

# Fifty Four Study Tips for the PANCE and PANRE

## Preparation and Organization

This first section is all about having a plan. Having a plan will dramatically reduce your overall stress. Envision how confident you will be the day of the test once you complete your plan.

1. **Start today!** Don't procrastinate it only adds to your stress.
2. **Give yourself plenty of time to prepare.** A key mindset at [physician assistant exam review](#) is slow and consistent progress. I started about one year before I plan on taking my exam. I don't think cramming is good for anything. With more and more demands on your time I don't even know if cramming for hours on the weekends is possible.
3. **Begin with the end in mind.** This is a Stephen Covey principle that you should use in creating your plan. When you begin to study for your exam understand your goals, envision what you want to accomplish and work backwards from there. In this case your main goal is to review and understand a certain amount of information in a specific time period.
4. **Set an "I'm done studying" date.** A major source of stress when preparing for the PANCE or PANRE is the question "When am I done?" You can determine this pretty easily. Here is an example. There are thirteen organ system topics on the exam. You estimate that you can complete one a month without interfering too much with your everyday life. Therefore, you will need thirteen months to get ready. Give yourself a deadline so that you know how much time you have to get through the material. Set a date to be done and then stop worrying about it.

5. **Set up a master study schedule.** Your master schedule will list each topic by the month in which it will be completed. As well as any review courses you plan on taking.
6. **Create a monthly schedule.** Create a study schedule and stick to it! Every Monday and Wednesday I will study from 8-10pm. Include the specific days you plan to complete the different subtopics.
7. **If at all possible study at the same time of day each session.** This creates a routine for you and your brain to get into study mode as fast as possible.
8. **Study consistently.** Like so many things in life, it is much better to do one hour three times a week than an six hours every other week.
9. **Decide how long to spend on each topic.** [Parkinson's law](#) states that work will expand to fit the allotted time. Just like with the master schedule you should predetermine exactly how long to take with each topic. Of course, this will have to be a little flexible, but you don't want to spend six months on cardiology because you're still not comfortable. You need to draw a line in the sand and move on.
10. **Know what to study.** Here is a link to the [NCCPA organ system blueprint](#)
11. **Find a place to study.** It is up to you to decide what works best for you: home, library, music, silence etc. The key here is to be consistent. The more often you study in the same place the easier it will be. Here is a great article on [choosing a study space](#).
12. **Keep a journal.** Write down things you are having trouble with. This way you can easily review them later. Write down scores on practice exams. Keep mnemonics and things you can review one last time the week before the exam.
13. **Create a list of everything you need to study and keep it all in one place.** Pens, pencils, review books, Clif bar, blank paper, print outs from [physician assistant exam review](#) ;) If your study location is away from home, keep these items in a bag so you don't have assemble them each time. If it is at home, keep your study items together in a drawer for easy and quick access.

14. **Stick to your schedule but be flexible.** Understand that things will come up and you will not always be able to keep on your schedule. Initially it will be difficult for you to tell how long each topic will take you to review. You will have to adjust your schedule as you go, but be sure you continue to use it!

## **Sitting Down to Study**

As you go through this section focus is the key term. You can accomplish in twenty minutes of focused time what you could not get through in two hours of scattered studying.

15. **Breathe for five minutes before you begin.** Set a timer and clear your mind for five minutes before you begin each session. Spending an hour considering how to keep your boss from making you stay late three days a week isn't helpful right now. Thinking about how your nursing staff is really nice, but don't actually help you with anything will make your session useless. You need to be extremely focused.
16. **Decide at the beginning how long this particular study session will be.**  
Remember [Parkinson's law](#).
17. **Turn off your cell phone.** You need to be totally focused.
18. **Turn off facebook.** You need to be totally focused.
19. **Turn off email.** You need to be totally focused.
20. **Turn off twitter.** You need to be totally focused.
21. **Plan time for breaks.** Your brain needs to rest. I have trouble going for more than twenty minutes without a break. I usually set a timer for 20 or 25 minutes. When it goes off I get up and at least walk once around the room.

22. **Plan ahead how long your breaks will be.** If I work for twenty five minutes I will set a timer for five minutes for my break.
23. **Use quizzes and tests.** Anything to facilitate active learning. You will retain more.
24. **Try [thepalife.com](http://thepalife.com) practice exams.** Stephen Pasquini has put together some very helpful practice exams and they're free. Check them out at the link provided.
25. **Make lists of associated things.** Ideas and terms on their own are easily forgotten. Your brain does a much better job remembering groups of things.
26. **Create flashcards.** The act of distilling information is a very helpful study technique.
27. **Use flashcards.** Now that you have them, use the flashcards you created to review with.
28. **Use [Flash card machine](#).** This is a place where people post the flashcards they have made, and you can use them to study. Overall they are OK. Some sets are better than others. If you use them as a review of information you already have a good handle on you will be fine.
29. **Use [Flash card exchange](#).** This is just like flash card machine, but maybe a little better.
30. **Create your own test questions.** Creating questions gets you thinking about how things will be presented on the test. You will also start to see patterns in how questions are asked.
31. **Create lectures.** Teaching others is a great way to learn. You don't necessarily have to present the lectures. Just the act of putting them together will change how your mind works on the material.
32. **Create videos.** You don't have to share them, but if you like producing video this is a great way to prove to yourself that you know the material. Create a video that could teach someone else.

33. **Create a podcast :) Variations on a theme.** If you can teach others it really changes the way you learn the material. I make sure I really know the topic before I hit the record button.
34. **Draw pictures!!!** Your brain has a terrible time remembering abstract ideas and terms. It is really good at remembering what it sees. Make abstract thoughts into pictures. Make diagrams of terms your having a hard time with. Draw out home made pictures of different bacteria. In PA school we had study rooms where all of the walls in these small rooms were whiteboards. We would draw and draw and make list after list on these boards. I could usually look over the pictures and lists in my head during an exam.
35. **Review what you've been studying every twenty or thirty minutes.** Repetition is key. Try to review just before or just after a break. This creates a consistent routine
36. **Have a healthy snack and drink available.** No sense in studying when you are preoccupied with hunger or thirst.
37. **Don't waste time surfing the internet when you should be studying.** Stay focused. I know people who actually use software to lock the internet on their computer for a set period of time so they don't waste time surfing.
38. **Two cups of coffee per day, use them wisely.** Most nutritionists agree that two cups of coffee a day are probably good for you. What's more is that a little caffeine will certainly help you study. The key word here is "a little." There is a very clear line of diminishing returns here.
39. **Use a personal reward system.** Rewards are great! Celebrate every achievement!
40. **Pronounce words out loud that you have trouble saying.** Don't just skim over these words. Abstract ideas are hard to remember. Try to make them more tangible. Check out <http://www.howsay.com>. It is a site dedicated to pronunciation.

## Improve Your Memory

You can find many of techniques to improve the way you use your memory.

41. **Check out Ron White.** He does a lot with memory. You don't necessarily have to buy his course. Look for lectures or talks he has given. Here is a link to one of his sites <http://www.memoryinamonth.com/>
42. **Check out David Farrow.** See the explanation for Ron White above, Farrow is pretty similar. Here is a link to one of his sites <http://memorymadeeasy.com/>
43. **Create mental "files" around your home.** This is a very old memory trick. You remember things much better if you have a place to look for the information rather than storing it all together in one big pile. One example is to take five pieces of furniture. These are now your files. Store certain information on your couch and other information on your TV. Picture these pieces of furniture carrying that information. This way when you try to recall something you know where to look. It sounds kind of wacky, but it works. This guy does a little better job explaining it than I have. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mIWsiHSpOho>
44. **Study from a physical source rather than a digital one.** This provides location and feel for your memories. I remember taking exams in PA school where I could picture the page of the textbook I needed. It gives your brain a place to look for the information. Just like the "files" you can use places in a book help your mind organize data.
45. **Use more of your senses to remember things.** Earlier I talked about drawing pictures. That is a great way to bring vision into the process. Attempt to smell the things you're studying. Feel them in your hands. If you had a giant trichomonas on your desk would the flagella be slimy or smooth? Bring as many senses in as possible.
46. **Attach diseases to people you know.** I always feel bad doing this but it works. Give your uncle colon cancer and your mother fibroids. It's painful, but it does give you a better retention.

47. **Use emotions to reinforce memory.** One reason why giving family members diseases works so well is because of the emotion you automatically attach to it. You can use this in different ways. You can attach happiness to certain treatments. Disgust to certain diagnosis. Be creative.
48. **Use mnemonics.** I have always been terrible at these. I usually use the information I'm trying to learn to remember the mnemonic instead of the other way around.
49. **Get enough sleep.** Sleep is directly linked to memory. In fact a study I was reading suggested sleeping directly after learning something improves your retention. Either way a sleep deprived brain clearly doesn't not retain information the same way a well rested brain does.

### **Other ways to study**

50. **Listen to audio recordings relevant to what you are studying.** This is especially helpful in the car.
51. **Use a podcatcher app to speed up playback of podcasts.** I use pocketcast with presto to speed up the audio.
52. **Watch videos.** There are a lot of good paid and free videos out there. If you just can't get something to stick try having someone else explain it to you.
53. **Use [VLC](#) to speed up videos.** This is free software you can download to your computer. You can slow down or speed up video with VLC. What ever speed works for you for a given topic.
54. **And finally stop at least the day before the exam.** I prefer two days if possible. Your brain needs to rest to function at its best. If you have been studying for even two months, there is nothing you are going to cram in the day before that is going to be more valuable than rest.