

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sarah Michelle

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Hey friends, in light of heavy board preparation season I thought it would only be appropriate to bring one of our past live study group participants on the show to kind of discuss the ins and outs of our absolute favorite student program, our live study groups.

Today we're going to be talking to Sarah who was a student in our very first graduating class of live study group participants last December. And Sarah is actually the reason that we have an entire slide now about sensitivity versus specificity because she reached out to me the day before her exam trying to remember which was which.

Sarah: So welcome, welcome, welcome, Sarah, to the show. Thank you so much for hanging out with me today and my listeners as we kind of give them that student perspective of this program.

Sarah P: Yeah, of course. Happy to be here.

Sarah: So happy to have you, so happy to get to talk to you again because it has been a little bit of time since you have been in the program. And really, I think the best place to start is just to kind of talk about how you were feeling about your board preparation process before you signed up for the live study group program.

Sarah P: Yeah, before I signed up, I was anxious. I just didn't feel like I came out of school with a great knowledge base. My program was online, so I think that contributed to it a little bit, I didn't have that in person lecture. I was nervous. I signed up actually, for your comprehensive course bundle about a month before the live study groups became a thing.

Tried to do that on my own a little bit, still struggled but I definitely learned. The live study groups came out and I was like, "That's what I need, that's

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

great.” Going into it I was definitely very nervous, but I think the live study groups calmed all of that anxiety down, it helped me formulate the study plan and just stick to it.

Sarah: Yeah, I definitely think there are some students out there that can do the self-paced and do it really well. But for a lot of people it’s almost like the live study groups are an accountability factor more so than anything else.

Sarah P: Yeah, and I found that accountability thing to be very true. Because before the live study group when I just signed up for the conference, of course on my own, I tried to go through and formulate my own study plan based on it and I did find myself saying, “Oh, I can take today off. It’s not a big deal, I’ll just catch up tomorrow.” And then it just sort of spiraled and I never really caught up. So the accountability, I think, was a major thing for me too.

Sarah: Yeah, and just a little bit of reinforcement too, because I think without perspective into the live study groups, which we’re going to get into, a lot of the live study group program is, you know, you get the course material.

But when you get actually into those live sessions it’s all about reinforcing what you saw in the videos and what you know. And so that way you can apply it to the exam scenarios and then hopefully one day to practice as well.

Sarah P: Yeah, I know when we got into the live study groups, I was nervous that first round just because I didn’t want to not know the answer. And I just was going to be intimidated if other people knew more than me or were able to answer the questions really quickly. And that wasn’t the case at all.

I definitely prepared for the live study session ahead of time, going through the courses as the schedule outlined. I took my own notes, I felt really prepared. But then even when I didn’t know the answer to the question, I

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

felt very comfortable in the setting just asking other people for help or just straight up saying I didn't know.

And there was just no judgment. Other people were trying to give you their little tips and tricks to remember. And even Sarah and Anna went through and, you know, just went about the teaching in a different way than the review course did just to make sure that everybody understood.

Sarah: Yeah, that's one of my favorite parts about the live study group. And for those of you that don't know Anna, she's actually my live study group partner and so she teaches half and I teach half.

But we work really hard together, literally at every single session like we come in with the expectation and we set the environment for this is a stress-free zone, this is a judgment-free zone. If you don't know the answer it's totally fine, we don't care. We're just going to walk you through how to get there so that way on your exam day you're like, "Oh, I already have this down. Like this is no big deal to me anymore."

Sarah P: Yeah, that was very helpful to not at all feel any judgment, no stress. If you didn't know the answer, you'd take your best guess and go from there.

Sarah: Move on, phone a friend.

Sarah P: Yes, exactly.

Sarah: I'm always like, "Raise your hand, do you want to phone a friend? Like who's raising their hand on Zoom today?"

So I kind of, you know, maybe I jumped ahead just a little bit, but I know my perspective of the program, leading the program. But can you kind of walk us through from a student perspective as to what the live study groups are actually like and how they're formatted? Because I think for a lot of my student listeners it's a bit of a mystery almost just because it's such a different formatting from any of the other reviews out there.

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Sarah P: Yeah, so when you sign up for it, you'll get a course calendar that walks you through the entire month long program with the two live study group sessions listed on there. So it's every other week, and you'll do two four hour sessions.

The schedule is very broken down by, you know, watch this section in this video, and then kind of clumps the topics together really well. And then come that live session day, you have already prepped, you know your material, you've got your notes taken, and then the live study group starts.

We'll go over a topic and then they kind of cover a topic, ask some questions, provide a case study just to see if we can apply the knowledge. And then they'll intermix these lightning round questions in the middle of the session just to give people that rapid fire, you know, get a question, what's the answer, get a question, what's the answer so that you can simulate more of that testing environment.

Sarah: Yeah, and something that we've even started doing because, you know, I don't want to say you were the guinea pig group. But you were kind of the guinea pig group where we were kind of sorting things out. Like we had the solid content but, you know, how we were presenting the content and those sorts of things we worked out some kinks on.

And now what we do is when you first come to the very first live session, so the first four hour session, when you're two weeks into the program, we spend the first two hours like going in order of topic. So we'll spend the first hour talking about cardiac, and the second hour talking all about respiratory.

And then for the rest of the session, so the remaining six hours after that point, it's all at random in hopes of simulating that test like environment. But we do the first two hours in order just to kind of ease everybody in. Because there is a little bit of nerves about coming to a live session when it's not really something that many people are accustomed to doing too.

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Sarah P: Yeah, and I know when I did it, like you said, it's changed a little bit, but I think we trialed both ways. So we tried doing it all in order.

Sarah: Yes, we did.

Sarah P: And then also tried switching it up and just doing a random question here and there. And I think both ways actually were very helpful.

So I think easing into it by doing it in order is great. And then it shouldn't intimidate anybody that they do it randomly because that really does help with board preparation and make you ready to quickly change your mind from thinking about the heart to thinking about the abdomen to thinking about lungs. So it's a great way to set it up.

Sarah: And kind of deep diving into all those topics, too. Because those case scenarios can get really complex really quickly. And people are like, "Well, how did you take someone having tingling in their arm to be a stroke, and B12 deficiency anemia, and maybe a cardiac thing going on?" Like all these different perspectives, right?

But that's exactly what your exam is going to want you to do. And then right behind that that's exactly what you're going to have to do in practice because somebody might walk in and be like, "Well, my left arm is tingling." So how are you going to be able to walk through that process? And we do that again and again in those case scenarios.

And then we follow behind it with the lightning rounds, where it's just quick facts. Do you know it or not? Like do you know murmurs? Do you know the different sounds of the heart? Like those more basic things that just you have to know to be able to get through that baseline knowledge of the exam too.

So kind of looking back on your experience what did you really enjoy the most about being in the live study group? Because I think, you know, for some students it's the support community, but for others it's definitely kind of pulling it all together in those live sessions.

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Sarah P: Yeah, and I truly think, not to be cliché, but I think for me it was both.

So like I said before, going into it I was anxious, I didn't have a great knowledge base. Taking the time to study on my own and then just reinforce that like, okay, I do know something in those live study groups was so helpful, it helped build my confidence. It not only for boards helped build my confidence, but I think just my ability to be a nurse practitioner after I passed boards. So that was really helpful.

And then even just all the other students, even though we only met on Zoom a couple times I felt like, you know, we all connected, we were there for each other. And then as people from that live study group were posting that they passed, their picture with their little certification. Everybody was like, "I knew you could do it, you did great in the study group." So I think just that sense of, you know, all of these people are doing exactly what I'm doing right now was so helpful.

Sarah: I love all the excitement of those posts. Because we always tell people like, you know, we're not going to monitor your private community once your session is done. But me and Anna, we constantly find ourselves like joining back in on those communities every time somebody passes. Because we're so excited about it and everybody in the group is so excited about it.

And so right now, for those of you listening, it's May and we had somebody just here recently had a lot of life stuff going on, but they were in our January 24th study group, and they just passed this week. And like half the people were still in Slack and so everybody was in there partying and celebrating. And so this community kind of goes far beyond just your board preparation too.

Sarah P: Yeah, and I think too, just another comment on the support from everybody and just the benefit of the live study group. I remember we had a student in my first group that took boards the day after our last live session.

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

And that last live session we really hit on, you know, syphilis. It's a covered topic, you need to know it, it's great.

I think we all really like absorbed the information at that point versus when we studied on our own. And sure enough, next day he said he passed, and he got those syphilis questions right because of the live study group.

Sarah: Which was awesome. I remember that post specifically. I was so excited because it was our first group too. So then me and Anna, we're anxiously waiting for everyone to go test too and see what everybody's thinking.

And it was such a nice like reinforcement and validation for us too when he posted and he was like, "Everything they said was in the live sessions was on my test." I was like, "Oh, thank goodness." Like I knew we were teaching good, but I didn't know it was this good.

Sarah P: Yeah. And I felt like the teachings too, you know, going through it on your own, if that's something that people are comfortable with and can hold themselves accountable to go through the courses, that's awesome.

But I think the live study group just reinforced that you were learning it correctly even. Because, you know, you can look at a topic and you can study a topic. But if you just maybe misunderstood the content or, you know, thought about it in a different way, it could be that you're just maybe not learning it 100% correctly. So I think that the live study sessions also just reinforced that like, okay, we learned it correctly and this is what it is.

Sarah: Almost like a mini validation almost, like do you actually have this material down?

Sarah P: Exactly.

Sarah: I thought I did but now I know I do.

Sarah P: Yes.

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Sarah: So if you could kind of restart and reboot your whole live study group experience, is there anything you would have done differently?

Sarah P: I think, looking back, maybe just like organizing my notes maybe a little bit differently. I am a very thorough note taker, I've always done nursing school, high school, I mean, you take it back to kindergarten, I am a thorough note taker.

So I think that during the live study groups I was very focused on like, here's my notes, I got to make sure I have everything written down, even anything that they're adding on and saying in the study group.

So I think maybe I would just try to less focus on the notes during the sessions, and more just absorb as much information and conversation as I can. Because the notes are really important and good to be able to reference afterwards, but I already had it all written down from my own study.

So I think just being actively engaged in those sessions, even more so than I already was would have been the only thing I would change.

Sarah: It's very ironic that you say that because that was really our biggest change after the first live group. We were like people are so absorbed in this note taking that they can't be fully present and fully engaged. Which is what we want because that's how you are going to absorb the most from being in the live session.

And so we ended up, we typed out all of the live study groups in a document essentially. And so when your live study group is done, you don't even have to take notes anymore because we provide all those notes for you.

So for anyone out there listening, if you're like, "Oh my gosh, like I'm having to sit and write notes for eight hours." No you're not, we're going to give you all those notes, we're going to get you in your very best spot so that way you don't have to stress. Like everything is all done for you, which is

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

kind of the beauty of this program. It's kind of like a made for you study plan if you want to think about it that way.

Sarah P: Yeah, and truly thinking about, you know, if I could have gotten all of those notes typed up, and I was the guinea pig, so you know, we're fine. We learned the best way to do it.

But I think truly, like those notes would have made a big difference in that aspect of being able to, okay, put the notes aside, don't think about it, don't look at them. You know, don't try to write anything down. Just be in the moment and listen to what everyone's saying.

Because even if you weren't called on and you weren't the one answering the question, there's a lot of benefit to listening to other people's rationales and answers as the questions are being asked.

Sarah: Absolutely. I can't tell you how many times a live study group participant has said to me now, "Well, I know this person got this answer wrong. And so I remembered it for my exam because I remember them getting it wrong." And I'm like, that's the whole purpose of doing this.

You don't have to know all the answers all the time. You really just have to show up to the live study groups and give it your very best effort every time. Like that is my expectation of myself, but it's also my expectation of you guys as the students as well.

Sarah P: Yeah, and I know I would go through, I would try to answer the question in my head or even out loud because I was on mute as the study group went. And that happened to me a couple times as well. Both the person being asked got it wrong, and I got it wrong. And so just that, okay, that's not the right answer, helped me on board day get the right answer.

Sarah: Yeah, absolutely. You know, what do you feel like would be your biggest piece of guidance for someone who just started this program?

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Sarah P: I think the biggest piece of guidance I can give is really, sounds cliché again, but stay on top of that study schedule. Make sure that you are listening to the videos when they're assigned.

It truly isn't a lot of work each day, which makes the program nice. It's broken down, it's very manageable to do if you're working full time, if you have a family. It's easy to get those daily assignments, if you will, in.

And I think just staying on top of those, making sure that you're not just watching the videos and if you want to take notes when you're doing that. But not just watching the videos but truly understanding each day's material.

Because the video might only be an hour. But if it's a topic that you're not so strong on maybe you take an extra hour that day to really like understand, really absorb the information so that you can get even more out of that live study group and see, you know, "I spent that extra hour learning the material, do I really know it now that they're asking questions? Is it something I need to go back on?"

So I think just making sure that you do all of the prep work on your own and hold yourself accountable in that is the most important.

Sarah: Yeah, we definitely get a lot of like stress messages of people who are wanting to sign up for the program. And they're excited about it but they're like, "How much of a time commitment is it? Like can I like accomplish this and work full time?" And I'm like, "Y'all, I worked two full time jobs when I was preparing for boards." And so I had to figure out how to make bite-sized segments work.

And what I found is, you know, when students are consistently studying for hours, and hours, and hours on end and they're not taking breaks, you're not absorbing any of that material anymore. And not only are you not absorbing that material that you're trying to learn, but you're losing the material that you already have learned.

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

And so we are very purposeful in the live study groups to make sure that students are only getting a little bit per day. I mean, there are some days where we watch 15 minutes of video and we're done for the day. So you can definitely incorporate that into your schedule to then come fully and totally prepared for the live study group.

So that way, you know, in the live study groups we're not teaching you the material, because we've already taught you the material in the courses. Instead what we're doing is we are just reinforcing all that material again, and again, and again to make sure that you remembered it the right way. And then that way you have it to use on your board exam.

Sarah P: Yeah, and just going off of that a little bit too, I was definitely, even when I first initially bought your comprehensive course, I was that student that took, you know, eight hours on a Saturday, and I was going to study for eight hours.

Sarah: Don't do it, don't do it.

Sarah P: No, I did it one Saturday and I never did it again. It's not realistic, and some people might be able to do it. But I think that most probably cannot retain that much information after studying for eight hours. You just get really burnt out.

But yeah, looking at the calendar the first day that we got the information and just being like, "I'm putting in, you know, maybe an hour a day, maybe 15 minutes a day for one month, and I'll know everything that I need to know for boards." It kind of makes it all seem possible. Because in one month of your time you can cover every topic in depth, you can know the information and be ready to go in a month.

Sarah: Yeah, being ready to go in a month is such a beautiful thing. Because I think there's so many people that graduate and they're like, "I'm going to have to spend months and months and months studying for boards." And I'm like, "No, y'all, we can get ready in four weeks."

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Now, it's going to be a bit of a sprint for those four weeks. However, we can get you ready. We can get you in a really good spot to pass your exam if you'll dedicate yourself for this month.

I mean, that's really like the big key factor. Because you know, I can't hold your hand and make you watch every 15 minute video at home. I wish I could, but I can't. And so it's all on you as a student to follow that study plan, come prepared, hold yourself accountable, and then we'll be there to hold you accountable as well.

Sarah P: Yeah. And once again I was that student as well. I graduated, I had planned initially to take my board exam either late March, early April of this year of 21. I ended up doing the live study group, four weeks later I took my boards early January and passed. So I mean I moved them up months because of this live study group.

Sarah: Which is awesome. And obviously you didn't need all that time because you passed.

Sarah P: Exactly.

Sarah: Yeah, you passed no problem.

Sarah P: Yeah, and I truly did. And that's not to say I know everything because I definitely don't. But I felt like the live study group prepared me well enough to go in there. I took it, there were definitely a couple questions I didn't know, everybody's going to get that. But I felt confident when I pressed submit that, "Okay, I passed it. And this good."

Sarah: And something we try to reinforce with the live study groups too is you don't have to know everything. Like people almost like enter into board preparation sometimes and they're like, "I have to know 100% of everything. I have to know every last little like nitty gritty detail."

And I'm like, "Y'all, this test is trying to make sure that you are going to be a safe, competent novice nurse practitioner. And novice nurse practitioners

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

and all the experienced nurse practitioners out there to do not know 100% of everything, which is why you only need a 70% to pass. Which is why we can do this in a month.” Like we can get you through all these topics in a month, we can reinforce that baseline knowledge base, and you can be ready to go for boards and you can be ready to go for practice, too.

Sarah P: Yeah, and even those one off questions that you maybe think, “Oh, had I known more or had I gone more in depth on the studying.” You can use the baseline knowledge you have just to critically think a little bit and be like, “Okay, I can get there. This is an educated guess, you know, it may or may not be the right answer, but this is my best educated guess.” And so I feel like you can use that even baseline knowledge to get those more complex questions answered.

Sarah: Yeah, I absolutely agree with that. And I think people also underestimate test taking strategies, too. I'm like, if you get a question and you really don't know, like here are five tools that you can use. Like maybe there's one word in the answer choice that makes it wrong. Like absolute language like always, only, never.

I've used those tools again and again on exams and so it makes what feels like an impossible question seem possible again because you're like, “Oh, I can at least get it down to two now. So I know I can kind of work my way out, I can really make that good, educated guess.”

Sarah P: Yeah. And I do think, you know, test taking strategies and the anxiety that you, you know, stress to get under control, two big things. And I feel like the live study groups actually did help with that. Because, you know, like I said, I was anxious going into it, was nervous if I didn't know the right answer.

So that kind of forced me to take a moment to be like, “Okay, this is the case study they presented, this is the question they're asking. Let's calm down and think about what I know and make an educated guess. So I feel

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

like that really helped me with that mindset of just like, take a minute and think about it.

Sarah: Yeah, it's so funny you're talking about calming down because I was talking to a student earlier and it popped right out my mouth. I was like, "You know, just calm down, take a deep breath." And then I like messaged her again and I'm like, "Well, I'm not sure that calm down and taking boards really go in the same sentence together." But if we could try to relax a little bit, I think you're going to be just fine if you can do X, Y, and Z.

Sarah P: Absolutely, yep. And you'll realize after, just like I did, that you should have calmed down and taken a breath, because you worked yourself up way too much beforehand.

Sarah: Yeah, about sensitivity and specificity.

Sarah P: Absolutely.

Sarah: Yep. And then finally, you know, my last question, do you feel like these groups just prepared you for your board exam? Or do you feel like they were preparation for future practice too?

Sarah P: I definitely feel like it prepared me for future practice. One, just because it's solidified the knowledge base, which we've talked about before, solidified what I knew. But two, it helped really apply them to case studies.

Because you can do practice question after practice question, which is very important for board prep. But I feel like applying it to a real patient scenario, like they do in the live studies was just super helpful for practice after boards.

And just the ability to say that you don't know, I think that live study groups helped with that as well. Because, you know, you don't know everything, like we've said. So if you're in a situation with a patient, they ask you a question you just don't know, I think that it's okay and you need to be

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

confident enough that you don't know. And just explain that, you know, I'm going to look it up for you, I'm going to get the answer. But I truly don't know the answer to your question. So I think it helps with all of that.

Sarah: Yeah, I definitely think, you know, when you're in the real patient setting there are so many different things that could be going on with that patient. And we try to capture that in the case scenarios but, you know, we're also kind of on a time schedule, too. So we can't always like deep, deep dive way down to those case scenarios.

But just having the clarity and the confidence to be like, "Even if I don't know the answer, I can still figure out where to get this answer. I know what resources I can use." I think that is one of the best things that you can be doing as a new nurse practitioner.

Sarah P: Yeah, yep. And I truly feel like your review, the live review prepped me for all of that.

Sarah: That makes my heart so happy to hear. And I'm so happy to get to talk to you again. And thank you so much for coming on the show and kind of deep diving with me a little bit into what these groups are like, because hopefully it will help our listeners understand this very unique board preparation experience that I get tons and tons and tons of questions on.

Sarah P: Yeah, absolutely. It was great to talk with you again as well and I truly would recommend it for anybody.

Sarah: Thank you so much. And everybody out there listening I'll be talking to you next week.

As an extra bonus, friends, if you're looking for support, no matter what phase of your nurse practitioner journey that you're currently in. I have communities available for both students and new nurse practitioners. In these communities we work to uplift one another and grow this profession together every single day. Links to join will be included for you in the show notes.

[Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner Podcast](#) with Sarah Michelle

Ep #16: Board Exam Prep: Live Study Groups with Sarah P.

Thanks for listening to Becoming A Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit stressfreenp.com. See you next week.