

The Critical Thinking Report

By Claire Corter

IMPORTANT: As an added bonus for downloading this report, you will receive additional HESI study tips shortly...

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Your HESI Exit Exam - Foundational Understanding -

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Your Best Grade was created to help students prepare themselves for the HESI the “right” way. It is my mission to help every student know what to expect, prepare for and succeed on the HESI.

As you’re probably aware, the HESI Exit Exam has evolved. As of 2024, there is a Next Generation HESI Exit Exam, a Legacy HESI Exit Exam, a HESI CAT Exit Exam, in addition to many Specialty Subject exams and even an A2 Entrance Exam.

The good news? We cover all these exams! (However, if you need to prepare for the pre-nursing A2 Entrance Exam, you have signed up for the wrong email series as I will be covering the HESI Exit here. No worries - just visit www.yourbestgrade.com/a2).

Assuming you need to take the HESI Exit, or a HESI Specialty Subject exam, continue reading...

All HESI exams currently exist in both a Next Generation and Legacy version.

Your school decides which version of the HESI exam they administer. It’s important that you know which version you’ll be expected to take, so you can properly prepare.

What’s the difference?

HESI Exam Name	# Legacy test items	# NextGen test items	# pilot items	Total Items
RN Exit Legacy	150	0	10	160
PN Exit Legacy	100	0	10	110
RN / PN Exit Next Generation	100	28	2	130
RN / PN Specialty Subject Legacy	50	0	5	55
RN / PN Specialty Subject Next Gen format 1 (e.g. Med Surg, Maternity and Pharmacology)	42	16	2	60
RN / PN Specialty Subject Next Gen format 2 (e.g. Fundamentals, Nutrition, and Management)	46	6	8	60

As you can see in the summary above, each HESI exam contains a different number of graded Legacy, graded Next Generation, and ungraded pilot (“beta testing”) questions.

If you need to take a Legacy HESI exam, you will only face Legacy-type questions. What are they?

The legacy HESI exams consist primarily of multiple choice (MC) questions. Most questions have 4 answers, of which only one is correct. Others have 5, with multiple answers being correct. Some MC questions come with supplements. Those questions will present an exhibit in your HESI testing window where you can, for example, see client prescriptions, diagnostics, and flow sheets. You will also face “alternate test items” such as calculation, sequence (“ranking”), and picture questions. *(Note that as of 2024, the HESI is phasing out all video and audio questions.)*

The legacy questions can be categorized into six specific formats:

- “Multiple choice” items with 4 answers and only 1 correct answer;
- “Multiple response” items with 5 or more answers, and multiple correct answers. These are also known as “Select All That Apply” questions;
- “Hot spot” items that ask to identify one or more areas on a picture or graphic. For example, you may be presented with a picture of a pregnant woman and a specific fetal positioning, followed by the question “where should the nurse place an external fetal heart transducer?” You will need to click on approximately the right area;
- “Fill-in-the-blank” items that require you to type in an actual number in a blank answer box, based on your calculation. (Note that the exam calculator - if enabled at your school - is a very basic calculator, allowing you to multiply, divide, add, and subtract. That’s it. There are no functions such as MC, MR, MS, or M+)
- “Chart/exhibit” format that asks that the chart be read prior to answering the question; and
- “Ranking” items that ask you to sequence certain procedures. For example, you may be presented with a scenario in which a nurse prepares to change the primary IV tubing (for a client receiving a continuous infusion of normal saline) by hanging a new bag of normal saline. You will need to “drag and drop” the associated actions for this procedure into the correct sequence.

Over the years, the Legacy HESI tests (both RN and PN) have changed in that over 20% of the HESI Legacy test items are now “alternate formats”. Nonetheless, the majority (over 70%) of questions are still basic multiple choice items. As for the remaining 30%, you’ll find that the majority of alternate format questions are “Select All That Apply” (approx. 10-15%), followed by “Calculation” (approx. 3-5%). You can usually count the number of hot spot and ranking items on one hand.

If you need to take a Next Generation HESI exam, you will face both Legacy and Next Generation questions. What are Next Generation questions?

There are 3 types of Next Generation questions.

The first type is an “NGN case study.”

This is actually not a single question but a series of subsequent questions. An unfolding case study consists of 6 linked questions that refer to one unfolding clinical scenario. Throughout the case, more and more information becomes available about the client’s condition and response to interventions.

An unfolding case study follows a client throughout their hospitalization or throughout multiple visits in the outpatient setting. This question format is presented as a client chart, and new information is constantly added as it becomes available (e.g., labs, vital signs, diagnostic tests). In addition to introducing a completely new question format with the NGN case study, the associated question styles, such as Drop down rationale, Matrix multiple response, and Drag and Drop (to name a few), are also brand new.

The case studies are designed to be less didactic (i.e., we often hear the complaint “this scenario would only occur in the HESI or NCLEX world...”) and more representative of real-life situations. They are specifically designed to assess your clinical judgment skills. Note that once you’ve answered a question, you cannot click back to an earlier question in the case study.

In contrast, both the second and third type of NGN questions are “standalone” (single) questions. These are called “Bowtie” and “Trend.”

Here's an example of what a bowtie question can look like:

Question 1

The nurse in the outpatient health clinic is seeing a 68-year-old female client in follow-up.

Patient Data

History and Physical **Laboratory results**

CBC

- White blood cell count - 7,500 mm³ (7.5x10⁹/L)
- Hemoglobin - 11 g/dL (110mmol/L)
- Platelets - 150,000 mm³ (150 x10⁹/L)

CMF

- Sodium - 130 mEq/L (130 mmol/L)
- Potassium - 3.8 mEq/L (3.8 mmol/L)
- Magnesium - 1.7 mEq/L (0.85 mmol/L)
- Chloride - 85 mEq/L (85 mmol/L)
- Bicarbonate - 25 mEq/L (25 mmol/L)
- Calcium: 9.5 mg/dL (2.37 mmol/L)
- Glucose - 75 mg/dL (4.1 mmol/L)
- Blood Urea Nitrogen - 6 mg/dL (2.14 mmol/L)
- Creatinine - 1.2 mg/dL (106.1 μmol/L)

TSH - normal

Plasma Osmolality - 240 mOsm/kg (240 mmol/kg) - (ref range 275 - 295 mOsm/kg (275 - 295 mmol/kg))

The physician has decided to admit the client for management of their condition. The nurse is reviewing the client's assessment data to prepare the client's plan of care.

Complete the diagram by dragging from the choices below to specify what condition the client is most likely experiencing, 2 actions the nurse should take to address that condition, and 2 parameters the nurse should monitor to assess the client's disease progression.

Diagram components:

- Actions to take (empty)
- Potential Condition (empty)
- Parameters to Monitor (empty)

Available choices:

- Actions to take: Collect blood and urine cultures, Implement fluid restriction, Request an order for [unclear]
- Potential Condition: Brain metastasis, Delirium, Syndrome of inappropriate ADH secretion
- Parameters to Monitor: Neurological status, Temperature, Respiratory status, Serum electrolytes

Next

Similar to unfolding case studies, Bowtie and Trend items are based on a clinical scenario, and often contain Nurses' Notes, Labs, Vital Signs, and other clinical information. In contrast to an unfolding case study, all information is presented "at once," requiring you to piece all information together to come to a diagnosis and treatment plan.

Like Unfolding Case Studies, Trend items can use a variety of the new NGN question styles (i.e., feature an extended multiple response list of answers, require answers to be dragged and dropped, require answers to be selected from a dropdown list, require answers to be highlighted in text, require answers to be chosen on a matrix grid, and more). Bowtie items always only use the characteristic Bowtie layout.

Another major change about the Next Generation questions is that, unlike Legacy questions, they allow for partial credit scoring.

This is a significant change because it means you can now get points even if you answer only some parts of the question correctly. That's good news, as it gives you a better chance of earning points for your responses. However, some items, like the Next Gen extended multiple-response questions, will have points subtracted for incorrect answers.

This may sound overwhelming. And, at first glance, the questions may look very complicated (like the screenshot of the bowtie question on the previous page). But don't worry! At the end of the day, the new Next Generation format really isn't something that should give you anxiety. All you need to do is review the client's situation and try to create the best possible client outcome.

Essentially, Next Generation questions evaluate your ability to apply your nursing knowledge in real-world scenarios and make safe and effective clinical decisions.

Of course, it's good to get familiar with the question formats in advance of your exam, so you are familiar with the different layouts, and what is asked of you. This is one of many reasons why taking plenty of (realistic) practice questions at yourbestgrade.com will really help you, so that none of this will be new to you. All possible question formats will feel very familiar to you when taking your actual exam!

The Next Generation HESI exams launched in April 2023 and are, therefore, relatively new. As you saw in the table on page 2 of this report, every Next Generation HESI Exit Exam (RN and PN) has 28 graded Next Generation test items. (Note that 1 unfolding case study counts as 6 Next Gen items. Also, note that your actual exam may feature 1 or 2 extra NG items because the exam also has 2 pilot questions that can be in either Next Gen or Legacy format.)

As the Next Generation HESI Exit has 130 questions in total, the majority of questions (78% to be exact, or 100 out of 128 graded test items) are "Legacy-style" questions. And, as we learned in the previous section, most Legacy-style questions (over 70%) are "basic" multiple choice.

This means that even on the Next Generation HESI Exit, you can expect more than half of your exam (> 55%) to be in "basic" multiple choice format. (You can expect to count the combined number of hot spot and ranking items on one hand and the number of calculation items on one to two hands.)

Why am I telling you all of this?

Remember: your journey to nursing success is unique, and understanding the exam is your first milestone.

No matter, if you take the Next Generation or Legacy HESI Exit Exam, a large part, will continue to be in the traditional legacy question format, including multiple choice and select-all-that-apply questions.

Knowing this will help you balance your preparation between the new and traditional formats.

Keep in mind, when I say "basic" multiple choice, I mean that the question format is "basic." As you may have heard from past students, the actual questions are anything but!

"Basic" multiple choice questions on the HESI are not easy. And answering them correctly requires real preparation.

The new 2024 HESI exams place a significant focus on clinical judgment, which is a shift from the previous focus on knowledge retention.

Therefore, it's important to develop strong clinical judgment and critical thinking skills, not just memorize content.

And this is exactly why the Your Best Grade HESI Insider program was created.

How Critical Thinking Items On The HESI Exit Are Developed

Now that we've discussed the basics of the HESI exam, I want to show you an example of how critical thinking test items are created.

I'll show you how a question focused on knowledge retention slowly transforms into a question testing clinical judgment, and, eventually, advanced critical thinking skills.

You'll see how, over time, the question changes formats and (temporarily) becomes a "hotspot" test question. You'll also see why, in the end, it reverts back into a "basic" multiple choice item.

So, let's begin. I want to "open the curtain" and show how such "tricky test questions" are developed. I want to show you a peek from the other side, to allow you to gain a better understanding of these test items.

To start, the authors of the book *Critical Thinking and Test Item Writing* list the four criteria for writing critical thinking test items that are applied to both NCLEX and HESI test items. These include:

- The question requires a rationale;
- The material tested is at or above the application level;
- The question requires multiple levels of logical thinking; and
- The question requires a high ability to discriminate and to choose from several possible alternatives.

These criteria are used to create and edit all HESI test items.

Now, let's look at the following example. How does this question evolve to become a HESI Exit-style question?

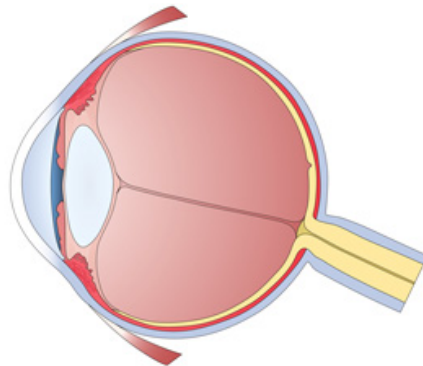
The test item format may begin as a traditional single response multiple-choice format as seen below. At this point, this question doesn't require critical thinking, just knowledge. For example:

Which area of the eye should the nurse examine to assess the client for increased intracranial pressure?

- A. Pupil.
- B. Optic nerve.
- C. Retina.
- D. Fovea centralis.

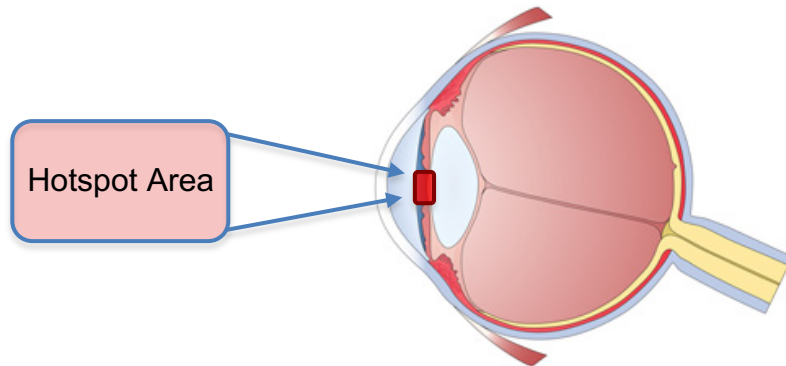
In the next step, you'll see the question is converted from a straightforward multiple choice item into a "hot spot" format, meaning you will now have an unlimited amount of spots to choose from. You can move your mouse over the picture, and when you press your mouse button, you better be pressing somewhere within the "hot spot" zone. The question is now more difficult, but still doesn't require critical thinking. Simple knowledge of the eye anatomy will get you to the correct location.

Which area of the eyes does the nurse assess to examine for increased intracranial pressure? (Place the cursor on the correct location on the diagram of the eye)



This question now undergoes an edit to create a **critical thinking** test item:

The nurse is concerned about a client who is vomiting following a fall and hard blow to the head. It is most important for the nurse to assess the client's eyes at what location? (Place the cursor on the correct location on the diagram of the eye)



Rationale: Critical thinking is now needed to solve the question as no diagnosis is provided. The nurse should recognize that a client with vomiting following a fall and blow to the head is at risk for increased intracranial pressure (ICP). To assess for ICP, the nurse should use a penlight to compare both pupils for size, shape, movement and reactivity. If the oculomotor nerve (CN III) is compressed due to ICP, the pupil on the affected side will become larger until it fully dilates. If ICP continues to increase, both pupils will dilate. The normal pupillary reaction in the absence of ICP is a quick constriction when the light is shone directly into the eye.

This “hot spot” question requires the student to use critical thinking and meets the four criteria listed before.

Notice how this question is already fundamentally different from the first and second questions.

Finally, the question is polished to create an **even better critical thinking** question for the test.

A client presents to the emergency department following a fall and blow to the head. Per EMR (emergency medical services) sign out, the client vomited twice during transport. The client is AAO x 3, has no obvious injuries besides a swollen and visibly twisted left ankle, and is responding to verbal instructions. RR 16,

SpO2 95% on room air, P 85, BP 130/70. What action should the nurse implement next?

- A. Gather supplies to place 2 large bore IVs.
- B. Obtain a pen light.
- C. Collect equipment for continuous pulse oximetry and cardiac monitoring.
- D. Obtain an order for an X-ray of the left ankle.

Correct answer: B

As you can see, again, no diagnosis is mentioned in the stem. Additionally, all listed actions are relevant to a client with suspected trauma. The question now tests the nurse's ability to **prioritize** appropriate actions.

Based on the provided scenario, the correct action for the nurse to implement next is:

B. Obtain a pen light. Obtaining a pen light is essential for assessing pupillary light reflexes, which is critical after a head injury. The client's report of vomiting and a fall with a blow to the head raises concerns about a potential traumatic brain injury (TBI) or increased intracranial pressure (ICP). Assessing the pupillary response to light can provide valuable information about neurological function and help identify the need for urgent neurological evaluation.

Rationales for incorrect choices:

A. Gathering supplies to place 2 large bore IVs might be necessary for fluid resuscitation or administration of medications, but it is not the most immediate action as the client is hemodynamically stable. The primary concern following a head injury is assessing for signs of TBI or increased ICP.

C. Collecting equipment for continuous pulse oximetry and cardiac monitoring is important for ongoing assessment following trauma, but it does not directly address the immediate need to assess the client for neurological injuries following a head injury. Neurological assessment using a pen light to check pupillary response is more directly relevant.

D. Obtaining an order for an X-ray of the ankle is necessary to assess the extent of the ankle injury, but it is not the priority in the context of a head injury. The initial focus should be on assessing and stabilizing potentially life-threatening conditions, such as a TBI, before addressing orthopedic injuries.

In summary, after a head injury, especially with symptoms like vomiting, which could indicate increased intracranial pressure, the nurse's immediate action should focus on a rapid neurological assessment, starting with the use of a pen light to assess pupillary

responses. This action is crucial for identifying signs of neurological compromise that require urgent attention.

And that's how it's done.

Now that you've received an "insider" look into how HESI Exit-style questions are created, it's time to take some realistic practice tests and see how you do. Then, from there, we'll work on a plan to improve your weak spots and get you HESI Exit ready in no time.

If you're reading this report the same day I sent it to you, then look out for more emails from me later this week (if you're reading this report sometime after I sent it, you may have already received these emails!).

(If you have no clue what I'm talking about and received this PDF from a friend, sign up for my free HESI Study tips mailing list at <http://www.yourbestgrade.com/hesi/>).

Later this week, I'll email a link to a free HESI practice test that includes both Legacy and Next Generation questions, to test your current knowledge. Based on your answers, I'll be writing a special report on the 5 or 6 most difficult questions from that exam and email it to you.

Also, to learn more about both Next Generation and Legacy questions, including alternate format questions, and practice answering them in a true HESI Exit Exam format (so you'll be prepared *the right way*), check out my premium HESI Exit prep program (containing literally everything you need to know to pass) at www.YourBestGrade.com/hesi/letter

I want you to know that if you like this report, I got a lot more really good stuff for you that's going to help you out even more in my newly updated product called HESI Study Insider. It's all about how to pass your HESI Exit Exam and I want you to know that this product is backed by a 100% guarantee. That's right, I am so confident that it will help you succeed on your exam (*based on our track record of helping students succeed since 2010!*), I insist that you try it out at my own risk.

You can find out more about it at www.YourBestGrade.com/hesi/letter

To passing your HESI Exam,
Claire Corter