To address this concern, NCSBN assesses the readability (the ease with which one can read and comprehend text) of each operational item pool before the pool is deployed for use. Readability, as used in this paper, includes the notions of semantic and syntactic complexity, but excludes aspects related to vision and perception such as screen position, screen color, font color, font size, etc. These perceptual aspects are important and were considered in the design of the test delivery software.

How is readability assessed on the NCLEX?

SELECTING AND EDITING TEXT

Before an operational item pool is deployed, the readability level of the pool is assessed. Three tests are simulated from the new pool: a minimum-length easy test, a maximum-length borderline difficulty test and a minimum-length difficult test. Because the items for these tests are from very different sections (with regard to item difficulty) of the item pool, it is unlikely that there would be overlapping items across the three tests. These items (approximately 18% of an operational pool)

are then considered as a representative sample of the items in the operational pool. The selected items are first edited to exclude all tables of information, charts and graphics. Complete sentences including technical terms, numerals, abbreviations and measurements are retained. If a sentence is spread across the item's stem and distracters, the beginning of the fragment from the stem is excluded, but the fragment is repeated with each distracter to form complete sentences. When distracters contain phrases that do not complete a sentence that began in the stem, that phrase is excluded. However, subsequent complete sentences in the distracters are included.

THE FRI

The Fry Readability Index (FRI; Fry, 1968) considers readability as a combination of sentence length 7n9fTEgan irerd ofi47() 794,nty)]TJT* opr

samples is computed. These numbers are plotted on a chart to produce a grade-level readability estimate. If there is too much variability between the three samples, more samples are included and the caveat is made that the readability of the text is uneven. NCSBN uses this same procedure but, rather than select three 100-word samples, the number of syllables and sentences is counted for each simulated test (which is noticeably longer than 100 words). This count is divided by the number of words in the simulated test and multiplied by 100 to make it comparable to the 100-word frame of reference that the chart requires. The conversion chart is used to produce the grade level. The average readability of these three simulated tests is considered to be representative of the readability of the operational item pool.

LEXILES®

Lexiles® also consider readability as a function of sentence length and the word difficulty, but rather than using the number

Advice for educators writing practice questions

Nurse educators should not feel that they must adhere to these standards when they write questions for their students. It is