

## Interviewing Guide for Nursing Majors

**The goal:** skillfully, tactfully and professionally articulate what you bring to the table.

### **Your why? Your unique experiences.**

- This is where new graduates can get tripped up. It's not that you don't have anything to bring to the table, but how can you articulate this in an intimidating environment?

Getting into a specialty area (such as: neonatal ICU, labor and delivery, critical care, the emergency department, or the operating room) right out of school is incredibly challenging. To break into those roles, most nurses need some experience first. Most new nurse graduates are hired into a low acuity unit (such as telemetry, medical, surgical, orthopedics, oncology, bariatrics).

Getting into a high-acuity specialty area right out of school is like going from the kiddie pool and diving straight into the deep end of the swimming pool at Mackal. The floors on a meg-surg unit provide new grad nurses with the opportunity to test out the waters without being in a constant state of being overwhelmed.

In reality, the perfect candidate is someone who will:

- Show up to work on time
- Be responsive with requests (if an education module is due, they do not need to be reminded 9 times before actually getting it done)
- Owns up to mistakes (accountability)
- Is not personally insulted when corrected or given feedback
- Isn't timid, but also is not overly aggressive
- Displays a genuine interest in improving clinically and learning more
- Adapts well
- Competent with technology
- Able to acclimate to new processes
- Cares about their patients and doing a good job
- Prioritize safety
- Honest
- Professional (won't curse at the nurse's station, embarrass people, wear appropriate attire, etc.)

### **Typical Structure of an Interview:**

#### Who You May Meet

- HR representative - this is probably the person screening you before you get to the nurse leaders
- Nursing leader - manager / supervisor of unit and/or nurse residency leaders
- Peer interview (sometimes) - nurses on the actual unit
- Staff during shadowing (sometimes) – if you haven't had clinicals in the hospital you're interviewing, ask for a tour or a shadow
- Others - office staff where interview is being conducted, whomever is scheduling the interview(s)

### **Typical Structure**

1. Meet and greet: This small talk is truly an aspect of the interview. As a nurse, you'll be expect to make small talk and immediately build rapport with patients and loved ones every shift, and they want to see if you can do this with them.
2. Questions to get to know you better / baseline questions: These may include things like why you decided to go to nursing school, school, why applying at this specific organization, questions about your resume, etc.
3. Clinical questions: Questions about specific patient/client/customer scenarios
4. Behavioral questions: How you may respond in certain situations
5. Soliciting questions from you: Ask questions to get a feel for any red flags

## Closing With Impact

Thank them for the opportunity. If you learned something about the organization, make note of that.

**Example:** "It was so wonderful to meet you and have the opportunity to talk with you. It was great to learn from you that your hospital recently received their second Magnet designation. What an incredible honor and demonstrates all of the work that goes on here to make this organization great."

During the interview, make sure you get a business card so you can have accurate contact information.

## Potential Interview Questions (real questions that a URI alumni received during an interview):

1. Describe a time you succeeded under high pressure
2. Describe a time you witnessed an emergency situation and your response
3. Describe a time you advocated for a patient
4. Describe a time you disagreed with a coworker
5. How would you handle workplace gossip
6. What is your interest in this role/hospital
7. Where do you see yourself in 5-10 years

## What to Wear:

- Business casual attire: This would be what applies to most of you. If you're applying for a staff nurse position, or something similar, business casual is appropriate. This generally means a collared shirt or blouse, dress pants or skirt, and dress shoes. For men, a sport coat is optional.
- Do not wear scrubs: You will not be providing patient care during a job interview. Do not show up in scrubs with a messy bun, and yesterday's make-up.
- Shoes should be comfortable for walking potentially long distances across the hospital campus during your interview. They should cover your toes, and shouldn't be too high.

It is important that you look like you put care, consideration, and effort into looking presentable. The candidates who look like they just rolled out of bed 10 minutes before the interview (whether that's video or in person) send up immediate red flags to interviewers. The candidate will have to try to overcome that during the interview with their answers. If their interview was not anything remarkable, the carelessness about his or her appearance will be that much more blatant.

## What not to wear:

- Revealing clothing: Avoid anything that is too tight, short, or revealing. This includes mini skirts, low-cut tops, and shorts. If you are wearing a skirt, it should be long enough so that when you are sitting with your legs together that someone casually glancing in your direction across the room cannot see your undergarments. I've spoken to hiring managers who have shared with me that they were in situations in which they sat across the room from the candidate and their brightly colored underwear was plainly visible during the entire interview because their skirt was entirely too short and it was extremely distracting.
- Casual clothing: Avoid anything that is too casual, such as jeans, t-shirts, or sneakers.
- Loud or distracting accessories: Avoid anything that is too loud or distracting, such as large jewelry, hats, or sunglasses.
- Strong perfume or cologne: Avoid wearing strong perfume or cologne, as this can be overwhelming and distracting.
- Clothing with profanity, political or religious statements, or other inappropriate sayings or symbols: This is not the time to make a statement or distract from what you have to say about your clinical expertise.

## **Green Flags:**

Throughout the interview process, they're not just listening to the words that you say or what's written on your resume. They're observing everything you do. There are certain things you can do that will signal not only low-risk, but high-reward. Let's walk through some of those.

- Able to schedule an interview with ease
- Shows up a bit early to the interview and is ready to go
- Only brings necessities to the interview, and possibly a small bottle of water
- Provides a fresh easy-skim, high-quality resume to interviewer
- Is polite, courteous, and warm
- Desires to engage in small talk
- Is calm and appears comfortable in their own skin
- Dressed appropriately
- Does not overshare when asked questions
- Able to answer the specific question that was asked and not ramble on about something that is loosely related
- Maintains professionalism and does not get too friendly, even if he or she connects well with the interviewer
- Doesn't speak negatively about others to make themselves look good when answering questions
- Is kind to everyone they encounter, including receptionists
- Has good answers and examples for questions, and has clearly prepared and isn't constantly stumbling over words or unable to think of answers
- Focused on being successful in this specific role, not overly focused on future goals (like graduate school, moving on to other areas of nursing, etc.). Make sure you balance your ambition for your future goals with your dedication to being good at this specific job first

## **Red Flags for YOU as the interviewee:**

The interview isn't just for you to prove to them that you're a good fit, it's also for you to feel out the organization. Let's go through some red flags. Keep in mind that a lot of these in isolation are not deal breakers, but multiple red flags may make you think twice!

**Barely asking any interview questions:** If they're just trying to find someone with a pulse, that's a red flag. Clearly they have problems staffing and don't care who works for them. While we can all get desperate at times, one would hope that even in difficult times, there are minimal standards to uphold.

**High turnover rate:** If the company has a high turnover rate, it may indicate that the company has a toxic work culture or that employees are not happy with their work conditions.

**Poor communication:** If the hiring manager or company representative is not responsive or fails to communicate important details during the hiring process, it may indicate that communication is not a priority within the company.

**Lack of transparency:** If the company is not transparent about the hiring process, job expectations, or company culture, it may indicate that they have something to hide or that they are not interested in building a positive relationship with their employees.

**Negative reviews:** If the company has negative reviews on websites such as Glassdoor, it may indicate that there are underlying problems within the company that may affect your experience as an employee. Keep in mind that with hospitals, reviews are tough to go by because an unhappy patient could write something pretty intense, but that doesn't mean your unit will be a bad place to work. These are an aspect of the entire picture, not what it depends upon.

**Unrealistic expectations:** If the job posting or interview process seems to have unrealistic expectations for the job, it may indicate that the company is not clear about what the job entails or may set you up for failure.

**Unprofessional behavior:** If you notice any unprofessional behavior during the interview process or from current employees, it may indicate that the company has a lack of professionalism in its work culture. While it might be funny if the manager drops an F bomb in the interview, it's not a good sign and indicative that crossing professional boundaries is so normal that they even do so with complete strangers.

**Lack of growth opportunities:** If the company doesn't offer any growth opportunities or doesn't seem to prioritize employee development, it may indicate that the company is not invested in the long-term success of its employees. This would be reflected in a lack of tuition assistance, clinical ladder, merit-based raises, financial incentives for professional development (like obtaining certification), or no formal training for preceptors or charge nurses.

**Referring to staff as "family":** If the manager refers to the staff as family, that is a red flag. Work isn't your family. Your family is your family. This is where you go to provide your nursing services in exchange for a paycheck and benefits. While we form unique bonds with our coworkers as we walk through tragedy together with our patients, this is still your job. It is not your responsibility to staff the unit, and often it can be framed as a favor or helping out your teammates to repeatedly work overtime. Also, you are expected to routinely pick up for additional shifts, stay late, or take on extra patients - that's a red flag.

**Poor benefits package:** If the company's benefits package is significantly less competitive than other companies in the industry, it may indicate that the company doesn't prioritize its employees' well-being. Not only do you want to know about the health insurance, retirement, and compensation structure, you also want to know about time off, any employee assistance (like free counseling sessions) or other perks.

**Insufficient orientation:** New graduate nurses should have some form of transition to practice support. Whether that's a residency program, classes, or mentoring, new grads need support outside of orientation (even the high performers!). On average, new graduate nurse orientations can range from several weeks to several months, typically lasting between 8 to 12 weeks. Experienced nurses may have a shorter orientation period, but if it's specialty, you're new to the hospital system, or you've been out of practice for years, you should have adequate support.

### **Sample bullet statements for a student nurse:**

Note: these are general and would require additional information for them to be ready to add to your resume.

- Acted as a mentor for first-year Nursing students providing guidance and support to navigate their experiences in the first semester of college
- Presented a nursing research project at a regional nursing conference, receiving positive feedback and recognition from peers and professionals (Specify the name and details.)
- Provided nursing care to a local community organization serving aging individuals
- Developed a nursing care plan for a complex patient during clinical rotations, receiving high praise from the clinical team
- Served as a student representative on the Nursing Student Association, coordinating community outreach activities and fundraising events
- Assisted in the development and implementation of a new nursing simulation lab and provided hands-on training for nursing students
- Developed and implemented a health education program for a local school, teaching children about nutrition, hygiene, and healthy habits
- Served as a teaching assistant for nursing courses, providing additional support and guidance to fellow nursing students
- Assisted in the development and implementation of a new patient safety program at a clinical site, resulting in improved patient outcomes and reduced adverse events