

Scenario Development – Overview

The **AACN Essentials** establish a competency-based framework that defines what nurses must know and be able to do across entry and advanced levels of professional practice. This framework encompasses **10 Domains and 45 Competencies**, further articulated through sub-competencies and progression indicators that describe developmental growth over time.

Nursing is inherently a **practice-based profession**. While knowledge acquisition is foundational, safe and high-quality care depends on learners' ability to use that knowledge in authentic clinical contexts. To support effective assessment aligned with the AACN Essentials, the **Assessment Expert Working Group** established the **Scenario Development Subgroup**. This subgroup developed exemplar simulation scenario templates for **entry-level (n = 2)** and **advanced-level (n = 2)** learners. These scenarios are intentionally designed to immerse learners in realistic clinical situations and support the development of **integrated clusters of competencies**, with a primary emphasis on formative feedback.

Effective competency development requires **multiple assessment modalities and repeated opportunities over time**, incorporating both formative feedback and summative evaluation. **Simulation**, broadly defined, is one methodology that can be used as a teaching and learning strategy that assesses learner progression along the continuum from *developing* to *developed* competence.

Faculty determine appropriate assessment strategies and curricular placement for competency development and demonstration based on program design. The Scenario Development Subgroup emphasizes that simulation should be used **primarily as a formative learning strategy**. Premature reliance on summative assessment will limit learning and impede competency development. Faculty are encouraged to adopt a **coach role**, supporting learners' growth and development across time.

To further support practice readiness, the Scenario Development Subgroup adopted **Miller's Pyramid** as a guiding framework for competency development. This model progresses from **Knows** (foundational knowledge) and **Knows How** (skills laboratory and early clinical experiences), to **Shows How** (simulation-based application and supervised clinical practice), **Does** (consistent clinical performance progressing toward independence), and ultimately **Is**—professional identity formation, characterized by consistently thinking and acting like a nurse.

Core Tenets

- Competency development occurs **longitudinally** and **is non-linear**, with learners achieving competencies at varying rates over time rather than simultaneously. Competency-based assessment emphasizes **integrated nursing practice across contexts**, not the assessment of discrete or isolated skills.
- Nursing practice requires the **simultaneous integration of multiple Domains and competencies**; artificially isolating them undermines authenticity.
- **Intentional scaffolding** across the curriculum revisits competencies across varied contexts, settings, and spheres of care.
- Professional formation—**thinking and acting like a nurse**—begins on Day 1 and advances throughout the program (Tanner Clinical Reasoning Model).
- Learners must clearly understand **which competencies to focus on and when** during their development.
- **Real patient cases**, appropriately matched to the learner's developmental level, enhance authenticity and clinical reasoning more effectively than purely faculty-designed scenarios
- Simulation is a **methodology, not an endpoint**, consistent with Gaba's definition of simulation as a technique to replace or amplify real experiences.
- Simulation extends **beyond manikins** to include diverse experiential learning strategies, with modality intentionally selected based on learner level and the competencies being addressed.
- Learners are **co-producers of their education**, supported through reflection to integrate learning into habits of practice.
- **An awareness of the components of psychological safety** is essential for establishing a safe learning environment; learners should be supported within a learning-focused culture that acknowledges uncertainty and emphasizes learning from mistakes as a foundation for growth.
- **Simulation modality, design, facilitation, and assessment** must be intentionally aligned with the INACSL Healthcare Simulation Standards of Best Practice, as well as with clearly defined competencies and targeted learning outcomes.
- Guided debriefing and reflection are essential to transforming simulated experience into clinical reasoning and professional practice.

The work of the Scenario Development Subgroup provides faculty with **practical, AACN-aligned tools** to support competency development, professional identity formation, and practice readiness—ensuring learners are prepared to deliver safe, high-quality nursing care.