What are the RN CMS Standard Setting Studies?

A main purpose of the RN Content Mastery Series® 2019 Standard Setting Studies was to evaluate and update the set of recommended cut scores that nursing schools might adopt as benchmarks for student performance on each of the nine RN Content Mastery Series (CMS) assessments. Three criterion-referenced cut scores were evaluated and updated to distinguish between four levels of proficiency for each of the RN CMS 2019 assessments. The four proficiency levels were classified as: Below Level 1, Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. These cut scores were established through a formal study in accordance with the recommendations of the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and National Council on Measurement in Education Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing. Nursing education institutions should recognize that the cut scores set as a result of these studies are recommended rather than required for those using the ATI RN Content Mastery Series assessments. Institutions are free to use these cut scores or to set their own as they see fit.

What are the definitions for the RN Content Mastery Series 2019 proficiency levels?

A student meeting the criterion for Proficiency Level 1:

- Is expected to just meet NCLEX-RN standards in this content area.
- Should demonstrate the minimum level of knowledge in this content area required to support academic readiness for subsequent curricular content.
- Should meet the absolute minimum expectations for performance in this content area.

A student meeting the criterion for Proficiency Level 2:

- Is expected to readily meet NCLEX-RN standards in this content area.
- Should demonstrate a level of knowledge in this content area that more than adequately supports academic readiness for subsequent curricular content.
- Should exceed minimum expectations for performance in this content area.

A student meeting the criterion for Proficiency Level 3:

- Is expected to exceed NCLEX-RN standards in this content area.
- Should demonstrate a high level of knowledge in this content area that confidently supports academic readiness for subsequent curricular content.
- Should exceed most expectations for performance in this content area.

Why were the RN CMS 2019 cut scores updated?

The current RN CMS cut scores were developed in 2014. To cope with the possible shifts in nursing practice, the RN CMS 2019 assessment test plan has been updated to remain current with the NCLEX 2019 test plan. Over time, the nursing field has also seen changes in test populations and curriculum focus. Consequently, the performance on the CMS assessments might drift and the current cut scores might not be sufficient for the purposes of classifications or benchmarks for a

content area. Therefore, the RN CMS 2019 cut scores need to be evaluated and updated to reflect the contemporary requirement for minimum knowledge and skills for each proficiency level. This is consistent with the principles in the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (2014), which ATI follows to ensure our assessments meet industry standard best practices.

What are the changes to the cut scores of the RN CMS 2019?

There is no change to RN Community Health and RN Mental Health as the current cut scores are deemed appropriate. Of all the other RN CMS assessments, more changes happened to Levels 1 or 3 than Level 2 cut scores. The changes are not drastic, but slightly adjusted up or down by one or two raw score points. Specifically, all Level 3 new cut scores are slightly more demanding, whereas some Level 1 cut scores have become slightly more lenient. As for Level 2 cut scores, the only two RN CMS assessments that have changed are RN Fundamentals and RN Nursing Care of Children, where the Level 2 cut scores are more rigorous by one point.

The changes in cut scores are proportionate to the improving performance on RN CMS assessments observed over the past few years. The gradual academic improvement might be the result of many factors, including, but not limited to, changes in student demographics, more rigorous program setup, better curriculum–assessment alignment, quality faculty and staff support, and better knowledge of the CMS assessments. To maintain the same rigor of accuracy in classification, the new cut scores are updated with a slightly more stringent cut score to keep abreast of the current status.

TABLE 1. *Comparison of score ranges for each proficiency level between new and old cut scores*

Exam		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
RN Adult Medical Surgical	New	56.7% - 67.8%	68.9% - 81.1%	82.2% - 100.0%
	Old	56.7% - 67.8%	68.9% - 80.0%	81.1% - 100.0%
RN Community Health	New	58.0% - 72.0%	74.0% - 82.0%	84.0% - 100.0%
	Old	58.0% - 72.0%	74.0% - 82.0%	84.0% - 100.0%
RN Fundamentals	New	50.0% - 63.3%	65.0% - 80.0%	81.7% - 100.0%
	Old	51.7% - 61.7%	63.3% - 76.7%	78.3% - 100.0%
RN Leadership	New	60.0% - 75.0%	76.7% - 88.3%	90.0% - 100.0%
	Old	61.7% - 75.0%	76.7% - 86.7%	88.3% - 100.0%
RN Mental Health	New	56.7% - 65.0%	66.7% - 83.3%	85.0% - 100.0%
	Old	56.7% - 65.0%	66.7% - 83.3%	85.0% - 100.0%
RN Maternal Newborn	New	55.0% - 65.0%	66.7% - 80.0%	81.7% - 100.0%
	Old	55.0% - 65.0%	66.7% - 78.3%	80.0% - 100.0%
RN Nursing Care of Children	New	51.7% - 63.3%	65.0% - 76.7%	78.3% - 100.0%
	Old	53.3% - 61.7%	63.3% - 76.7%	78.3% - 100.0%
RN Nutrition	New	48.3% - 65.0%	66.7% - 81.7%	83.3% - 100.0%
	Old	46.7% - 65.0%	66.7% - 80.0%	81.7% - 100.0%
RN Pharmacology	New	53.3% - 70.0%	71.7% - 85.0%	86.7% - 100.0%
	Old	56.7% - 70.0%	71.7% - 83.3%	85.0% - 100.0%

Who is impacted by this change?

Institutions that adopt the cut scores as benchmarks or that use the cut scores as a guide to develop their own benchmark will now have an updated set of cut scores to assist in decision making.

How were the cut scores developed?

ATI utilized nurse educators who have extensive experience in teaching courses related to RN CMS content areas. For each RN CMS assessment, the panel of nurse educators worked as a team to set three cut scores through panelists exchanging their professional judgements on the subject matter, item difficulty, and student performance.

Are updates made with each corresponding blueprint year?

No, updates are only made when our research shows they are necessary.

Which set of cut scores applies to me (2016 vs. 2019)? Are the 2016 proficiency levels being retired?

The release date of the 2019 proficiency level table will be the cutoff date at which the 2019 cut scores replace the 2016 cut scores. Beyond the cutoff date, the old table is no longer applicable. At that time, the 2019 proficiency level table will be applied to all ATI RN CMS assessments, regardless of the blueprint version of the assessments that a client is currently using.

Are there any changes to reporting?

Upon release of the 2019 proficiency level tables, the report explanatory page will be updated to reflect information about the new table. After the new table is active, anyone pulling reports will see the updated explanatory page, regardless of when they have tested.

Is there anything students and faculty need to do to get the new proficiency?

No, there is nothing students or faculty need to do.

How do I contact ATI if I have questions?

If you have any questions regarding the cut score studies or its findings, please do not hesitate to contact us at aticommunications@atitesting.com.