

PCOL 260 FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

What are the tests like?

A regular, hour-long exam consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. A majority of these are case-based questions that require you to analyze a case-based scenario and apply your knowledge to solve a problem. These case-based analytical questions are different from the rote memorization questions you have probably experienced in other questions.

For example, let's look at these two kinds of questions based on some information in your Online Lecture Notes about the diuretic drug, furosemide (Lasix®):

- Furosemide works by inhibiting sodium and potassium reuptake in the loop of Henle in the nephrons of the kidney
- Furosemide can cause hypokalemia (low blood potassium level) as a side effect.
- Oranges and bananas are foods that high in potassium. Adequate potassium intake can prevent hypokalemia caused by diuretics.

Below is a rote memorization question based on this information:

Which of the following is a common side effect of furosemide (Lasix®)?

- a. Hypertrichosis
- b. Bronchoconstriction
- c. Elevated blood pressure
- d. Hypokalemia

The correct answer is d.

This is an analytical, case-based question, based on this information:

M.P. is a 62 year-old man who has been given a new prescription for a diuretic drug that acts in the loop of Henle. What patient counseling information regarding the use of this medication should be given to M.P.?

- a. Avoid foods that are high in saturated fat
- b. Eat plenty of oranges and bananas
- c. If you experience feelings of depression or agitation, call your doctor
- d. Use a sunscreen if you go outside; avoid strong sun

The correct answer is b. You can see that this question requires you to recognize the drug by its mechanism of action, then remember what one of its side effects is and understand how to prevent it.

There are several reasons for using case-based, analytical questions as opposed to rote memorization "spit back the fact" questions:

- In the real world, you will need to apply your pharmacology information to patients' problems. Patients and clients generally won't to ask you to spit back information you have memorized!
- The board and certification exams of most fields (e.g. NCLEX, NBDHE, etc.) are using analytical, case-based questions. It's good to get practice with this style of testing during your courses.

- Application-based questions are more difficult to cheat on. In an online course, this is a real issue because it is tempting to go to one's notes to look up information. In order to correctly answer analytical, case-based questions, the person needs to understand the information, not just spit back a fact they looked up in their notes. Application-based questions make the class more fair for everyone.

Is the information from the question sets on the tests?

No. The question sets are specialized for your field of study and refer to information that is in your textbook. The tests only refer to information that is in the Online Lecture Notes that are available to everyone. *Please be aware that the case-based questions can use different health care professionals in the scenarios.* For example, if your Online Lecture Notes state that a drug can cause dry mouth, the case-based question might involve a dental hygienist or dentist. If a drug is used in a hospital setting, the question might involve a nurse or physician. Drug counseling questions may involve a pharmacist. Please understand that all test questions do come directly from your Online Lecture Notes, even though a specific health care professional can appear in the scenario!

How should I study for the tests?

1. Treat this class like you would a classroom-based course. Allocate time to study on a regular basis, and give it as much time as you would for a regular 3-credit course (lecture time, study time, and homework time). Do not get behind – there is too much information to cram!
2. I recommend using the study guides in order to get the most of your study time. Study guides can be downloaded from the Schedule link, and are found directly before each exam. Study guides tell you what to focus on and help you to compare and contrast different classes of drugs. In a sense, they take the place of the instructor standing in front of the class and telling you “be sure you understand this...” I suggest skimming through the study guide for each topic before reading the online lecture notes, then reading the online lecture notes for the topic, then, going back and re-reading the online lecture notes for that topic while filling in the study guide. Once you have a filled-in study guide, you can use it as a quick study reference to reinforce what you have learned. Go back to the online lecture notes periodically, since the study guide is just an abbreviated form of the information you must know.
3. Don't study by just reading the notes or your study guide over and over; instead, practice using the information while you study. Answer the quick questions in the notes *on your own* before you click to see the correct answer. You can also think up potential application problems and exam questions for the information you are studying. For example, if you are reading about how volatile agents for general anesthesia can cause side effects of decreased blood pressure and slowed respiration rate, you could turn that information into a question such as, "A 16 year-old boy is undergoing general anesthesia. His blood pressure and respiration rate drop. What anesthetic agent is likely to have caused this problem? "

4. Try to put the information in context of something you know. If you know a person who is taking a certain drug or has a certain condition, or if you have encountered a certain drug class in a clinical rotation, try to link together, in your mind, the new class information with what you already know. Here are some examples:

"I know that Grandpa takes Lasix® and I've noticed he always eats a lot of bananas. In class I learned that Lasix® causes hypokalemia, and bananas are a good source of potassium - this is why Grandpa eats them."

"When I was in my intro to clinical nursing class, I saw a person undergoing general anesthesia. She was attached to a blood pressure monitor. Now I know that one of the reasons they do this is because the volatile agents for general anesthesia can lower the blood pressure."
5. If you have trouble keeping information straight in your mind, try to make up a rhyme or think of some kind of visual clue to remember it.
6. Be sure you do the sample questions that are available for each exam. The link to these questions found directly before the exam in the Schedule.
7. If you are confused about something, email me and ask. I am glad to help!

Do you have any helpful hints or strategies for taking the tests?

1. *Pace yourself.* A regular exam contains 50 questions and you have 60 minutes to take it, giving you 1 minute + 12 seconds per question. Since you are online, it will generally take between 1 - 12 seconds for the next question to load (depending on the speed of your connection). Since the questions vary in their length and difficulty, you can't really say, "I'm only going to take 1 minute on each question." But you can pace yourself over a longer interval: every 12 minutes, you should have 10 questions completed. If you have taken more than 2 minutes on a question and feel like you are getting nowhere, answer it as best you can, mark it and go on to the next question. Go back at the end if you have time.
2. For those long questions where there's a lot of information, *jot down the important points as you read*, for example "woman, diabetes & hypertension, on Zestril & Glucophage. Pregnancy issues - why?" Then look back at the notes you just took on the question (rather than trying to re-read the question and sort it all out again), think of the answer, jot it down, and look for the answer on the screen that most closely matches your answer.
3. Some students find the multiple choice questions confusing because they read through the answers and they all seem like they could be right, or they forget what the question was when reading through the answers. In this case, I suggest that you *read through the question while keeping the answers covered up. Then, think of your own answer and jot it down. Finally, look at the answers on the screen and pick the one that most closely matches your own answer.*

Do I need to click “Save” after I answer each question before going on to the next question?

Absolutely not. Clicking the “Next” button saves your answer then brings up the next question. Clicking “Save” then “Next” slows things down, especially for people using modems. Please don’t do this – it wastes valuable test-taking time and is not necessary.

Do the exams vary with respect to content or difficulty?

The first exam is much different than the rest of the exams. It covers mainly pharmacology concepts and does not include many drug names, mechanisms of action, and side effects to learn. In addition, it covers autonomic physiology background information that may be familiar to those of you who have taken physiology. If you find the first exam to be very easy, don’t slack off for the next exam! All of the other exams contain lots of specific drug-related information and most students consider them to be much more challenging.

What do I do if my computer crashes (or the power goes out or the internet goes down or my 3 year-old spills juice into my laptop) during an exam?

The first thing you need to do is ***call your instructor right away!!*** (home = 304-296-1164, cell = 304-685-5181). I will make every effort to fix the problem remotely or give you advice on how to fix the problem. If that is not possible and you lose a lot of time, there are other options. Because SOLE records every keystroke and mouse click you make, I can get verification of your computer problems from the SOLE Support people the next day. *If they indicate to me that you had a verifiable computer issue*, I can give you a make-up exam containing the questions you never got to, in the amount of time you lost. I will not be able to let you go back and change the answers on the questions you have already seen (that would not be fair, since you had extra time to think about them). So – I advise students to always answer every question on the test before going on. Use the “mark” function to mark the ones you want to go back to, but don’t leave any blanks because you won’t be able to go back to them on a makeup exam.

How can I see what I got right and wrong on a test?

After all of the students have taken a test (including those who needed alternate times), the test will be “opened up” so that students can see their answers. To see your answers, click the Exams link, then click on your score for the exam. If clicking on your score doesn’t bring up your exam results, it hasn’t been opened up yet. Please note that the correct answers are not shown on the exam. You should look these up yourself (it’s a learning experience) – and, if you have any uncertainty after you have tried, ask your instructor about specific questions.

What do I do if I need to reschedule a test?

Contact your instructor! I will reschedule tests and give extensions for question sets in cases of illness, family emergency, work or school conflicts, and significant life events (e.g. weddings, family reunions, child's school play). If you have an event the day that a question set is due, please submit it in advance, don't ask for an extension.

How is my final grade calculated?

Your final grade is calculated as a percentage grade as follows:

$$\text{Total points earned by you on all assignments} \div \text{Total points possible}$$

More information on the grading scale is in the syllabus. You can see how you are doing by looking at the Gradebook on the course web site.

Is there any way I can get extra credit?

There are 6 bonus points available to the entire class for completing the startup survey, getting a 90% or higher on the "About this course" quiz, and completing the course evaluation at the end of the semester. These 6 bonus points are added onto your point total (that is, the total points earned by you on all of your assignments) – they are NOT percentage points added onto your final percentage grade. Other than that, there is no extra credit available. Providing individuals with special extra credit assignments would be unfair to the rest of the class.

I am having trouble getting through the exams during the 1 hour of time we are given. Can I get extra time on the exams?

The only way that I am allowed to give extra time on exams is when the student has made arrangements with the WVU Office of Disability Services (for example, the student has a learning disability and needs extra time). The Office of Disability Services can be reached at (304) 293-6700).

If you are having trouble completing the exams because it is taking a long time for the test questions to show up on your screen, it could be that your computer or Internet connection is too slow. With the exception of the optional audio lectures, this course is designed to be able to be taken by students using modems, but sometimes individuals' Internet connections or computers are slower than expected due to problems with phone lines, viruses, or spyware. In this case, try taking the exams from a computer that has fast Internet access (e.g. DSL, cable modem, etc.). Many public libraries' computers have fast Internet access.