The Next Generation NCLEX Uses Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) Video Transcript

More info: https://www.ncsbn.org/1216.htm

Presenter
NCSBN Examinations

If you're taking the NCLEX, then you need to know about CAT, or Computer Adaptive Testing. In this video, we'll not only tell you what CAT is, but also help you understand why we use it and what it means for you. The purpose of a test is to measure something like knowledge or a set of skills. Let's think of nursing knowledge, skills, and abilities as traits that can range from really low to really high along a continuum.

At the high end, the student who gets As on everything. And on the other end, the student who lets just say doesn't. With the traditional test, finding out precisely where a candidate falls on that scale requires a lot of questions. That's why CAT is so important in the design of the NCLEX. Computer Adaptive Testing provides the most precise measurement with the least number of questions.

The secret of CAT is adapting the questions you see based on your previous answers. Let's take a look. Here's our scale again. Let's label the scale from -3 to 3 since that's about the range we use on the NCLEX. The test begins with a question of medium difficulty, which we'll put right at 0 on our scale.

The test taker can either get this question right or wrong. Suppose the candidate responds correctly, then the CAT algorithm estimates an ability greater than 0, but places a lot of uncertainty around the estimate because there's only been one question. On the graph, we might show this as a dot around 0.5 to mark our estimate, but a very wide interval to acknowledge the uncertainty of the estimate.

Now the key feature of CAT is what happens next. Instead of getting a second question at random, the computer now selects a question right around the test taker's ability estimate. If the candidate answers correctly again, our estimate of the candidate's ability goes up even more since they just got an even harder question right.