



ESSENTIALS

COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK



American Association
of Colleges of Nursing

The Voice of Academic Nursing

Endorsed by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, The Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education (2021) delineates the competencies that encompass all levels of professional nursing practice. The competencies include entry-level professional nursing education (baccalaureate, RN-BSN, and generic or second-degree master's education) and advanced-level nursing education (all graduate nursing programs preparing nurses for an advanced specialty or advanced nursing practice role), including post-entry level master's and Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) programs. Sub-competencies, which are defined as the skills and behaviors required to demonstrate a particular competency, are identified for each competency at the entry- and advanced-levels of education and practice. Learner attainment of competency at each level is documented by demonstration and observation of the sub-competencies. To evaluate learning, a common understanding is needed by both the assessor and the learner of the specific behaviors and actions that must be demonstrated for each of the sub-competencies.

ACHIEVING PROFESSIONAL NURSING COMPETENCY



All students embark on an evolving learning journey—from developing foundational knowledge to strengthening skills and achieving competency. Entry-level program graduates must be able to demonstrate Level 1 sub-competencies. Advanced-level program graduates must be able to demonstrate Level 2 sub-competencies, which build on Level 1 sub-competencies.

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW


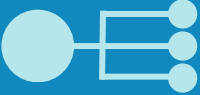


Under this Assessment Framework, there are two levels of competence: Level One (entry-level nursing education) and Level Two (advanced-level nursing education). Since the behaviors expected of a nurse at these two levels differ, nurses are designated as competent for where they are in their educational trajectory – Level One or Level Two. Progression indicators (also known as behavioral performance indicators) are descriptive behaviors that show progression to competency and attainment of each sub-competency. Progression indicators describe specific behaviors that the assessor would expect to observe and provide markers of sub-competency development along the path from developing competency to competent. For ease and efficiency of evaluation by the assessor and to inform the learner regarding their progress, these progression indicators must be identified and assessed at key points along the competency development continuum.

Multiple and frequent assessment opportunities to demonstrate progression to competence for each of the sub-competencies must be developed by nursing programs and integrated across the curriculum. Using the progression indicators, feedback is provided to the learner regarding their progress from developing competency to competent for each of the sub-competencies.

With the transition to the 2021 *Essentials* and competency-based education driven by the need to prepare nurses ready to practice in evolving healthcare systems, ongoing engagement by academic and practice leaders is critical. Nursing practice scenarios, which include clusters of related competencies and sub-competencies, should be used to support learning as well as to assess the achievement of competencies. These scenarios should be designed by academic and practice partners to ensure relevancy across clinical settings and to ensure the preparation of practice-ready nurses.

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

In summary, the *Essentials* Competency Assessment Framework includes four components which together create a platform for assessing student learning and readiness for professional nursing practice.

<p>Competencies</p> 	<p>For professional nursing practice which include knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that cross all professional nursing practice.</p>
<p>Sub-Competencies</p> 	<p>Encompass the behaviors or behavioral representations of an important aspect of a competency. Learner attainment of competency at the entry- or advanced-level is documented by demonstration and observation of the sub-competencies.</p>
<p>Progression Indicators</p> 	<p>Defined as descriptive behaviors that show progression to competency and attainment of each sub-competency. Progression indicators describe specific behaviors that an assessor would expect to observe and provide markers of sub-competency development along the trajectory from developing competency to competent.</p>
<p>Nursing Practice Scenarios</p> 	<p>Learning experiences which include clusters of related competencies and sub-competencies for both formative and summative assessment of competency achievement.</p>

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THE ESSENTIALS

For more tools related to the *AACN Essentials*, strategies for engaging practice partners, and approaches to moving to CBE, visit:

www.aacnnursing.org/essentials