



Memorial College of Nursing | Southside College of Health Sciences



INTERVIEWS MADE SIMPLE

For Nursing Students and New Graduates



5 TIPS FOR INTERVIEW SUCCESS

1 DRESS PROFESSIONALLY.

As clothing grows more casual, interview attire is changing as well. In today's *healthcare interview*, here are suggestions:

Women	Nice blouse or sweater with dress pants or skirt. A coordinating jacket is optional.
Men	Dress shirt with tie, dress slacks (blazer/suit are optional).
All	Wrinkle-free clothing. Dress shoes (close-toed) safe for walking on hard floors, minimal jewelry and fragrance, perfect hygiene, neat fingernails.

2 **ARRIVE 10 MINUTES EARLY**—but prepare to wait—since priorities in healthcare change quickly. Avoid arriving late and plan ahead for parking challenges. If you are running late, call and let the director know.

If you are still waiting for the manager 15 minutes after the scheduled appointment time, politely remind someone in case the director was delayed or has forgotten.

3 **BRING YOUR RESUME.** Contact Career Services for samples.

4 **SMILE**, make eye contact, and introduce yourself when you meet the hiring manager. Beginning with the COVID-19 pandemic, the tradition of shaking hands is not always expected. Be open to extending your hand if the interviewer extends their hand. If this is a group interview, make eye contact with each member as you answer questions.

5 At end of interview, **THANK** all interviewers for their time, express continued interest in the position, and indicate that you look forward to hearing from them once they've made their decision. Follow up with a thank you email or note, re-stating your interest and what you have to offer.



6 COMMON INTERVIEW TOPICS & HOW TO HANDLE THEM

1 TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

This is a common “ice-breaker” to start the interview.

Don’t tell a long, personal history or mention where you were born, your age or marital status.

Instead, prepare a few sentences that summarize your most recent education and work experience. This can also be a brief story explaining how you arrived at this point, and why you’re interested in the specific opening.

Good Example

“ I am a junior at Bon Secours Memorial College of Nursing. Before attending there, I graduated with a BS in Biology from VCU. I have worked in a veterinarian’s office for the past 3 years. I also volunteer with the American Red Cross once a month. ”

Good Example

“ I will graduate in May and I’ve been working as a Patient Care Tech at Southside Medical Center for the past year. I’ve had many chances to interact with patients and the healthcare team, which has been great. I’ve also noticed the excellent teamwork among the nurses on that unit. ”

2 TELL ME ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS/WEAKNESSES.

Nursing leaders need to know what you are good at and what may set you apart from other applicants. Everyone possesses strengths. Often, these are qualities about which friends or employers compliment you.

Strengths are things you do naturally well.

Some interviewers also ask about a weakness. Be honest about an area where you have struggled in the past, and how you have worked to improve it.

These questions reveal how well you know yourself.



TELL ME ABOUT YOUR STRENGTHS (CONT'D)

EXAMPLES OF STRENGTHS INCLUDE

- **Assertiveness**
Will you speak up and ask questions when you need to? Can you advocate for your patients?
- **Leadership**
Do you have a history of leadership? Those patterns often start early and continue throughout life. Give examples.
- **Listening**
You need to listen to instructions, to patients, physicians, managers. Are you a quiet person, but a great listener?
- **Interpersonal Communication**
Are you effective in handling upset patients or anxious children? Do you have the ability to explain procedures, “read” what’s going on in a situation, provide patient discharge education, explain the purpose of procedures, medications, etc.? (Some of these examples apply to RNs only). Give examples.
- **Flexibility**
Do you adapt to change easily? Give an example.
- **Time Management**
This is very important in busy healthcare settings. Give examples of how you manage your time.
- **Problem Solving**
Can you “think on your feet?” Can you analyze and solve problems? Give an example.
- **Teamwork**
This is essential in all healthcare roles. Give examples.
- **Detail Orientation**
Do you pay attention to the details? Are you accurate? Have you ‘caught’ errors before? Give examples.
- **Standards of Quality**
How do you show you care about doing things correctly? Have you ever made quality improvements? Explain.
- **Stress Management**
If you seem to handle stress better than most, say so. Give an example.



3 GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW YOU HAVE WORKED ON A TEAM.

Teamwork is one of the most highly valued skills. Be sure to give examples of times when you worked effectively as a team member.

During the interview, the unit director will be thinking...

"Can this person work with my team?"

4 DESCRIBE YOUR RELIABILITY.

This means that others can count on you.

Even if you are not asked directly, reliability is a concern in the back of the interviewer's mind. Try to find a way of telling the interviewer that if hired, they can count on you to be dependable and committed to doing a quality job.

“ — Good Examples — ”

I have had an excellent class attendance throughout nursing school. In my weekend job, I never call out sick and I am willing to work extra hours during our busy season.

...

Even while attending college full-time, I have worked 15 hours per week and my supervisor considers me to be highly reliable.

...

While working in Pediatrics, I only called out once due to the flu. Otherwise, I was among the most dependable techs/nurses in our unit.

”



5 WHY WOULD YOU BE THE BEST PERSON FOR THIS JOB?

This question can catch you off guard. A good response may be to highlight one of your strengths again... or an experience that sets you apart from others.



Good Examples

I have been told by past managers that they value my flexibility. Sometimes our unit is slow so I am floated to CCU or PTU. I can easily adjust and jump right in to help.

...

Having volunteered with Team Haiti and also in Appalachia with RAM, I think I've grown in my ability to work as a team member and communicate with patients who are very different from me.

...

I have had the opportunity to work in healthcare for more than 5 years, starting as a CNA just out of high school. During that time, I've cared for patients of all ages with a wide variety of illnesses. I believe my experience and flexibility will help me succeed if I'm selected.

...

Having worked as a nurse in both med/surg and radiology areas, I have a broad range of experiences. In addition, I served on the Safety Committee for 2 years and the Quality Improvement Committee for a year... so I think my unique perspective on quality nursing will be valuable in this role.

...

My elderly grandparents lived with my family when I was young. When my grandmother began receiving hospice care, I was right there helping whenever I could. That experience has made me very sensitive to the issues faced by both patients and families.





6 WHAT INTERESTS YOU ABOUT THIS POSITION, OR OUR HOSPITAL?

Draw a connection between yourself and the job or organization. Be prepared to explain how your nursing interests align with the opening. Tell how your values are a good match for those of the organization. The hospital's web site (home page) is a good place to read about its values and mission.

Bon Secours Mercy Health holds these values: Human Dignity, Compassion, Justice, Integrity, Stewardship and Service.



Good Examples

I share your hospital's value of human dignity. I believe every patient deserves my respect and compassionate care.

...

I noticed on your web site that your hospital is a leader in cardiac surgery. I am very interested in working with cardiac patients as I progress in my career.





SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS

SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO TELL YOUR STORY

The Situational (or Behavioral) Interview is a common interview style. Questions prompt you to recall stories from the past, like “Think about a time when xyz happened. How did you handle it?” Give yourself a moment to think of the best possible answer—and then respond with a short story.

Examples

- 1 Describe the biggest challenge you faced in your last job/clinical and how you handled it.
...
- 2 Tell me about a work or school situation where you had to demonstrate creative problem solving.
...
- 3 Tell me about a time you’ve received constructive criticism from a manager or supervisor. What happened and how did you respond to it?

Tell a short story in your response.

If you have never encountered the situation as described, say so, but offer your best explanation of how you *would* handle it if it occurred.



SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS (CONT'D)

WAYS TO PREPARE FOR SITUATIONAL INTERVIEWS

- Analyze the job posting, paying attention to the skills required.
- Read over your own resume and recall past jobs.
- Rehearse brief stories—think of at least two—one that describes your problem-solving skills, and one concerning your communication skills.

OTHER POPULAR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

“

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

...

What is your 5 year Plan?

...

Suppose your patient presented with _____
(symptoms.) What would you do first? Why?

”



PEER OR PANEL INTERVIEWS

Peer (or Panel) Interviews involve a group of employees interviewing the job candidate. These are recommended as a best practice by many in the field of human resources and are common in healthcare. Here are specific suggestions:

- 1** Arrive 10 minutes early, but be prepared to wait. It sometimes takes longer than expected to gather a group together, even if they have this appointment on their calendar.
- 2** Smile and take a deep breath before entering the room. Everything you've done up to this point has prepared you.
- 3** When you are introduced, greet everyone in the room with a friendly smile and be seated. If someone offers to shake your hand, respond accordingly. (This is less common following the COVID-19 pandemic.)
- 4** It's OK to say that you're nervous. Most job candidates are! The group will usually act friendlier and less threatening if you go ahead and just admit it. They don't want you to be nervous.

Typically, group members will take turns asking questions. If the group has not interviewed together before, it can feel awkward. Knowing this might keep you from thinking that you are giving bad answers.



As you respond to interview questions, make eye contact with all the group members. Don't just look at the person asking the question.

5 Give yourself a moment to think of the best answer before responding to the question. Ask for the question to be repeated if necessary.

6 If it is a multi-part question, answer it to the best of your ability and then say, "Did I answer that completely?" or "Did I cover everything you asked?"



QUESTIONS TO ASK AT THE END OF YOUR INTERVIEW

At the end of the interview, the interviewer will probably ask if you have any questions. Your questions further reveal your degree of interest in the job. Consider asking 1-2 questions along these lines, if this information has not been given during the conversation.



From your perspective, what qualities are needed in order to be successful in this role?

...

By asking, you can determine if you'll be able to give what the job demands.



What advice do you have for a new Patient Care Tech/Nurse working on your unit?

...

This gives insight into what the manager feels is important.



Tell me how orientation/training takes place on your unit.



What has your experience been with hiring students from our college in the past?

...

This will give you an idea if others before you have been successful, or if you are going to be the first from your college to work there.



How can I advance if I am selected for a position in your department?

...

This reflects positively on you, because it implies that you intend to continue striving to improve. If you have not learned about the "clinical ladder" or certification in a speciality, the manager can explain this to you.



Will you be inviting candidates back for additional interviews?



Do you have concerns about hiring me, given my level of experience?



Additional Information

...

- Ask Human Resources about benefits, salaries, and the potential for a relocation bonus (if you are moving to accept the job).
- Ask the Unit Director about shifts, training, work schedules, and starting date.



COUNTING DOWN

1ST SEMESTER

- Create a resume
- Consider volunteering
- Explore student jobs at the end of your first semester.

2ND | 3RD SEMESTER

- Create a resume
- Explore student jobs
- Apply for a summer externship*
- Look into job shadowing

* Available after completion of Junior year

TIPS

4TH SEMESTER

- Scope out the RN job market
- Begin budgeting for NCLEX expenses
- Ask questions of nurses you meet during clinicals

5TH SEMESTER

- Finalize resume
- Attend RN job fairs
- Schedule a mock interview with Career Services
- Apply for RN jobs
- Register for the NCLEX



BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER



NOTES

The Office of Career Services offers support in many areas, including:

Career preparation, employment opportunities, interview practice, resume assistance, and graduate school research.

For more information, please contact:

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