NURSING ADMISSIONS INTERVIEWS

Nursing schools conduct interviews to evaluate a candidate’s academic preparation, related experience, personal qualities, communication skills, career goals and fit with their educational program. Interview formats vary for nursing schools, but usually include interviews with faculty, meetings with current students and student affairs staff, and tours of the facilities. You may be interviewed by one person or a panel of interviewers. Your interviewer(s) may have reviewed your application (open file interview) or have no knowledge of your application (closed file interview). It is critical to evaluate ahead of time what is most important for interviewers to know about your background, preparation for nursing school, experience, and your career goals.

Interviewers develop an impression of how you look, dress, speak, and act in order to provide their feedback to the admissions committee. You may improve your chances for interview success through preparation, reflection and evaluation. When preparing, keep in mind the skills and qualifications that nursing schools are seeking in candidates. Practice talking about your skills, accomplishments and career goals. You need to inspire confidence in your ability and potential to be a successful nursing student and to become a compassionate and skilled nurse.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: PREPARE AND PRACTICE

Schedule plenty of time to practice before interviews. Evaluate and know yourself.

- Practice describing your accomplishments, experience, education, skills, career goals...
- Review your written application – know it well and incorporate it into your verbal answers.
- Answering typical practice questions will help you to be ready for other questions.
- For each skill you have, prepare detailed examples of where you demonstrated that skill.
- Prepare to describe yourself and to state your value as a candidate.
- Why do you want to become a nurse? How have you prepared for nursing school?
- Practice answering interview questions out loud with someone else and in front of a mirror.
- Practice with a web cam using the typical interview questions on UA Interview Prep: [http://www.career.arizona.edu/student/jobs-and-interviewing/ua-interview-prep](http://www.career.arizona.edu/student/jobs-and-interviewing/ua-interview-prep)
- Career Services provides individual mock interviews and career counseling by appointment.

Research nursing, health care, current issues, and the nursing school programs.

- Read up on the fields of nursing of interest to you.
- Practice discussing topics and issues in health care and nursing (ethical, social and legislative issues).
- Review the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics for Nurses.
- Review the nursing school’s student Code of Conduct and Academic Integrity policies.
- Research nursing schools you are applying to (curriculum, resources, size, faculty, facilities, location, rankings, costs, student services, specializations, student clubs, history, reputation…)
- Be prepared to articulate your specific reasons for why you want to attend a particular school.
- Talk to nurses, faculty, nursing students, and admissions staff.
- Conduct your research to develop questions you will ask during interviews.
DURING THE INTERVIEW: PRESENTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Arrive early, greet the interviewer by their formal name, smile and offer a firm handshake.
- Your body language, facial expressions, poise, mannerisms, clothes, grooming, and overall presentation and appearance are being evaluated during an interview.
- Be professionally dressed in a suit that fits you well in a color that complements you.
- Turn cell phones off throughout interview (don’t text in the lobby or waiting area).
- When you are called, stand up, smile, offer your handshake, and greet your interviewer formally. (“Good morning Dr. Rose. I am Zia Smith. It is a pleasure to meet you.”)
- Listen attentively and be aware of your body language.
- Maintain good eye contact and nod your head appropriately. Be poised and expressive.
- Sit up straight, unfold your arms, uncross your legs, lean slightly forward -- try to relax.
- Avoid distracting hand movements, squirming in chair, and touching your face or hair.

Listen attentively. Be concise, to the point and answer the question that is being asked.
- Provide detailed answers and specific examples (avoid yes and no responses).
- Give specific examples of past situations where you demonstrated the skills and desired behavioral competencies required for nursing school and a career in nursing.
- Be confident, honest, friendly, cooperative, enthusiastic, positive and professional.
- Speak clearly and concisely. Use proper grammar and professional language.
- Avoid saying filler phrases: *like, you know, in other words, to be honest with you, to tell you the truth, long story short, as I said before, you know what I mean, um, uh...*

Ask quality questions.
- Decide what you want to know and what you will ask before you go to your interview.
- Use your research about the school to demonstrate your knowledge and interest in their particular school so you may determine topics you want to ask interviewers about, including curriculum, student support services, research, evaluations, faculty and staff, facilities, rotations, preceptorships, community connections, and resources available for students...

Thank the interviewer(s) and leave promptly (do not linger or try to prolong the interview).
- Don’t linger - watch for cues that the interview is over and leave promptly.
- Express your appreciation for the interview, summarize your skills, state your interest in being admitted, stand up, smile and say thank you as you shake hands.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW: REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Keep written notes of all of your interviews. Who interviewed you, when, what was discussed...
Evaluate your performance to determine your interviewing strengths and weaknesses.
- How did the interview go? Did you highlight your education, experience, and skills?
- Did you ask good questions to show interest in nursing and knowledge of the school?
- Did you support your skills and accomplishments with specific examples?
- Closed interview with a short summary of skills, stated your interest in program, and said thank you.
- After interview, made detailed notes of questions you were asked and everything discussed.
- What worked well for you? What could you do better during your next interview?
**ASSESS YOUR SKILLS**

Identifying your skills will help you prepare for the questions nursing school admissions interviewers ask. Describe your experiences, skills, knowledge and qualifications as they relate to the nursing program you are interviewing for now. Analyze the skills and qualifications the schools are seeking and prepare to talk about how and where you have demonstrated the required skills, strengths, competencies and characteristics through your education and experiences. Focus on measurable skills and specific examples where you can cite evidence of your skills and knowledge. Use the STAR approach to talk about your history and your strongest skills.

**Behaviors and skills being evaluated include:**

- academic skills
- scientific knowledge
- communication
- ethical decision-making
- compassion
- empathy
- logical & critical thinking
- analytical reasoning
- problem solving
- professionalism
- time & stress management
- altruism
- accepting criticism & feedback
- leadership
- learning new things quickly
- teambuilding & teamwork
- achievement orientation
- flexibility & adaptability
- learning from successes
- interpersonal skills
- showing initiative
- conducting research
- taking & giving direction
- nurturing others
- community service
- health care experience
- decision making

**STAR: skills focused approach to answering interview questions**

- Recall 10 successful experiences where you liked what you did and you did it well.
- Identify 10 challenging experiences where things did not go as planned or you were not pleased with your performance or the outcome.
- Use various situations to describe your experiences from college, jobs, internships, hospitals, clinics, community service, campus activities, student involvement, class projects, teamwork, research, labs, volunteer roles, leadership roles, committees, etc...
- Evaluate skills you used and how you were effective during each experience.
- A strong story demonstrates use of *multiple skills in one situation*.
- Practice telling detailed stories about your experiences, describing:

  - **Situation:** challenges, problems, concerns, issues, conflicts
  - **Tasks:** your responsibilities and role in the situation
  - **Actions:** your behaviors, focusing on skills and competencies you used
  - **Results:** outcomes, accomplishments, what you contributed, how you were effective

Create a list of each of your top 10 skills with at least two situations where you demonstrated each skill, using the STAR method to describe what you did and how you were effective in 20 varied situations.

**Skill: ____________________

**Situation #1:** ____________________________________________
  Tasks: _______________________________________________
  Actions: ______________________________________________
  Results: ______________________________________________

**Situation #2:** ____________________________________________
  Tasks: _______________________________________________
  Actions: ______________________________________________
  Results: ______________________________________________
INTERVIEW PRACTICE QUESTIONS

You need to inspire confidence in your ability to succeed in nursing school and the profession. Keep in mind the skills and qualifications that schools are seeking in candidates. You communicated your skills, qualifications and motivations in your application to get invited to an interview. Now you must present your case verbally and communicate why you believe you are a qualified candidate for nursing school and the nursing profession. Before every interview, practice talking about your motivation, influences, skills, accomplishments, and career goals.

Interview questions may cover many topics, but you must be prepared to talk about:

- the role of a nurse and why you want to be a nurse (educational and career intent)
- what influenced your decision and motivates you to pursue a nursing career
- why you applied to and what you know about this nursing school
- what you have done to prepare to be a successful nursing student
- qualities you have to become an excellent compassionate nurse
- current issues in health care and knowledge of nursing as a profession
- your health care setting experiences and patient interactions (clinical, non-clinical, research, community service, hospital, public health, education, teaching, etc.)
- compassion, empathy, altruism, commitment to be of service to society
- professionalism, character, attitude, integrity, maturity, honesty, flexibility
- sensitivity to studying with, working with and serving diverse populations

The following list of typical admissions interview questions is provided to help you practice for your interview. You may want to think about other possible questions and topics.

- Why do you want to be a nurse? (intent, purpose, motivation, personal awareness)
- What is the role of a nurse? (career knowledge of nursing)
- What type of nurse do you want to be? (goals, interests, career paths)
- Why should we admit you? What makes you a strong candidate for nursing school?
- When did you decide on nursing as a profession? (influence and background)
- Describe your related experiences. (volunteer, community service, clinical, hospital, research…)
- How did the nurses and doctors you volunteered with influence your outlook on health care?
- What qualities do you have that will help make you a good nurse? (strengths, knowledge of nursing)
- Tell me about yourself and how you have prepared for nursing school. (give brief overview)
- How has your experience and education prepared you for nursing school?
- How did you choose your undergraduate school and your major? (decision making process)
- What are your greatest strengths and skills?
- What problems and challenges do you anticipate during nursing school?
- What challenges do you think you will face during your nursing career?
- What changes would you like to see made in the current health care delivery system?
- What will you do if you do not get into nursing school? What is your second career choice?
- Describe what you are doing to improve two of your weaknesses. Be specific.
- Why do you want to go to this school? What do you know about this nursing school?
- What criteria are you using to evaluate potential nursing schools?
- If you caught a fellow student cheating on a test, what would you do?
- What resources do you use to keep current on the trends in nursing? What do you read?
- Describe your greatest strengths and skills. Give me detailed examples of each one.
- Do you have any questions you would like to ask me? (always have questions to ask)
- Is there anything else you want to tell me and the admissions committee?
BEHAVIORAL-BASED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Behavioral-based interviews involve questions asking you for detailed and specific examples of past situations demonstrating you have the skills, competencies and work behaviors a nursing school wants to find in candidates. This popular interview questioning style focuses on evaluating your past behaviors to predict your future behaviors and your potential for success.

Interviewers ask for examples of past situations with positive or negative results and want you to describe the situation, what you did, challenges you faced, and the outcome. Identify specific situations where you demonstrated the required competencies, skills and qualifications required for admissions. Give examples of your past situations using the **STAR Approach** to tell your story by describing the:

- **Situation:** challenges, problems, concerns, issues, conflicts
- **Tasks:** your responsibilities and role in the situation
- **Actions:** focusing on your behavior and the skills you used
- **Results:** outcomes, accomplishments, what you contributed, how you were effective

- Tell me about a time you believe you made a difference with a patient. What type of challenges did you face? What did you do? What did you contribute to the situation?
- Describe an accomplishment. What did you do to make that happen? Be specific.
- Tell me about a time when you performed well in a stressful situation. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you were (or you were not) satisfied with your performance.
- Give me an example of a time you had to make an ethical decision.
- Describe a problem you had in a health care setting. Tell me how you went about solving it.
- What was the biggest challenge you faced when you were a hospice volunteer?
- Describe a challenging situation you faced with a patient and their family.
- Describe a time when you did (or did not) perform well in a stressful situation.
- Describe how you dealt with the grief you experienced as a hospice volunteer.
- Describe your biggest challenge in preparing for nursing school. How did you overcome it?
- Describe a time when you volunteered or worked as a member of an interdisciplinary health care team. Describe your role. What did you contribute? What challenges did you face?
- Tell me about a situation when you were part of a team and a team member was not performing their role as expected. What did you do? What were the results?
- Describe a time when you worked as a member of a team. What was your contribution?
- Describe a time you successfully managed multiple tasks. How did you prioritize?
- Describe a recent problem you attempted to solve using a systematic and logical process.
- Tell me how you handled a conflict with a co-worker. What did you learn from that?
- Tell me about a weakness you used to have. What did you do to improve that skill?
- Tell me about a time when you made suggestions for improving a process or procedure.
- How were you effective in your most recent volunteer experience? What challenges did you have to overcome? What did you contribute? What did you learn?
- Describe a situation where you took the initiative and went beyond what was expected of you in order to complete a work project or class assignment.
- Tell me about a time when you utilized good listening skills and empathy.
- Describe a time when you effectively interacted with people from diverse backgrounds in a health care environment. What were the challenges and how did you handle them?
PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCE COUNTS! DRESS UP!

It is always better to be conservative and overdressed than underdressed in interviews. When in doubt, you will always be safe in a professional suit! Classic cut matching suits and shined shoes are recommended for men and women, to make a positive first impression.

✓ Dress conservatively in dark colors such as navy blue and dark gray suits that fit you well.
✓ Choose natural suit fabrics that don’t wrinkle – preferably wool gabardine.
✓ Wear minimal jewelry. Have neat hair and clean fingernails.
✓ Prepare in advance – avoid last minute shopping in case you need time for alterations.
✓ Try on your suit before the interview to be sure it fits and makes you look professional.
✓ Be well groomed, use deodorant but not cologne or perfume.
✓ Avoid eating garlic and onions before interviews. Carry breath mints.
✓ You might carry a dark portfolio with your resume, paper for notes, and a nice pen.
✓ If interviewing in the winter on the east coast, you may need an overcoat.
✓ If you are traveling to interviews, pack light. Carry your suit in a small carry-on suitcase or garment bag – do not check your bags and risk losing your luggage when flying to interviews.

WOMEN
• Wear a navy blue or dark gray matching suit.
• Find a great fit that complements your body type and a color that complements your skin tone.
• Professional suits with skirts and/or pants are acceptable.
• Skirts should be about knee length (not too short – no thigh showing when you’re sitting).
• Wear a long sleeved, ironed blouse in white or beige.
• Sleeveless and low necklines are not professional - no armpits or cleavage please!
• Wear low heeled, closed-toe and closed-heel pumps (polished) and hose with skirted suits.
• Wear flat or low-heeled, closed-toe black polished shoes with slacks.
• Do not wear open toe or open heel shoes, sandals, spiked heels, or bare legs with a suit.
• Wear hose neutral in color or matching the color of your suit, free of runs or snags.
• Only use light make-up. Make sure fingernails are clean - avoid flashy nail polish colors.
• Have well groomed hair pulled away from your face so you will not touch it when you talk.

MEN
• Wear dark matching suits in navy blue or dark gray solid color or thin pinstripes.
• Single-breasted jackets are more common than double-breasted.
• Find a great fit that complements your body type.
• Long-sleeved, ironed white or blue cotton shirts, with cuff extending ¼” below the jacket sleeve.
• Wear a white t-shirt under your button down dress shirt - especially if you tend to sweat.
• Conservative silk ties should complement suit and be as wide as your lapels (2¾” to 3½”).
• The bottom tip of your tie should land in the middle of your belt when you are standing.
• Black shined shoes with a matching belt.
• Dark socks long enough that your skin does not show when sitting with your legs crossed.
• Well-groomed hair. Make sure your nails are clean and manicured.
• Be clean shaven or have your beard and mustache neatly trimmed.