse  
learners



Evaluate  
student's  
competencies



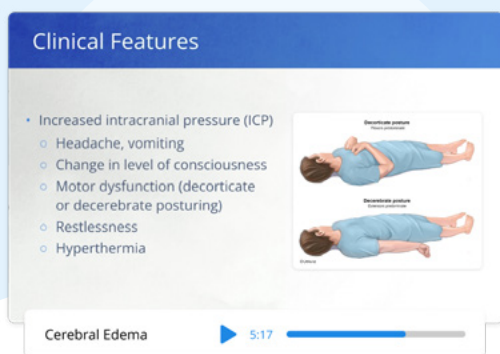
Empower faculty  
with resources  
and training



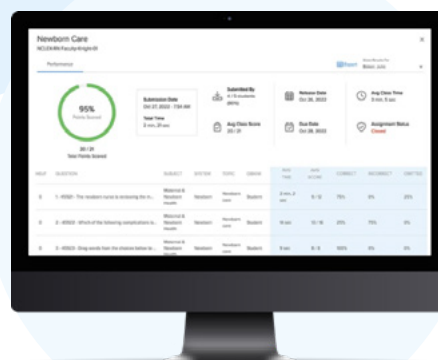
Provide data  
for continuous  
improvement

# IMPROVE OUTCOMES WITH UWORLD'S LEARNING PLATFORM

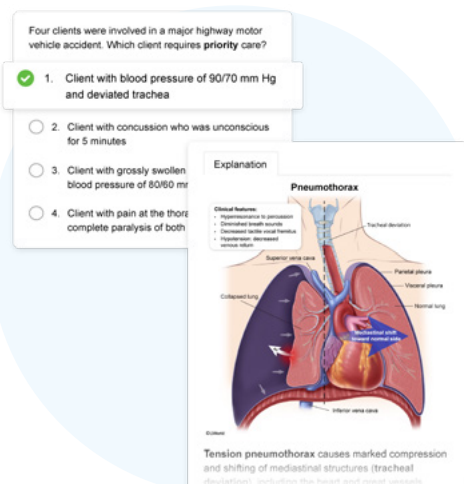
Through our educator Learning Platform (LP), we provide NCLEX support proven to deepen your students' understanding, strengthen clinical judgment skills, and increase licensing exam pass rates. Our LP is a leading learning management system with thousands of practice questions, assessment options, faculty resources, and active learning tools.



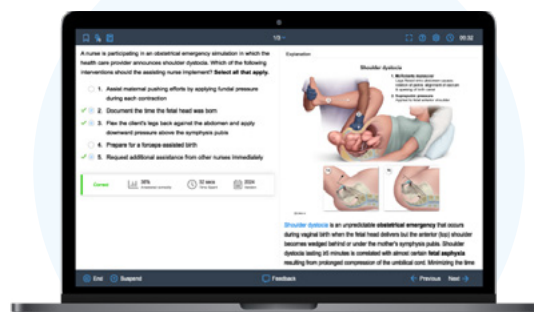
## HIGH-YIELD LECTURE VIDEOS



## MULTIPLE ASSESSMENT METHODS



## DETAILED ANSWER EXPLANATIONS



## ASSIGNABLE ITEMS AND NGN CASE STUDIES

# ENGAGE DIVERSE LEARNERS

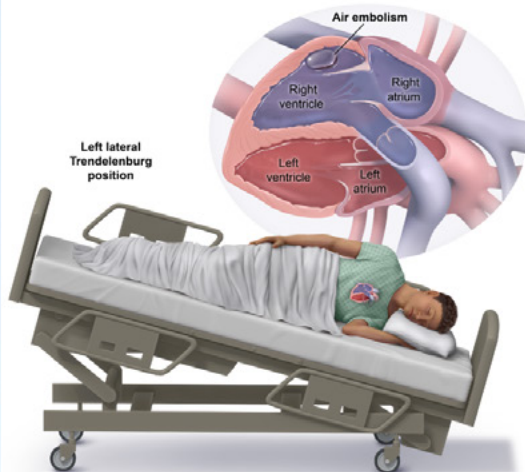
Competency-based education produces learning and behavior that endures because it encourages conscious connections between knowledge and action.<sup>3</sup> This same learn-by-doing principle is what our materials are built around.

We use realistic images and animations alongside detailed explanations to help students connect theory to real-life practice.



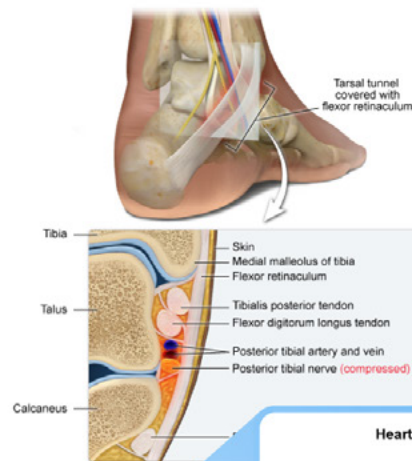
Visuals are processed  
**60,000x**  
faster than text

Left lateral Trendelenburg position



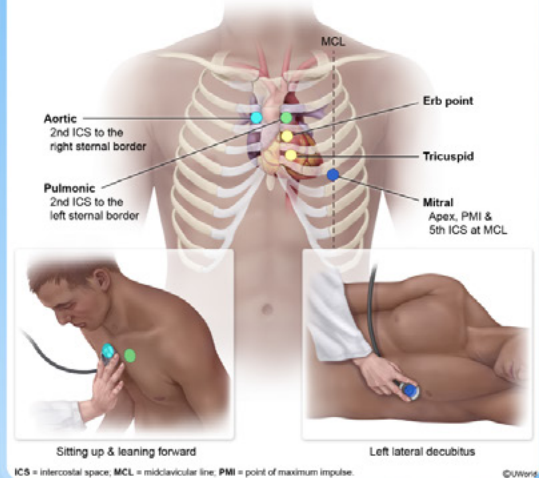
©UWorld

Tarsal tunnel syndrome



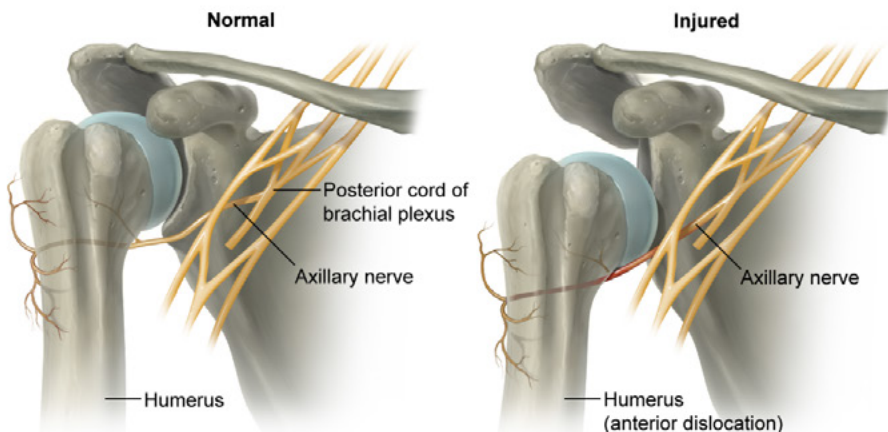
**90%**  
of info received  
by the brain  
is visual

Heart auscultation & accentuation positions








©UWorld

Axillary nerve injury  
(anterior view)



©UWorld

Active learning clearly describes the information to be learned, includes guided practice in using that information to achieve competency, and involves regular assessment and feedback.<sup>3</sup> That's why our platform offers a rich repository of educational resources designed to support active learning and competency-based education. Key features include:

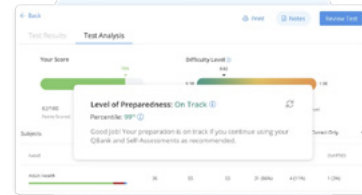
	<b>Extensive Item Bank:</b> Thousands of classic items and NGN case studies aligned with AACN competencies.
	<b>Comprehensive Feedback:</b> Content-rich rationales for each item provide immediate feedback and enhance understanding.
	<b>Multiple Assessments:</b> Our platform provides a comprehensive assessment suite to track student progress, evaluate learning, and identify areas for remediation.
	<b>Comprehensive Reporting:</b> Robust reporting capabilities measure progress and concept mastery and identify areas for remediation at the student, class, and campus levels.
	<b>Student Self-Study Tools:</b> Student self-study QBanks with customizable flashcards, adaptive (CAT) practice tests, a digital notebook, and other active learning tools.

# EVALUATE STUDENT'S COMPETENCIES

Performance assessments should be integrated into the curriculum throughout the program of study to demonstrate the integration of competencies across multiple domains with increasing complexity.<sup>3</sup> Our platform offers multiple high-quality assessment methods to evaluate your students' nursing knowledge and NCLEX readiness.

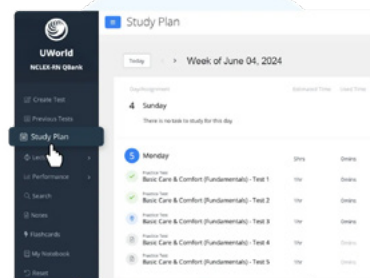
## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Create formative assessments using our faculty QBank to measure students' progress throughout the curriculum.



## SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Schedule one of our pre-made summative assessments to evaluate students' overall learning at key points.



## BENCHMARK FOR NCLEX-RN

Utilize our new benchmark assessment for NCLEX-RN to track student progress against established standards and identify areas for intervention.







 All of our items and assessments are automatically graded to save faculty time!



# EMPOWER FACULTY WITH RESOURCES & TRAINING

Creating a successful competency-based program requires giving faculty greater flexibility to take ownership of their students' learning outcomes. Course expectations should be clearly defined, and instructors should be equipped with learning tools that allow them to assess student understanding in multiple ways. This is exactly what we aim to provide through our LP.

## Adaptable Faculty Resource

	Pair UWorld video lessons with related items to supplement in-class lectures and gauge student understanding.
	Create assignments for classes, custom groups, and individual students based on their needs.
	Monitor student progress and performance on faculty-led assignments and in the self-study QBank.
	Present NGN items in class to increase student engagement, and poll your students for immediate feedback.

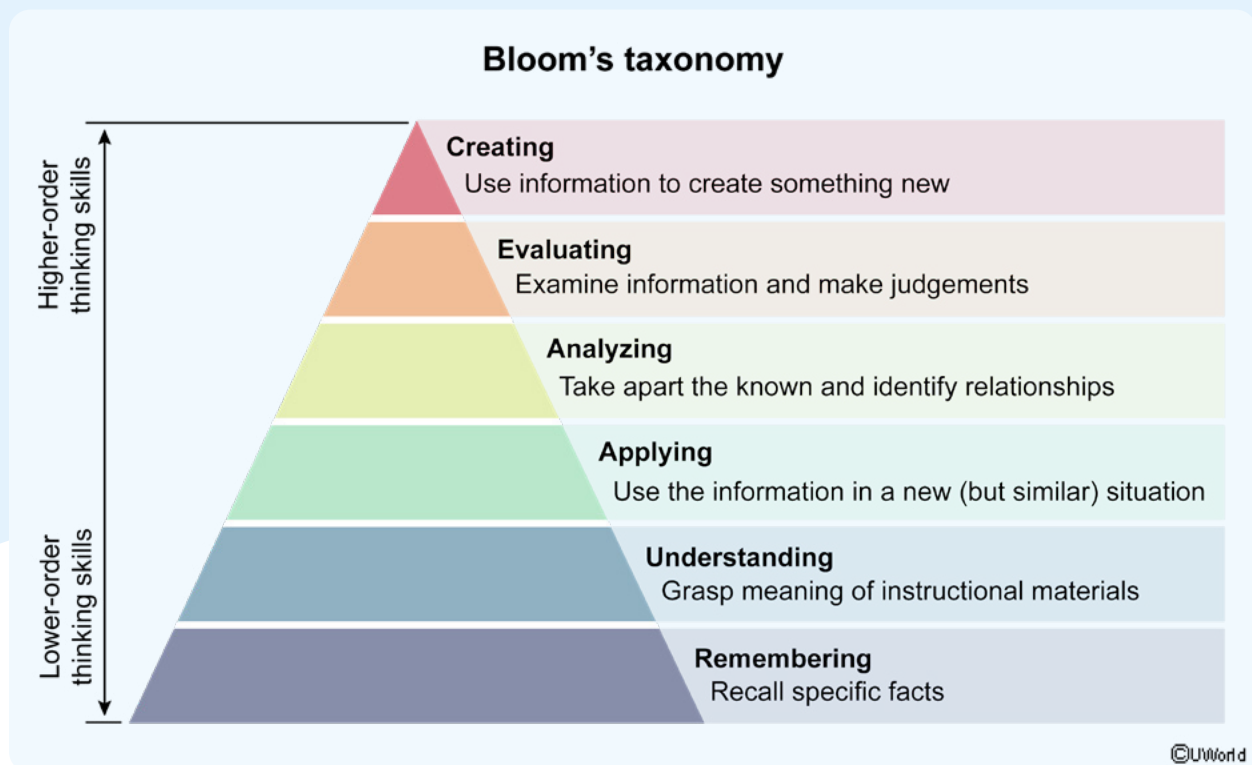
Our resources feature the item types your students can expect to see on the NCLEX, including extended multiple responses, drag and drop, highlight, [bow-tie](#), unfolding case studies, and more.

# RELIABLE DATA FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

With large-scale program changes comes the possibility that key requirements will be overlooked. To prevent this, we developed item-level reports that compare your program to common professional standards and guidelines like the AACN Essentials, including:

- Quality and Safety Education for Nurses (QSEN)
- NCLEX Client Needs Categories
- Bloom's Taxonomy
- Competencies
- Clinical Judgment Measurement Model (CJMM)
- Integrated Process
- Subject & Systems
- Concepts

These checks are useful whether your program is undergoing accreditation or simply being updated for improvements. Regularly mapping your program to professional standards and guidelines ensures that your students are adequately prepared for modern practice.



## YOUR PARTNER FOR A COMPETENCY-BASED FUTURE

Our resources are powerful tools that help nursing programs successfully transition to competency-based education models. By providing a flexible and engaging learning experience, we empower educators to help their students master essential skills, develop critical thinking abilities, and confidently enter the nursing workforce.

**For more information,  
view the AACN's *Essentials* FAQs  
and connect with us at  
[nursing.uworld.com/educators/learning-platform](https://nursing.uworld.com/educators/learning-platform)**

## References

1. Nursing Workforce Fact Sheet, AACN, Apr. 2024,  
[www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/fact-sheets/nursing-workforce-fact-sheet](http://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/fact-sheets/nursing-workforce-fact-sheet).
2. “What Is Competency-Based Education?” The Essentials, AACN,  
[www.aacnnursing.org/essentials/tool-kit/competency-based-education](http://www.aacnnursing.org/essentials/tool-kit/competency-based-education).
3. The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education, AACN, 17 Jan. 2023,  
[www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Publications/Essentials-2021.pdf](http://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Publications/Essentials-2021.pdf).
4. Understanding the Re-Envisioned Essentials: A RoadMap for the Transformation of Nursing Education, AACN, 2 Mar. 2021,  
[www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Essentials/Roadmap-to-New-Essentials.pdf](http://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Essentials/Roadmap-to-New-Essentials.pdf).
5. “Webinars & Programs.” The Essentials, AACN,  
<https://www.aacnnursing.org/essentials/webinars-programs>.
6. “Welcome to the Essentials Tool Kit.” The Essentials, AACN,  
[www.aacnnursing.org/essentials/tool-kit](http://www.aacnnursing.org/essentials/tool-kit).



## HELPING YOU INSPIRE THE NEXT GENERATION OF NURSES

[nursing.uworld.com/educators](https://nursing.uworld.com/educators)

