

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO THE NPTE



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ROAD TO THE NPTE - THE BEGINNING

In 2015, NGPT partnered with Mark Denesha, now Mark Denesha, DPT, who took on the NPTE. We were able to follow along with him on his journey to taking the exam. This is what he had to say to those beginning their own path to test preparedness:

“For those of you who will be taking the exam soon, don’t look at it as an obstacle. Change your perspective. Approach the NPTE knowing that each day, hour, and minute spent scrutinizing the fine details of your chosen field of physical therapy will only make you better than you were the previous day. The journey does not end with the NPTE . . . it begins.”

A handy place to start, before studying, is to register!

REGISTERING FOR THE EXAM

After a quick glance over the information at [FSBPT.org](https://www.fsbpt.org), it can feel like the registration process for the exam is almost as daunting as the exam itself. We’ve broken down the steps that you’ll need to take to get all your paperwork sorted out ahead of time and leave you more time to prepare for the big day.



Six Easy Steps

The FSBPT recommends you being with these six steps:

1. Find your jurisdiction requirements
2. Complete a state application form
3. [Register](#) and pay
They do have a “Pay Later” option that is worth exploring for those on a tight budget.
4. Request special accommodations as needed
5. Receive Authorization to Test

Once your registration and payment have been received by the FSBPT, you must wait for confirmation from the licensing authority of your jurisdiction to move forward.

6. Schedule your exam

Your Authorization to Test (ATT) will contain instructions for selecting your exam date via [Prometric](#)



NPTE Registration via Prometric

This consists of five sections:

1. Personal information
 - a. Name, SSI, DOB etc.
2. Demographics
 - a. Address, school, accommodations
3. Product selection
 - a. PT or PTA exam and date
4. Payment information
5. Final Confirmation

State Licensure

Please refer to your state's board website. You can access it via the [FSBPT site](#)

Limited Permit

Do you plan on working while you study? Maybe part-time perhaps? If so, you'll need to apply for a [Limited Permit](#). You can work for 90 days after graduation without having to actually hold the permit, but you still have to apply and pay the fee!



Breakin' the Bank

Item	Cost
NPTE Registration	\$400 (\$485 - Effective January 1st, 2019)
Licensure	Varies by state (\$294 in New York)
Limited Permit	Varies by state (\$70 in New York)
Prometric Registration	\$85
Total Cost	\$856

Dates and Deadlines

Regardless of the specific date you are hoping to take the NPTE, we recommend reserving your spot sooner than later. Seats are first come, first serve and, according to the website, fill up fast!

We urge you to complete your paperwork as soon as possible.

The sooner your documents are processed, the sooner you'll receive your ATT, and the sooner you can register! This easy tip will increase your odds of getting to test at a facility nearby, as seats do fill quickly. Once you've got a seat, it's time to prepare! Bring it on, NPTE!





STUDYING

Tips and Tricks

There are an infinite number of ways that you can try to study any material, and everyone learns differently. In order to help focus your efforts, we've compiled tips from Mark Denesha, PT, DPT, Jasmine Marcus, PT, DPT, and Miye Fonseca, PT, DPT about how their studying habits led to successfully passing the NPTE!

Mark dove right in. "I accessed the retired NPTE that I had taken a few weeks earlier and went through all the questions I missed. Some were careless mistakes, but the majority was material that I certainly needed to revisit." Going through old work and recognizing your mistakes is a pretty common study tip, but Mark also reflected on something many students skip.

"After [reviewing the ones I got wrong], I went over the questions that I answered correctly. Most of my answers made sense, but some were undeniable guesses. A few I managed to reduce to two choices and simply flipped a coin. Make sure you take time to understand why answers are both incorrect and correct." Reflecting on the sections you know you got right in your practice work can help to narrow your margin of error even more significantly during the real test!

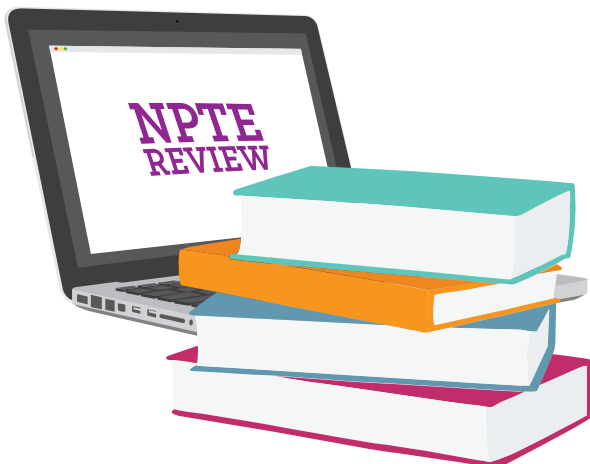
Here are some other key tips from Mark's time studying for the NPTE:

1. Environment is key!

- a. Staying at home was a bad idea. Starting fresh the next day, week two of studying, I planned to head to the library. I'm always more productive in a positive setting where work is being done. The comfort of my apartment, on the couch wearing gym clothes, didn't get the gears turning in my brain

2. Reduce distractions.

- a. A great application I found for Google Chrome is called "NewsFeed Eradicator." It will make your Facebook newsfeed empty! Genius. You no longer have any reason to waste valuable minutes on nothing.



3. Have multiple resources

- a. We have a few that have come highly recommended, and you can find more information in this section to find the one that is right for you.
 - i. National Physical Therapy Examination Review and Study Guide **(\$132.93)**
 - ii. Scorebuilders **(\$90)**
 - iii. The FBPT's Practice Exam & Assessment Tool, or PEAT **(\$99)**

4. Take breaks every hour – move your body!

- a. I stretch and do calisthenics every hour. It keeps my mind fresh!

5. Be accountable!

- a. Keeping yourself on task can be difficult, but treat studying like it's a full-time job! Originally, I scheduled myself 6-8 hours per day of study time. After every hour I stood up, stretched, and did some pushups. Despite my body and brain calisthenics, I only managed about 3 hours per day.
- b. Keeping yourself accountable can be incredibly difficult though. Have a study partner. Have a blog. Have other things in your life that will keep your mind sharp and will still give you something productive to do when you feel like you can't read another word.

“I seek strength, not to be greater than others, but to fight my greatest enemy, the doubts within myself”
- P.C. Cast

While Jasmine and Mark had some tips that overlapped quite a bit, it's important to note that they both approached their new full-time job in ways that worked for them!

Jasmine was able to prepare for the exam after graduation while also planning for her wedding, but she emphasized that you can prepare for the NPTE and still have fun. She wanted to share her journey with in the hopes of offering up some suggestions to do just that:

1. Don't over-study.

- a. If you give yourself enough time (8 weeks or so), you shouldn't need to devote your whole days to studying. I set aside 3-4 hours every day for studying and that was it. If you try to spend all day studying, you'll probably burn out after a week or two. Occasionally, I did an extra hour here or there if I felt like I was running behind, but otherwise I stuck to my schedule.



2. Make studying your job.

- a. Each weekday morning, I got up with my husband and had him drop me off at the library on his way to work. While I was at the library, I was there to study. Once an hour I walked around and checked my phone, but the whole rest of the morning I had nothing else to do but study. Knowing that by noon I would have the rest of the day off was usually

enough to keep me focused even though I can be a bit of a daydreamer. I also kept my laptop at home and my phone in my backpack so that I couldn't "accidentally" end up on Facebook.

3. Have fun.

- a. In the afternoons, once my three hours were over, I did not touch my notes. I went to the gym, I organized wedding seating charts, I binge-watched Gilmore Girls, and I eventually started working part time, but I never once cracked a study guide. This was also true for the one day per week I took completely off. Knowing that I was not "at work" at the library allowed me to enjoy the rest of the day guilt-free.

4. Know where to focus your time.

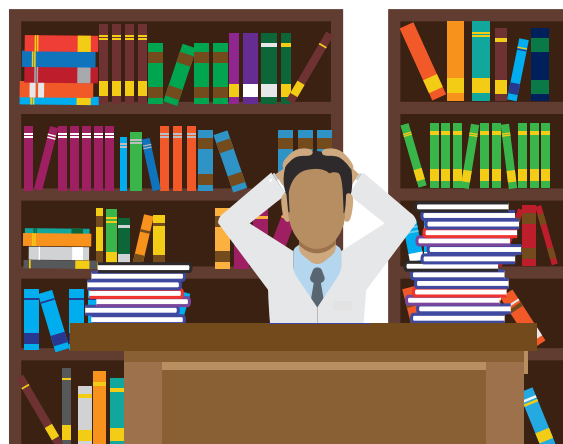
- a. Orthopedics, neuroscience, and cardiopulmonology comprise the vast majority of the test, so that should be where the bulk of your attention goes. It's important to study everything, but don't spend hours on the genitourinary system if that comprises less than 10% of the questions. Make an outline at the beginning of your studying period so that you know in advance how long to spend on each topic. While debates rage on as to which study guide is the best, I found Scorebuilders easier to read, and used O'Sullivan's as a supplement.



5. Hit the highlights.

- a. As I studied, I filled two legal pads with notes. I copied down things I hoped to memorize (like pediatric milestones), wrote out things I had forgotten, and drew pictures of important concepts. While 50 yellow pages may seem like a lot, I was able to review it again and again in a way that you can't with an 800-page study book. I reread these notes at the end of every week and several times in the lead up to the big day to make sure that the most important details stayed with me. This was my version of cramming since it is impossible to actually cram for the boards.

the same computer format as the boards, so that you're already familiar with it when you sit for the test.



6. Use practice tests wisely.

- a. While practice tests are very helpful, it's important not to go crazy taking them. Each test takes about five hours, and I found that it took me about 10 (!) hours to go over each one. This meant reviewing each question one-by-one and looking into the answers I got wrong. Most books will explain why each possible answer is either right or wrong, and I found this to be immensely helpful, but also very time consuming. Overall, I did a test or two from my study guides, but most importantly I did both tests from the PEAT about a week before the exam. Although the PEAT is a little pricey, I'm thankful I shelled out for it. It is written by the same organization as the boards so it's closer to the boards than any review book can hope to be. It also mimics

YOU DON'T HAVE TO KNOW EVERYTHING TO PASS THE NPTE

Developing good study habits like keeping a consistent schedule and having a strong support network can go a long way to make sure you are studying regularly. Jasmine mentioned the importance of focusing your studying; you need to be sure that those long hours spent studying are spent learning valuable information.



We hear a lot of “I have to read everything just in case” when studying for the NPTE. This is the academic mentality of cramming a lot of information whether relevant or irrelevant. That last bit of information could be the tipping point on the passing score – however, the reality is that the majority of what you are reading won’t help you for the upcoming exam.

The reality is you don’t have to know everything in order to pass. You do have to know your core foundations (Musculoskeletal, Neuromuscular, CardioPulmonary) and be strong in the content sections (Evaluation, Examination, Interventions) in order to pass the exam. The goal is to make sure your academic knowledge is at entry-level competency and also confirm that you are safe to treat a patient by understanding clinical applications of the information.

While you may feel you have to go deep into a subject, the majority of the time that’s not actually true. Yes, you will have to delve into certain topics, but for the most part, you need to understand concepts that can be applied generally to a group of topics.



Why you shouldn’t try to study everything

Creates unnecessary stress and anxiety

Making sure you read every little detail “just in case” makes you feel overwhelmed. This only adds stress to the process because you are now aware that there is so much information out there to learn and know. It can become an endless cycle – buried in books, papers, journals, or watching YouTube videos.

Hours are spent reading or studying information that is not essential for the exam. Unfortunately, the accomplishment you feel after checking off chapters read from a book is not one that will be measured for competency on the [National Physical Therapy Exam](#). It just shows you are able to flip through books. Being asked to summarize what you just read is a different story.

When faced with clinical scenarios that ask you to integrate, the “study it all” approach tends to create more anxiety. The questions asked of you on the exam won’t be presented to you in the exact same way the information appeared in the books.

Reinforces memorization

Reading study guides and textbooks reinforces academic study habits of memorization and recall. For instance, it’s easy to recall and recite every muscle origin, insertion, and action of the body. However, this is not very practical when it comes to applying information to the actual NPTE.

When students just focus on memorization, it is tough to see how the information is applied to what they would see in the clinic. The questions on the NPTE are more clinically integrated, so you have to learn to apply the knowledge you've learned. Thinking clinically forces you to identify the cause of an impairment based on signs and symptoms, movements, and assessments.

Going beyond memorization increases retention and clinical understanding. As a result, you will see higher exam scores.

Easy to go off on tangents

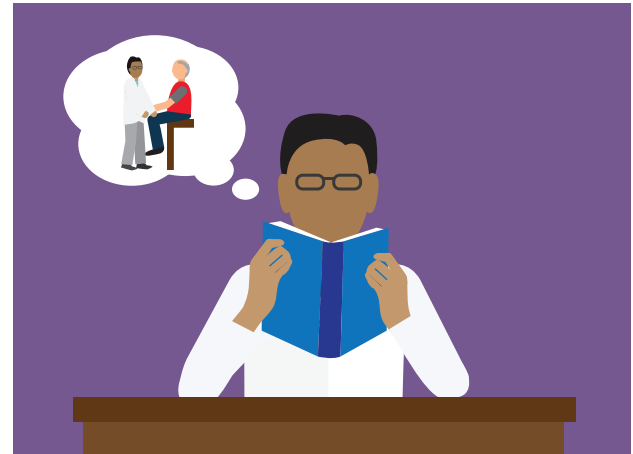
When reading, it's easy to go off on tangents. You sit down to work on perfecting the musculoskeletal section of the exam, one thing leads to another, and after a glance to a question that popped into your head about cardiopulmonary turns into an hour of reading elsewhere.

Then you are forced to re-read the material even though you feel like you just studied it all. And then when reading again, your brain wanders or turns off because you feel that you already know this information.

What you can do when you study

Quality vs quantity

Rather than reading every page of every review book on the market, focus on the material from a content perspective. Think of it as a test. Referring to and understanding large concepts saves time and allows for relating the information clinically.



Keep the big picture in mind

For the sake of time, you can't study every single detail. It's great to have a vast amount of knowledge, but it's best to keep the big picture in mind. Your end goal is to treat patients, so think more clinically about how you would treat that patient. The NPTE is designed to test your ability to be a physical therapist, so keep that in mind as you focus your study sessions.

Study efficiently to pass the NPTE

While it seems good on paper to know everything for the NPTE, it is not the best way to go about studying. Realistically and practicality, you'll want to focus on the important aspects that matter only for the National Physical Therapy Exam itself. You have the rest of your career to keep reading and learning to help you become a better clinician.



MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Review Courses

While review courses in their own right can be helpful and help add another layer of structure to your study regiment, they aren't for everyone. One PT told us:

I learned a lot, but it wasn't a magic course that taught me everything I need to know for the test.

In reflecting on his study experience, Mark said, "Ultimately, it's about time. You need to put in the time to learn and fully understand the concepts. I think that is the key to success for this exam. Unfortunately, there aren't any magic tips or tricks to passing, but we do have some study tips that can help you be more efficient and still enjoy yourself. From here, it's all about prioritizing and effectively making use of your time."

Some alternatives to traditional classroom settings, that can still help you to build a structure to your study habits, are offered by [PT Final Exam!](#) Their combination of full online courses, self-guided materials, and coaching can be useful for a variety of study habits and styles, and their different package tiers mean that you can select the resources that you need!

The PEAT

The key advantage to using the PEAT is that as the official FSBPT practice exam, the questions are pulled from retired NPTE exams, and it is organized in a way that make studying your results much easier.

Purchasing the PEAT gets you access to supplemental study materials including:

- Information about NPTE construction
- Tips on how to use the test blueprint and PEAT in your exam preparation

You also get access to two practice exams that you can begin at any time, and each exam provides a breakdown of topics that you may need more work on. From there you can visualize and break up what topics you can focus your studies on! It is important to keep in mind that you will have access to all of these materials for 60 days!



The Breakdown

Retired NPTE

Scores by Content Area	Your Score					On Track to Pass Score	
	Total Items	# Items Correct	Percent Correct	Scale Score	Estimated NPTE Range	# Items Correct	Percent Correct
Total	200	141	71%	562	539-585	151	76%
Physical Therapy Examination	53	35	66%	539	495-582	40	75%
Foundations for Evaluation, Differential Diagnosis, & Prognosis	65	49	75%	575	533-616	51	78%
Interventions	57	39	68%	566	523-608	42	74%
Non-System Domains	25	18	72%	575	511-639	19	76%

The table above is a sample content breakdown. You can see the scores for each section of the exam, separated into “Your Score” versus the “On Track” scores. The “On Track” column shows the estimated number of correct answers it would require to achieve a passing score.

Retired NPTE

Scores by Body System	Your Score					On Track to Pass Score	
	Total Items	# Items Correct	Percent Correct	Scale Score	Estimated NPTE Range	# Items Correct	Percent Correct
Cardiovascular/Pulmonary & Lymphatic Systems	33	21	64%	543	488-598	24	73%
Musculoskeletal System	61	51	84%	664	614-713	47	77%
Neuromuscular & Nervous Systems	50	30	60%	489	446-533	38	76%
Other Systems	31	21	68%	524	467-582	24	77%

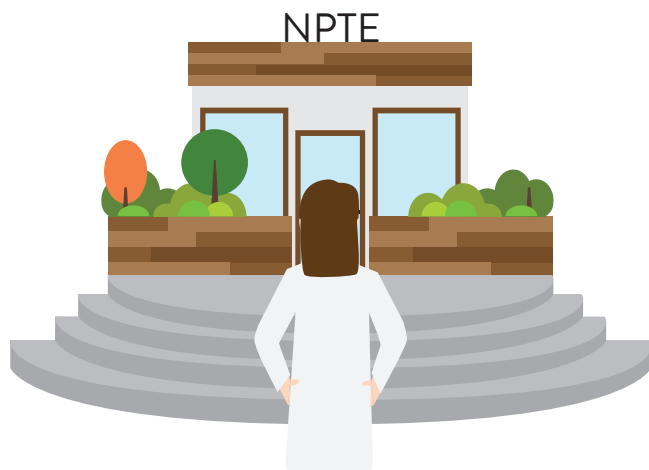
This table breaks down the exam by “Body System” which will help you to break your study focuses down even further!



O'Sullivan's vs. Scorebuilders

In his search for the holy grail of study guides, Mark grabbed a few options and spoke with other PTs that had taken the exam. Here's what he was able to learn:

O'Sullivan's	Scorebuilders
Questions that are more difficult than the NPTE	Questions that are on par with the NPTE
Detail and Depth	Easy to read
Textbook-like diagrams	Simple diagrams
Average Result Range: 135/200	Average Result Range: 145/200



THE BIG DAY

You've used your guides; you've made study sheet after study sheet; you've taken a review course; now the test is here! Jasmine and Mark have a few last minute tips for you before you go into your testing center.

"Everything is hardest while you're in it." Mark says. "This is an unnerving time in your life. Some days you will feel overwhelmed. Some days you'll answer a string of questions correctly and feel like Eduard Einstein (Albert's son). You're not alone in this. You've put in the time, learned the concepts (not all the little details), and know that one day you will look back and tell people that it wasn't that bad." And there's a reason for that energy.

You have been preparing for the NPTE (or are getting started to prepare, depending on when you read this article) for much longer than you might think. "Remember," Jasmine says, "you haven't just been preparing for the NPTE for eight weeks. You've been preparing for three years! On top of being dedicated and focused on studying for this specific exam."

Look over your notes one last time and get some sleep before your big day!

The NPTE is a long test, a psychological battle, and beyond studying, there are several things to keep in mind while taking it:

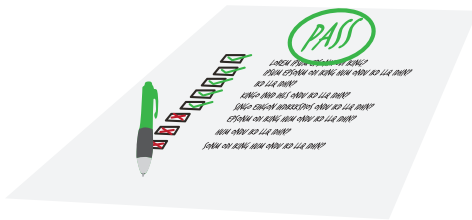
Remember the obvious

Dress in layers, bring a good snack for your break, and read through every possible answer before selecting your choice. You've taken multiple choice and standardized tests before, so don't psych yourself out. You've done this, and done this well, before. Make sure to read everything the NPTE tells you about test day so that you go in fully prepared.



Expect at some point to feel like you're failing

At some point during the exam, everyone feels like they're bombing. At some point, your eyes will glaze over when you're stuck on a difficult question, contemplating what eight more weeks of studying might feel like. Just take a deep breath, remember that the feeling is normal – the [vast majority](#) of first-time test takers pass – and get back to work!



Remember that you don't need 100%

The likelihood of getting every question right is minimal. Anyone who does, typically goes on to write the textbook on exam prep. Don't sweat the question about blood pressure that you don't quite remember. It's just one of a couple that you are expected to get wrong. The goal of taking the test is not to get 100%. It's to pass, get your license, and start your career.

Setting your sights high can help to keep you focused, but the NPTE has questions that, put plainly, you just are not going to get right. If you run into a question that you don't know the answer to or a series of questions for which you are not

confident you chose the right answer, that's ok! Move on, and concentrate on the challenge in front of you. Keep your focus on the present moment, on the one single question that you need to answer at any given time and you will do great!

50 questions don't count

[Fifty questions are in development](#), and don't count towards your score, so every time you encounter a crazy question, tell yourself that it is a development question that won't count anyway. Between the fifty questions that are not scored and the few that you have to get wrong (since there's no such thing as perfection), you have a solid seventy-five questions or so to be unsure about before you even start to worry.

Take a good picture

At the beginning of the test, the testing center will take your picture for [ID verification purposes](#). This picture would pop up, again and again, every time you start or end your break. If you're frowning and looking annoyed it can be quite a downer every time your face reappears. Instead, smile and look happy to cheer yourself up at breaks! It may sound silly, but it works.

Celebrate afterward

Go out to dinner. Have a few drinks. Pat yourself on the back for having studied so well for the past three years, and rest easy knowing that you're about to be a licensed physical therapist!

THE CONTRIBUTORS



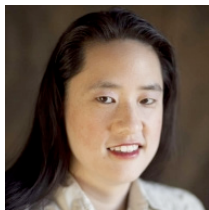
Mark Denesha, PT, DPT

Mark graduated from SUNY Downstate Medical Center (Brooklyn) in May, 2015 and is currently the Clinic Director for Metro Sportsmed Physical Therapy (Motion PT). He also manages a website & blog, Muscles 2 Movement. Mark has interests in biomechanics, pain management, and strength training. Prior to PT school Mark played collegiate basketball and served 9 years in the U.S. Army. Beyond PT, Mark is a fitness adventurer, willing to try most anything. Eating too much ice cream and watching movies is how he recharges his batteries and turns off his brain.



Jasmine Marcus, PT, DPT

Dr. Jasmine Marcus, PT, DPT is a physical therapist at an outpatient orthopedic clinic in Upstate New York. She graduated with her Doctorate in Physical Therapy from Columbia University and received her undergraduate degree in psychology from Cornell University. She combines her passions for physical therapy and writing on her website, and is also active on Instagram and Twitter.



Miye Fonseca, PT, DPT

Miye Fonseca, PT, DPT is the Founder and CEO of TherapyExamPrep.com, a provider of online NPTE and NPTAE exam prep courses focusing on the clinical thinking aspects, test-taking strategies and addressing factors on confidence, fear, and test anxiety. She has been trained by the FSBPT on writing NPTE format questions and developed a practice exam simulation to mimic the real exam. Miye has also spoken at student conclaves about exam preparation from a clinical thinking and practical approach.

RELATED RESOURCES

If you just can't get enough about the NPTE, we'd recommend checking out the contributor's pieces as well as a few extra articles on coremedicalgroup.com!

[Road to the NPTE - The Beginning](#)

[Road to the NPTE - Registration](#)

[Road to the NPTE - 4 Study Tips](#)

[Road to the NPTE: PEAT & Which Study Guide to Use](#)

[How I Studied & Passed the NPTE](#)

[How to Get Through the NPTE](#)

[No, You Don't Have to Know Everything to Pass the NPTE](#)

[How to Register for the NPTE in All 50 States](#)

[NewGradPhysicalTherapy Audio Works](#)

