How to…

Succeed at your nursing interview
How to succeed at interview

About this guide

Once selected for interview, the recruiter believes that your application shows you to be a viable candidate for the job. They will be using the interview to both test your experience as well as seeing if you are someone that they think would fit into their team. This is your opportunity to stand out amongst candidates who may all be able to do the job ‘on paper’. This guide talks you through steps that increase your chance of success, starting with: (i) what employers are looking for, before considering (ii) how to come across well (iii) the interview questions you can expect and (iv) suggested steps for preparation.

1. What Employers are Looking For From Interviews?

All interviews aim to test a mix of (a) technical-competence and (b) personality attributes. In other words, interviewers want to know that you are capable of doing the job to a high standard and also that you will fit in with the organisational culture and the rest of the team. Feedback from former nursing interviewees suggests that interview difficulty varies between different Trusts. However, facing seemingly ‘easy’ questions does not reduce the onus to demonstrate your suitability, by providing well-grounded answers that are delivered with convincing assurance.

In respect of assessing your capabilities, NHS interviews will generally be based on a structured set of competences that individuals are required to either possess, or show the ability to attain. The framework is outlined in Table 1 over the page. Expect interviewers to be evaluating you to see how you meet, or could develop, some of these capabilities. An approach you could use to demonstrate your applicability is also suggested in the table. For NHS jobs, these behaviours and competences will often be gauged within each stage of the recruitment process.
### Table 1: NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Entry Level</th>
<th>2nd Gateway (Level)</th>
<th>How will you demonstrate this at interview?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>• Written effective letters or notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Taken meeting minutes or notes</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Given presentations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Used an interpreter to help</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Produced useful written guides</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Persuaded another of a course of action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and people development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Attended a course and applied the learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Done research and updated guidelines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflected on development in your portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Carried out literature reviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health, safety and security</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Taken part in mandatory training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Spotted and reported / or resolved risks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Proactively avoided risks or dangers in your work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service improvement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Evaluated activities that improved services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sought support when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Helped with governance/benchmarking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Followed service policies to offer good service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• MDT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Meeting minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality and diversity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Taken part in training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Included considerations in your own work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Used an interpreter or other specialist to help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of Health &amp; Wellbeing &amp; prevention of adverse effects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• Given presentations or advice to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Implemented improvements or informed others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Included relevant elements in your portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment &amp; treatment of planning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Kitchen sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Worked on coursework related to this area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interventions &amp; treatments</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• Developed action Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Worked on case studies related to your field</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: NHS interviews will be modelled around the Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) which provides a set of behaviours (competencies) that individuals must meet to be appointed to a post (entry level) and then will further develop to progress in their career. It is therefore also essential for your CPD.
How to come across well

Introduction

A well known study (some time ago) suggested 55% of the interview is assessed on body language, 35% on tone of voice and only 7% on content! Whether you believe this or not, it is true that by the time you reach interview stage, how you present yourself can make all the difference. Below are some tips to help you:

Coming Across Well

- **Greeting:** greet the interviewer(s) with a smile and a firm handshake
- **Listen carefully:** ensure you address questions carefully and patiently. Nod occasionally to show you are listening. Do not interrupt the interviewer.
- **Speak clearly & concisely:** don`t talk for longer than 2/3 minutes at any time. Watch for body language signals that the interviewer has heard enough. Keep it simple.
- **Use evidence:** use the “CAR technique – explained on the next page – to ensure that your answers are convincing. This basically equates to giving specific examples.
- **Be truthful:** if you don`t know, be truthful. Ask for clarification if required.
- **Make eye contact:** this tells the person that you are interested.
- **Engage the panel:** if there are 3-4 members in the panel, look towards each of them while answering questions.
- **Mind your hands:** too much gesticulation (or nervous hair stroking) implies anxiety and can distract. Rest hands on your knees, or the table, if you have this tendency.
- **Posture:** leaning forward slightly shows you are keen, engaged and alert. Do not keep changing your position or you will distract the interviewers.
- **Communicate your personality:** the key unspoken question is: Does interviewer (s) like me?. Be positive and enthusiastic. People like others who like them.
- **Strong ending:** thank them for their time, offer a firm and confident handshake and smile.
Overview

There are several types of interview question, which are roughly split as described below. It is recommended that you prepare answers to these questions ahead of interview and rehearse. If unsure of answers, prepare by re-reading course notes or through further research of the organisation or field.

Frequent questions:

Why are you applying? This is a frequent ice-breaker question at the start of the interview, but an important one to get off to a good start. The subtext of the question is “How motivated are you?”, “Do you specifically want this job, or are you looking for any job?” A good answer makes it clear that you are applying for specific reasons related to the role, because it clearly fits your passions, knowledge and goals. If the interviewer asks “Tell me about yourself?”, which is another common opener, be prepared to give a 2-3 minute answer which gives them the same confidence, by explaining the relevant progression of your skills, and experiences toward this point

Other Examples

• What attracted you to the post?
• Where do you see yourself in 2-3 years time?
• Tell us about anyone you have met in nursing that you admired and has influenced you

What do you know about our organisation/hospital? This type of question tests your knowledge of the hospital. As per the question above, it tests whether you have done your homework and can demonstrate specific interest. You might face the question in other guises E.g. “What you do know about the needs of local patients?”. Either way, the interviewer is assessing whether you know the kind of work that you are likely to face, and have done some specific research before submitting your application.

Other examples

• What motivates you as a nurse? (This offers a good opportunity to link with the post)
• What do you think the main challenges will be for this post at our hospital?
• Tell us about a Government initiative or policy and how it applies to this role
Professional competency questions: these will vary between disciplines, but will be testing your knowledge. (E.g. What would you do if you received a referral for a low protein diet for a patient with liver disease?”). If you feel you need to revise, do so.

Other examples
• When and how have you applied research findings into your work?
• What are your strengths (you can link your answer to the job specification)

Hypothetical questions: as per the question above, you might be faced with questions based on how you handle situations. (E.g. How would you handle a patient presenting with symptom X but who wanted to go home?) A strong answer would reference times that you’ve faced similar dilemmas but handled the situation effectively. Be clear that you understand the key values and procedures related to your field. (It is recommended that you prepare as outlined on the next page).

Other examples
• What would you do if a patient returned from surgery and reported acute pain?
• What would you do if believing a patient to be suffering a cardiac arrest?
• How would you deal with an aggressive and abusive relative of a patient
• What would you do if a patient fell from their bed and you were the only one on duty?
• What would you do if a patient reported that their belongings had been stolen?

Behavioural competence questions: the interviewer will have identified the key behaviours that the post-holder must demonstrate, in line with the types listed in Table 1. (e.g. Tell me a time that you have XXXXXX). The CAR (Context – Action – Result) Framework is a good way to answer: tell the interviewer about the context (e.g. While on placement, I was given responsibility for….. A situation arose whereby….); then the action you took (In response, I knew that I had to ..... and so carried out .....). Remember to mention the result. (As a result, the outcome was…..)

Other examples
• What are the most important skills and experiences you could bring to the role?
• Give an example of where you collaborated with a multidisciplinary team
• What role do you play in a team environment?
• What are your weaknesses? (You can describe overcoming them with CPD)
• How do you keep up to date with your field? (Give examples from Table 1)
Here are some tips to help you arrive at interview well prepared:

**Find out what the interview will entail:** if it is not explicitly stated on your invite letter, call up to find out if there will just be an interview or whether you will need to do a case study/practical exercise/test as well.

**Go for a visit pre interview:** this isn’t always possible, but it will help you to find out more information on what the post will entail e.g. specialities, length of rotation, how big the organisation/department is, (NHS) what the feeding regimen is etc. Ensure that the questions you are asking are NOT covered off in the information provided about the job.

**Find out about the organisation:** from their website, internet searches or people that may work there. For clinical roles research the local population needs (look at the public health section on the trust website) to establish the main health priorities and conditions.

**Know key practices, procedures and professional expectations:** ensure you are confident that you understand the following: The NICE framework, HPC Code of Ethics, Anti Discrimination Policies, Defensible Documentation, BDA Code of Professional Conduct, Safeguarding (i.e. Managing Vulnerable Patients), Principles of Continuous Professional Development, Principles of Reflective Practice, Health and Safety practices, The Principles of Clinical Governance and Audit.

**Know your own history:** re read your application form, job advertisement, job description etc. Ensure you know your own work/University history.

**Know what they expect in the role:** go over the person specification and job description – how can you evidence the essential and desirable criteria?

**Prepare interview answers:** look at sample interview questions - think of your responses. Collect evidence as to how you will meet the requirements of the role.

**Rehearse:** speak aloud or in your head the answers you have planned. Don`t remember them word for word as it will make you sound very stilted on the day.

**Plan your day beforehand:** set out your smart clothes the night before (checking for broken zips, buttons etc). Plan the journey, print a map, do a trail run if you do not know the way.

**Be organised on the day:** leave a good half hour before you think you need to. As soon as you arrive turn your phone off or onto silent.

**Be pleasant to EVERYONE:** this includes people you meet BEFORE going into the interview, they are often asked for their first impressions.
Further Info & Checklists

Further Useful Sources:

Prospects: [http://www.prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips.htm](http://www.prospects.ac.uk/interview_tips.htm)
National Careers Service: [https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/getajob/interviews/Pages/default.aspx](https://nationalcareersservice.direct.gov.uk/advice/getajob/interviews/Pages/default.aspx)

HLS EPU: contact the office (details overleaf) for further help and support with interview preparation

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**Checklist Dos**

- ✓ Prepare thoroughly
- ✓ Practice interview questions beforehand (based on job description/ person spec)
- ✓ Contact the EPU to arrange a mock interview if you need more practice
- ✓ Plan your journey – know where the building and room are in advance
- ✓ Arrive in good time
- ✓ Get a good nights sleep before your interview
- ✓ Ask the interviewer to re-phrase a question if you don’t understand
- ✓ Be consistent with the information you gave in your application form/ your CV
- ✓ Prepare questions in advance for when you’re asked “Do you have any other questions”. Intelligent, well researched questions could help you stand out
- ✓ Thank the panel for their time at the end of the interview
- ✓ Ask for feedback if you don’t get the job. This could help you to develop and perfect your interview techniques
- ✓ Reflect constructively if you aren’t successful. Remember you’ve done well to be shortlisted and there will be other opportunities out there.

**Checklist Don’ts**

- ✗ Dress casually
- ✗ Chew gum in the interview
- ✗ Forget to switch your phone off
- ✗ Forget about your body language once you’re in there. Remember eye contact smile and be aware of your hands
- ✗ Panic! Take a deep breath before you begin your answer, or take a sip of water. This will give you a few seconds to compose your answer before you begin
- ✗ Read from prepared notes/ your CV in the interview
- ✗ Come across as arrogant or over confident – this is likely to be off putting
- ✗ Talk too quickly if you’re nervous
- ✗ Interrupt or talk over the interviewer
- ✗ Argue with the interviewer – even if you disagree with something they’ve said. Keep things positive
- ✗ Forget to turn negatives into positives if the interviewers asks about your weaknesses or a time you’ve done something wrong or made a mistake
- ✗ Criticise former employers, colleagues or your placement providers
- ✗ Just ask about preceptorship when you’re asked if you have any further questions
The HLS Employability & Placement Unit

Our mission is to develop your employability, guiding and helping you to:-

• Obtain relevant work experience, industrial-placements, internships and volunteering experience
• Secure suitable graduate employment or postgraduate study

Individual Services for Students

Our advisors provide bookable, confidential appointments covering:-

• Placement (excluding NHS courses) and job search
• Professional CVs and job applications
• Making speculative job applications
• Preparing for interview
• Options with my degree – what next?
• Advice about graduate employment

Nursing Vacancies

The Unit handles nursing vacancies on behalf of nursing recruitment agencies, the private sector and charitable organisations.

These will appear on the EPU Portal and nursing students will also receive these towards the end of their degree from the EPUsupport.HLS email account.

Contact Information/ How to Book An Appointment

Call Us:
For all enquiries T: 02477 656 656
For internal calls T : 656 656

Email Us:
E: EPUsupport.hls@coventry.ac.uk

Drop In:
• Visit Charles Ward G32 to book an appointment:
  open daily* 9:00 to 5:00
  (* except Thurs 9 to 11, Bank Holidays & University closure days)

Or Visit Our Website for Nursing Vacancies:
https://students.coventry.ac.uk/HLS/Pages/EmployabilityandPlacementUnit