

Change Your Answers...Defying Conventional Wisdom: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Background/Introduction

Over 70 years of research data have shown that students benefit from changing answers on an exam. Yet, conventional wisdom often guides faculty to tell students, "Don't change your first answer." While some faculty support backtracking and the opportunity to change answers during testing, the attitudes and behaviors regarding changing answers are varied across disciplines, including Nursing.

Purpose

This scoping review aimed to explore the available evidence related to backtracking and changing exam answers and identify knowledge gaps in the evidence.

Methods or Processes/Procedures

This scoping review was guided by Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework that included defining the research question, searching the databases for relevant material, carefully selecting the studies using predetermined inclusion criteria, recording the abstracted data, summarizing the information, and sharing the findings with stakeholders to validate and inform them of the findings. The a priori protocol used was backtracking and changing answers on exams would lower scores.

Results

The 10 studies analyzed concluded that changing answers increased scores between 48% - 68% of the time, regardless of the subject or course. Despite each study having varying outcomes, overall scores improved significantly when answers were changed. These findings challenge the common misconception that altering answers results in lower scores.

Limitations

A limited number of studies exist in nursing, and the data reported were from various disciplines. The different study approaches, and low participant numbers across various educational levels and geographic settings suggest further research on the topic.

Conclusions/Implications for Practice

Future research should explore student attitudes and understanding of advice received about changing answers during an exam and include criteria to identify high-performing students and those who could benefit from answer-changing. Additionally, the limited number of nursing studies, the high stakes testing in nursing programs, and the NCLEX licensure examination procedures also suggest the need for further research about the benefits of answer-changing by nursing students.

Biography

Dr. Marianne Snyder has over 26 years of teaching experience and nursing leadership in higher education and has developed innovative clinical teaching and practice partnerships throughout her career. She is an Associate Clinical Professor and Director of Clinical Partnerships at UConn School of Nursing. Her research and scholarship focus on nursing education, leadership, and healthcare experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals and nurses' knowledge, attitudes, and experiences caring for these populations. She is the immediate past Chair of the Nursing Section of GLMA- Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality and serves on the National Campaign for Action's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Steering Committee.

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