

NURSING ADMISSIONS INTERVIEWS

How you present yourself during your nursing school admissions interview will influence your chance of being accepted. In the first few minutes of an interview, the interviewer will develop an instant impression of how you look, speak, and act so it is important to dress professionally and be very well prepared. There are no absolutes with admissions interviews; however, there are ways to increase your chances for success through preparation, reflection and evaluation.

There are basically three steps to the interview process: **Before**, **During**, and **After**.

I. BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: PREPARE AND PRACTICE

Evaluate and know yourself.

- Practice describing your background, accomplishments, experience, education, skills, goals...
- Review your written application and personal statement.
- Practice answering interview questions out loud with someone else or in front of a mirror.
- Answering practice questions is critical to help you to be ready for other questions.
- Mock interviews are available through Career Services – call 520.621.2546 for counseling appts.
- Prepare to sell yourself. Ask yourself: Who am I? What are my skills and abilities?
What makes me qualified and prepared? What do I have to offer to a nursing program?

Research nursing, healthcare, current issues, and the nursing schools.

- Read up on the fields of nursing of interest to you.
- Practice discussing current topics and issues in healthcare.
- Research nursing schools you are applying to (curriculum, history, reputation, resources, size, faculty, facilities, location, rankings, costs, student services, specializations...)
- Develop questions you will ask about the school during your interview
- 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.
- What criteria do schools use to evaluate candidates? What are the profiles of typical candidates?

Dress professionally.

- Dress conservatively in a professional suit.
- It is always better to be over-dressed than under-dressed.
- Men should wear a white button-down shirt with a t-shirt underneath, conservative tie, socks that cover their calves and shined shoes that match the color of their belt.
- Women should wear closed toe shoes with hose. (low heels with skirts or flats with slacks)
- Everyone should have neat hair, minimal jewelry, and skip the cologne or perfume.

ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

These two exercises may help you identify your skills and competencies in preparation for the questions interviewers might ask you. You will need to identify and describe your skills, characteristics, experiences and qualifications as they relate to the position you are interviewing for now. Review the description of the College of Nursing program to identify their skill requirements – what is being evaluated to consider students for admissions?



STAR SKILLS METHOD

- Recall 10 successful experiences where you liked what you did and you did it well
- Identify 10 experiences where you liked what you did and you did it well but things did not go as planned, did not work out or you were not pleased with your performance.
- Use various situations to describe your experiences from college, jobs, internships, campus activities, student involvement, class projects, teamwork, research, volunteer roles, leadership roles, committees, community service, etc...
- Evaluate the skills you used during your experiences.
- Practice telling detailed stories about your experiences, describing:

Situation, challenge, problem, concern

Tasks and responsibilities

Actions, behaviors, skills and competencies you used

Results, outcomes, accomplishments, what you learned and contributed

TOP FIVE SKILLS METHOD

- Identify 10-15 skills, strengths, experiences and characteristics you have.
- Rank order these and then identify your **TOP FIVE**.
- Write down examples of **TWO situations for each of your TOP FIVE skills** where you used or demonstrated your competencies. Now you have TEN stories to tell.
- Use the STAR Approach to describe the situation, tasks, actions and results.
- Focus on measurable skills and specific examples where you can cite evidence of your related skills, knowledge and experience.
- Outline your **TOP FIVE** examples on note cards for review before interviews.
- Practice telling your stories until you can determine your best examples.

II. DURING THE INTERVIEW: PRESENTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Nursing schools interviewers must easily recognize your ability. You must “sell” your ability and potential. Be honest, sincere, confident, relaxed, and positive. Some general guidelines:

Arrive early, greet the interviewer by their formal name, smile and offer a firm handshake.

- 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.

Be concise, to the point and answer the question that is being asked.

- Be friendly, positive and enthusiastic.
- Speak clearly and concisely. Use proper grammar. Avoid saying like, you know, um, uh...
- Demonstrate your knowledge of yourself and your interest in their particular school.
- State your opinions confidently.
- Provide detailed answers and specific examples (avoid yes and no responses).

Ask quality questions.

- Decide what you want to know and what you will ask before you go to your interview.
- Possible topics to ask your interviewers about include curriculum, preceptorships, rotations, student support services, research, evaluations, faculty and staff, facilities, resources available for students, and the interviewer’s background.

Thank the interviewer(s).

- 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 and say thank you as you shake hands.

III. 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 well with a short summary of skills, stated your interests, 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?

CRITERIA USED TO EVALUATE CANDIDATES

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

- ✓ Undergraduate grades (above average) and honors
- ✓ Degree focus and choice of undergraduate school
- ✓ Demonstrated scientific knowledge in organic chemistry, biological sciences, physical sciences, math, physiology

EXPERIENCE AND ACTIVITIES

- ✓ Work experience and volunteer experience (clinical, non-clinical, research)
- ✓ Patient interaction experience
- ✓ Community service
- ✓ Campus involvement and service with student organizations and clubs; leadership roles

PERSONAL QUALITIES

- ✓ Concern for helping others, altruistic
- ✓ Empathetic and compassionate
- ✓ Ethical decision maker
- ✓ Investigative mind, scientific focus, analytical and methodical
- ✓ Communication: good listener, speaker and writer; ability to articulate ideas and opinions
- ✓ Maturity, integrity, honesty, character, leadership, attitude, interpersonal skills
- ✓ Achievement orientation (especially demonstrated during the past 2-3 years)
- ✓ Ability to manage time and stress, able to prioritize
- ✓ Ability to take direction and to accept feedback

EVIDENCE OF PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ Appearance: clothes, grooming, body language, poise, mannerisms, smile
- ✓ Conversational ability, interpersonal skills, attitude
- ✓ Communication: content of your answers and the quality of the questions you ask
- ✓ Ability to talk about yourself, nursing and your motivation for a career in healthcare
- ✓ Able to discuss current trends in nursing and healthcare delivery
- ✓ Knowledgeable about particular school – able to talk about specific criteria
- ✓ Can inspire confidence in your ability to become a nurse

INTERVIEW PRACTICE QUESTIONS

You need to inspire confidence in your ability to succeed in nursing school. Keep in mind the skills and qualifications that nursing schools are seeking in candidates. You communicated your skills and qualifications in your application to get invited to an interview. Now you must sell yourself verbally and communicate why you believe you are a qualified candidate. Before every interview, practice talking about your motivation, influences, intent, skills, qualifications, 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 healthcare

Behaviors and skills being evaluated include:

ethical decision-making	analytical reasoning	problem solving
scientific knowledge	time management	accepting feedback
verbal communication	written communication	leadership
altruistic	learning new things quickly	handling pressure
showing empathy	teambuilding	working under stress
achievement orientation	flexibility	academic skills
learning from successes	interpersonal skills	showing initiative
patient interactions	conducting research	taking direction

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 go to nursing school? (evaluates motivation & personal awareness)
- When did you first decide on nursing as a profession? (influence & background)
- Describe your related experiences. (volunteer, community service, clinical, research, etc.)
- What qualities do you have that will help make you a good nurse? (strengths, knowledge of nursing)
- Tell me about yourself. (self awareness, communication skills, qualifications)
- How has your experience prepared you for nursing school?
- What factors have influenced your decision to attend nursing school?
- What qualities should a good nurse have? (knowledge of career field)
- What is the role of a nurse?
- Why do you want to be a nurse? (intent and purpose)
- What type of nurse do you want to be? (goals, interests, career paths)
- How did you choose your undergraduate school? choose your major? (decision making process)
- What are your greatest strengths and skills? (give detailed examples of each)
- How has your undergraduate education prepared you for nursing school?
- 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 healthcare 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.
- How many nursing schools have you applied to?
- Where else have you applied for admission? What's your first choice and why?
- 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?
- How did the nurses and doctors you volunteered with influence your outlook on healthcare?
- If you caught a fellow student cheating on a test, what would you do?
- What regrets do you have about your college education and experience up until now?
- What resources do you use to keep current on the trends in nursing? What do you read?
- 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?

BEHAVIORAL BASED INTERVIEWS involve questions where you are asked for specific examples of past situations that demonstrate you have the skills, competencies, and work behaviors a nursing school wants to find in the “ideal” nursing student. Analyze the skills and qualifications required for admission, and then identify situations where you demonstrated these skills and behaviors in your education and experience.

Give specific examples, using a story format, describing:

Situation, challenge, problem, concern

Tasks and responsibilities

Actions, behaviors, skills and competencies you used

Results, outcomes, accomplishments, what you learned and contributed

- 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 healthcare setting. Tell me how you went about solving it.
- Describe a time when you worked as a member of a team. What was your contribution?
- What was the biggest challenge you faced when you were a hospice volunteer?
- How did you deal with the grief of the loss you experienced?
- Tell me about a time you believe you made a difference with a patient.
- Describe a challenging situation you faced with a patient and their family.

Career Services Resources

- ✓ UA Interview Prep is an interactive program in Wildcat JobLink to help you polish your interviewing skills with hundreds of practice questions using a web cam: <http://career.arizona.edu/students/?interviewprep>
- ✓ Career Services counselors are available to discuss interviewing strategies
- ✓ Mock Interviews are offered all year: <http://career.arizona.edu/Students/?mock>
- ✓ Interviewing Professional Development Seminars: <http://career.arizona.edu/Calendar/>