

Doubtless, you've heard the expression, 'there's more than one way to skin a cat'. Preparing for an exam as important as anesthesia boards is a lot like skinning a cat-- there are a thousand different ways to do it and none of them sound like fun. I try to follow up with students after they complete their board exam to find out what resources they used to study, which ones were the most helpful and which ones were the more of a waste of time. By doing that, I can focus my attention on creating study materials based on the resources that have the highest yield.

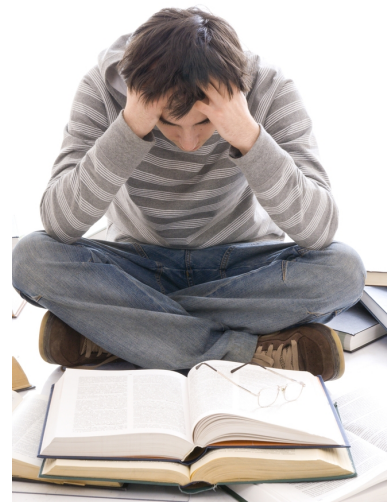
What appears below is a summary of only one study approach, but one that seems to be effective at approaching the exam from multiple angles, is well organized, and can be customized for the amount of time you have to prepare. It is based on the study habits and most commonly available study materials as reported by students over the past 5 years.

1. Before beginning the exam preparation process, take a single 100 question exam simulation using the PACES program. The reason for doing this is to acquaint you with the level of detail you must understand BEFORE you begin studying. You will also begin to recognize information in the text as potential questions while you are studying. Don't concern yourself with how well you perform on this exam. The objective is not to pass yet, but to introduce yourself to the exam.

2. Begin reading *Clinical Anesthesiology* by Morgan, Mikhail, and Murray. This is an easy to read resource and will serve as your study outline. Start with Chapter 1 and go straight through the end. Skipping chapters tends to result in 'preparation entropy' and your studies quickly fall into disarray.

3. Although *Clinical Anesthesiology* is a solid overview, easy-to-read, and the perfect study outline, it does not cover most topics in enough detail to answer the higher level of difficulty questions on your exam. As you come across a disease process, read about it in more detail in *Anesthesia & Co-Existing Diseases* by Stoelting. This reference will provide much more detail about the disease process and expand your understanding of it significantly.

4. A large portion of the Advanced Principles of Anesthesia portion of your exam tests your knowledge of surgical procedures. When you encounter a surgical procedure in *Clinical Anesthesiology*, find that procedure in the *Anesthesiologist's Guide to Surgical Procedures* by Jaffe. This reference will explain the procedure in great detail and point out significant anesthesia-specific considerations that may appear on your exam.



*A well-organized approach to preparing for the exam will reduce your stress levels considerably.*

5. Find the corresponding chapter in *Nurse Anesthesia* by Nagelhout and carefully review all of the diagrams and images. I believe this text to be the most valuable resource for image-based questions.

6. After reading a chapter in *Clinical Anesthesiology* and explored pathophysiologies and surgical procedures in greater detail in *Anesthesia & Co-Existing Diseases* and the *Anesthesiologist's Guide to Surgical Procedures*, respectively, it is time to see if you have retained enough information to answer board questions correctly. Start up the PACES program and under Exam Format, select Exam by Specific Topic (or create a Custom Exam to cover multiple topics), then scroll to the topic that most closely matches the title of the chapter you were reading. Try answering all of the questions under that topic and see how you feel. If you are not making a passing score, read further using the references associated with each question or, if there are articles and worksheets associated with that particular question in PACES, study those until you understand the material.

7. If you are still having trouble with a particular section, the read the corresponding chapter of *Nurse Anesthesia* in detail.

8. Repeat this process for each chapter. Occasionally, take a complete exam in the PACES program, but be sure to save at least two full exams to take in complete simulation mode during your last week of study. No matter how well you have studied, the exam becomes one of psychological endurance as much as one of intellectual prowess. Multiple simulations will help prepare you to maintain your focus while facing complex questions under stressful conditions.