

PM Aquino

How To Be a Pharmacy Board Topnotcher

Meta: Do you think you have what it takes to be a pharmacy board topnotcher? Here are a few tips from the few who aced the pharmacy boards on their first take.

Passing the Philippine Pharmacists Licensure Examination is already a feat, but to be able to rank the highest amongst thousands of examinees requires hard work, discipline, and sheer luck.

We asked a couple of high rankers for the study habits they had to build, their tips in preparing for the exam, and their overall message to pharmacy graduates who are about to face the most important exam in their life.

1. Lay a foundation

“In the case of the Pharmacy Licensure Exam, I would say it’s primarily a matter of breadth of knowledge, rather than [the] depth of knowledge,” Ryan, who ranked first in the March 2018 exams, said. “I prioritized getting exposed to as many pharmacy topics as possible,” he added.

The pharmacy boards, which is conducted by the Professional Regulation Commission, consists of six modules that tests an examinees’ knowledge in pharmaceutical chemistry, pharmacology, biochemistry, and pharmaceuticals, to name a few. Laying down a foundation of these topics greatly increases your chances of passing and topping the exams.

Ser Loisse, who scored the second highest among the March 2017 examinees, shares a tip in laying this foundation: “Months before exams, I kept on collecting whatever notes or handouts I could get my hands on without filtering them.” This allowed him to make decisions on what details and topics were important and what to focus on later.

2. Create a schedule, and *try* to stick to it

After covering all your bases, you can increase your chances of passing and scoring highest in the boards by creating a study schedule. Ryan tells us that this is his “number one technique” in placing first. “I created a personal calendar to schedule more days of review [for] the modules [that] I was getting low scores in,” he reiterated. Other study habits Ryan developed over the course of his review are writing his notes by hand and utilizing the Pomodoro technique, which is a productivity tool used by many.

Although his study habits were “irregular,” Ser Loisse did the same and tried to follow his own schedule to “improve his concentration” by going to cafes or other silent environments.

In your personal schedule, however, don’t forget to allot time for rest. “The one thing that I didn’t really allow myself to break was making sure that I always get 7 to 8 hours of sleep every

day leading up to the board exam itself,” Ryan shared. “I found it hard to remember something if my brain is asleep,” which is why he prioritized rest during his review.

3. Surround yourself with the right people

“In these times where rationalization and strategy won’t work, your best resolution to keep fighting would be those around you,” Ser Loisse said. During your preparation for the pharmacy boards, the pressure and anxiety might pull you down. Therefore, it’s important to surround yourself with the right people to motivate you to get out of that pressure cooker.

Ryan agreed by saying, “what helps bring the knowledge out is surrounding yourself with like-minded people. Having a study group, or even just a study buddy, really helps because you get to support and encourage each other. The greatest achievements are most often a group effort.”

4. Have a sense of discipline

These two topnotchers shared that if there’s one main takeaway from this article, remember that it’s discipline that sets topnotchers apart.

Ryan tells us that even if you don’t have the best of study habits, being a pharmacy graduate gives you a great fighting chance in passing the boards. But it’s the “difference in discipline that brings out the topnotchers.”

Ser Loisse agrees and adds that it takes a great deal of hard work and sheer luck to take a place in the top 10. However, he further elaborates that “as far as I’m concerned, all I have learned 5 years after becoming a topnotcher is that the temporary euphoria one gets for such a feat has little practical use in the future.”

Preparing and reviewing for the pharmacy board examinations may be a crucial first step in a pharmacist’s career, and having to place in the top 10 highest scoring examinees is an achievement considered by many. However, scoring high in the board exams will not determine your future in pharmacy; that is all up to you. No pressure.