NGN Plus/Minus Items: Strategies to Lead Your Students to Higher NCLEX Scores
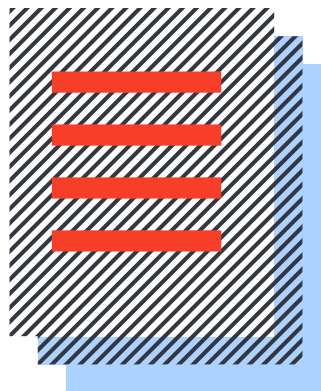
Ben Babcock, PhD
Donna Spivey, DNP, RN
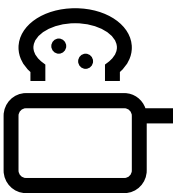
Are you using traditional
multiple choice answering strategies
for Next-Generation NCLEX
Plus/Minus items?

You =

Examples of NGN
Plus/Minus Item Types

Select All That Apply

Which of the following colors are shades of blue? Select all that apply.

A. Azure
B. Cobalt
C. Crimson
D. Maize
E. Royal
F. Walnut

Item types that are similar in concept: Highlight in Text, Highlight in Table

Multiple Response Grouping

Select which color variations on the right go with each base color on the left. Select all that apply.	
Base Color	Potential Variations of This Color
Red	A. Cobalt
	B. Lime
	C. Magenta
Green	A. Azure
	B. Forrest
	C. Sage
Brown	A. Cedar
	B. Crimson
	C. Walnut

Matrix Multiple Response

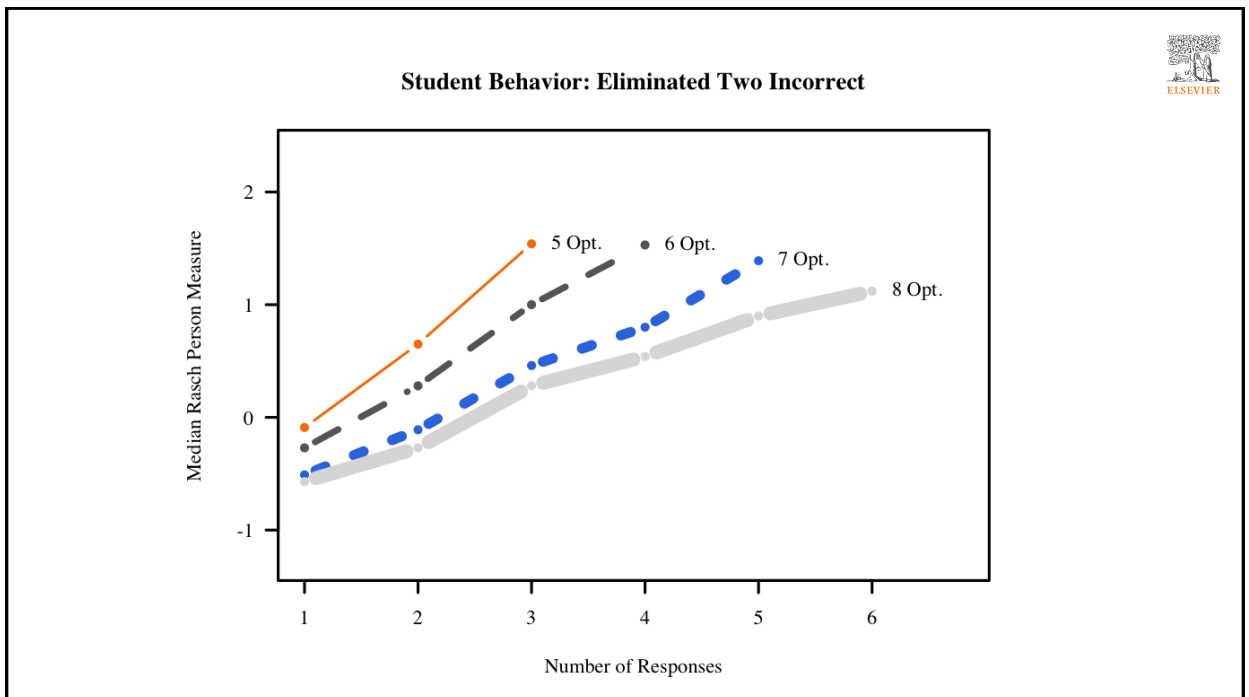| Color	Blue	Green	Yellow
Cobalt	☒	☐	☐
Shamrock	☐	☒	☐
Aqua	☒	☒	☐
Scarlet	☐	☐	☐
Royal	☒	☐	☐
Mustard	☐	☐	☒

Plus/Minus Strategy #1:
If 2 or more correct answers are known, do not guess further

Plus/Minus Strategy #2:
If 2 or more incorrect answers are eliminated, mark numerous options

Student Behavior: Eliminated Two Incorrect

Plus/Minus Strategy #3:
If ≤1 answers are known and
≤1 incorrect answers are struck,
guess an odd number of options

Say whaaaaaaaaaat?!

Hypothetical Select All That Apply Item: Guessing 2

Which of the following … ? Select all that apply.

A. Correct
B. Correct
C. Incorrect
D. Incorrect
E. Incorrect

Item Score	# of Scenarios
100%	1
0%	9

$$[(100\% \times 1) + (0\% \times 9)] / 10 = 10\%$$

Hypothetical Select All That Apply Item: Guessing 3

Which of the following … ? Select all that apply.

A. Correct
B. Correct
C. Incorrect
D. Incorrect
E. Incorrect

Item Score	# of Scenarios
100%	0
50%	3
0%	7

$$[(100\% \times 0) + (50\% \times 3) + (0\% \times 7)] / 10 = 15\%$$

List of Some Plus/Minus Response Strategies

- Know two or more answers: Mark only what you know is correct

- Eliminated two or more of the incorrect options but are guessing beyond that: Consider guessing numerous options

- Know ≤1 answer and eliminated ≤1 incorrect answers:
  - 3 to 4 options, mark one answer total (MR Grouping & some Matrix MR)
  - 5 or 6 options, mark three answers total
  - 7 to 8 options, mark three or five answers total
  - 9 to 10 options, mark five answers total

- When guessing, NEVER mark an even number of choices

Response Strategies
for Next-Generation
NCLEX® Item Types

Questions?
Thank you!