Analyzing blood gases is like driving a car. There are specific steps that must be followed to be successful. Step 1: PaO2 level = does the PaO2 show hypoxemia yes or not? Step 2: Interpret the pH level: is it on the acidic or alkaline side? Step 3: PaC02 level: does the PaC02 show respiratory acidosis, alkalosis, or normalcy? Step 4: HC)3 level: Does the HC)3 show metabolic acidosis, alkalosis or normalcy? Step 5: pH level: Does the pH show a compensated or an uncompensated condition?

Each step followed in order will help the students work through the analysis. When steps are missed then the analysis will lack precision.

I use the analogy of driving a car frequently when I teach. I use it to try to get students to understand that they must practice until they can complete things like ABG interpretation, or sterile technique, or IV insertion, or any of the other things that require us to practice until perfect. So many of the skills need to be able to be completed without having to think through each step each time, and practice is the only way to get to that level of proficiency.