

*The Ultimate Guide To*  
*Completely Rockin' Your*  
*Next Nursing Interview*

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## Top Nursing Interview Tips

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## Introduction

There are 2 purposes to job interviews:

1. For the interviewer to decide if you are the best choice for a particular position.
2. For the interviewee (you) to find out about a job and to ask questions to determine if the job would be a good choice for you.

Although these are very simple concepts, the actual interview process is usually not easy.

I am sure you have heard from many people that all you need to do is “be yourself” and “you’ll be fine”. Although these common clichés sound nice, they are not going to help you prepare for an interview.

The fact is an interview is a sales process. I can hear you now: “but I don’t like sales.” Whether you like sales or not, the interview is a time you are selling yourself as a product and hopefully the interviewer is selling the position.

The term “selling yourself as a product” may sound harsh, but it’s not. We are going to delve into what exactly it means a little later.

Just like sales, the interview process demands that you know your product (yourself) and that you know your audience (the interviewer).

This simple concept is the key to the entire interview process. Once you understand this concept you are on your way to being an interview pro.

**Like it or not, the interview process is a sales process. You can learn how to use that to your advantage.**

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When do you think the interview process begins? If you think it begins when you meet the interviewer, you are wrong. The process begins the moment you find out you are scheduled to interview.

## Before the Interview

### **1. Self-awareness**

You may be wondering what self-awareness has to do with interviewing. I have to tell you, it has everything to do with interviewing. If you are not aware of your strengths, weaknesses, skills, and talents, how will you communicate them? Take some time to write out these factors out. You need to be fully aware of them and they need to roll off the tip of your tongue. It always amazes me when I ask someone what their strengths are and they have to take time to think about it.

If you are unsure of what your strengths are, how will possibly convince someone else of what they are?

### **2. Research**

This step absolutely cannot be missed. If you have an interview, particularly if it is with a different company, you must do your research. Find out as much as possible about the company/facility/hospital.

When you find out information about the company that you want to work for, it shows the interviewer that you are serious and interested in the company. It sets you apart from most interviewees who will probably skip this step. You can use the information you gather from your research when answering questions.

For example, keep the company's mission statement in mind when answering questions about your work goals and mindset.

Also, you can craft specific questions for the interviewer(s). For example:

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"From reading your website and your newsletter, I noticed that this company is particularly expansion focused and even has plans to build new satellite extensions. Will this new extension.....?"

**Remember: Most people do not do adequate research. Your goal is to set yourself apart from "most people" AKA other applicants.**

Another benefit to doing thorough research is that it helps you determine what the company is like. Remember, the interview process is a 2 way street. It is not just a time for the company to decide if you are the best candidate; it is also a time for you to decide if the company is a good fit for your standards and goals. Your research will also help to determine this.

Typically, the higher the position you are applying for, the more research you should do.

Here are suggestions for what to look for:

- Does the company have an online presence?

Most hospitals/companies/medical centers have a website. Read the pages on the website. They will usually give you a good idea about the company, its mission, and its goals.

Do they have a Facebook or Twitter account? Read the latest updates and tweets. You can also observe how they interact with people in their online community.

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- Who are the leaders of the organization? Have they been featured in news media lately? What are their goals and values? Have they owned other companies? Where did they go to school?
- Does the company have a motto?
- Are they growing or expanding compared to other companies?
- Does the company participate in volunteer events or charities? Are they involved in their community?

If you are applying to a different position in the same company, I suggest you focus your research on the new position. Talk to nurses who already have that position. Ask them questions about the manager/director/supervisor such as what are some of the most important goals and standards for that unit/floor/department.

You can also do research on that specialty. For example, if you are an oncology nurse applying for an ER position, do research on the Emergency Nursing specialty. Most specialties have associations with lots of information online (for example Emergency Nursing Association <http://www.ena.org>)

Use search engines like google.com to find the appropriate specialty websites and organizations.)

**The information you gather during your research can make the difference in an “ok” interview and an outstanding one.**

## 3. Practice

Confidence is the key. I feel as if I could end this entire report here. Don’t worry, I won’t. Confidence is the key to success in so many areas of life, particularly in excelling at interviews.

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So how do you master your interview confidence skills?

- a. Become aware of your strengths, talents, and skills (see the section on self-awareness above)
- b. Become a master at communicating your strengths, talents, and skills (PRACTICE).

The more you practice what you are going to say, the more confident you will feel and appear.

- Practice by yourself
- Practice with other people (friends, colleagues, and family members)
- Practice with a [career coach such as myself \(shameless plug\)](#)

It is amazing how much improvement is possible with practice. When you practice with someone else, they can also point things out that you maybe cannot hear or notice yourself saying. For example, how many times you say “umm”.

You can also practice using a recorder or web camera. Listen out for the following tendencies:

- Speaking too fast
- Speaking too slow
- Mispronouncing certain words
- Saying “umm” or “uh”.
- Not maintaining eye contact (It may feel silly, but if you are using a web cam/video recorder, pretend that the interviewer is the camera and try to maintain eye contact). Notice how frequently your eyes stray from the camera.

**Maintaining eye contact is very important during interviews. It demonstrates confidence and authenticity with what you are saying.**

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In addition to practicing asking and answering questions, you should practice your handshake and how you end the interview (what you say at the end).

## 4. Location Details

When possible, find the location of your interview/company ahead of time. This will prevent you from possibly getting lost on the day of the interview. Getting lost can make you flustered, anxious, and LATE.

If you can avoid this, do so.

Finding the location ahead of time also lets you gauge how much time you need to get to the interview. As you may know, being late to an interview is one of the worst mistakes you can make.

With that being said, if it happens (ie due to unforeseen incident such as a major road block/accident on the road); don't let it blow your calm.

Remain composed, explain the situation and give the interviewer the opportunity to reschedule if necessary. Of course, that is a last resort. Nevertheless, it may happen if they have another time commitment and your arrival was severely delayed.

## 5. What to Take To the Interview

- At least 3 copies of your resume
- A nursing skills checklist for your current/last nursing job
- At least 2 copies of references

## 6. How to Dress

Dress professionally. Just because you are applying for a job where you may be wearing scrubs all day, do not show up wearing scrubs. It is almost impossible to go wrong with wearing a suit. This goes for both men and women.

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A few other grooming suggestions: Well-groomed hair, clean nails, closed toe shoes, and minimal jewelry.

## 7. While You Are Waiting

If you have arrived on time (which means about 15 minutes early), you will have time to wait in a reception area.

Below is a table of “Do’s” and “Don’ts” to follow during this period.

DO	DON'T
Use the time to mentally rehearse answers to common questions.	Don't Pace. Try to sit. If you need to, pick up a magazine or brochure
If you have enough time, and you need to, use the restroom. A full bladder can be very distracting and uncomfortable during an interview.	Talk to yourself.
Dispose of chewing gum.	Let your cell phone ring/vibrate during the interview. Turn it off!
Observe the surroundings including cleanliness of the building and restroom if you use it. Remember the interview is also about you determining if you want to work there. Cleanliness can tell a lot about a workplace.	
Visualize yourself entering the interview room, meeting the interviewer(s), remaining calm and confident.	
BREATHE!	

## During the Interview

### 1. The Confidence Factor

When you go to an interview, the chances are you will feel nervous. You can take steps to try to reduce your level of nervousness (practice, deep breathe, positive thoughts, etc.). Nevertheless, there will still be a level of nervousness. The key is to attempt to not let it show.

You need to appear to be confident in yourself. Believe in yourself, your skills, your experience, etc. If you do not believe in yourself, how can you expect someone else to believe in you?

Nervousness can erode your ability to answer questions effectively. If you are so nervous that you only answer questions with one word answers, this decreases your likelihood of getting hired.

Tips for demonstrating confidence:

- ***Eye contact***

It is important to maintain eye contact during the interview; however it is especially important when you first meet the interviewer. Maintaining eye contact demonstrates sincerity and openness. It is also generally accepted that giving eye contact shows that you have nothing to hide.

- ***Smile***

A smile says a lot in almost every situation, but it is especially important during an interview. It implies approachability and sincerity. It also suggests that you are happy to be there and you are happy to meet the interviewer.

- ***Avoid “shifty” body language*** such as fidgeting, biting your nails, tapping on the desk, playing with a pen, etc.

### 2. Common Nursing Interview Questions:

#### a. Why have you chosen to apply for this position? /this company?

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Whatever you do, do not say because I need a job. This is not the time for a general plea for employment. No matter how much you may need a job, if you present yourself as desperate, the interviewer will think you have no real interest in THEIR job, you just want A job. This is not a good sign. Instead, use this time to give specifics about the job you have applied for and why/how you feel your experience, skills; abilities are a match for the position.

This is the time to really let your research efforts show. If you can, spice up your answers with specifics that you found out when you conducted your research. Here are a few examples:

- “Because I like the fact that this is a not for profit hospital.....”
- “Because I believe that your employees can take pride in working for a company like yours since you show that.....”

## *b. “Tell me about your nursing training/are there any certifications or qualifications not listed on your resume?”*

Here you can elaborate on your qualifications, training, and certifications. If you do not have many qualifications (of course outside of your nursing degree), but you are an avid learner, express that. Explain that you are always reading, researching, and educating yourself about your specialty or nursing in general. Of course only say that if it is true for you (which hopefully it is).

## *c. “What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?”*

This question is very common in interviews because it can tell the interviewers a lot about the interviewee.

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When asked about your strengths, you should always remember to be honest. Do not exaggerate the truth; they will usually notice if you do.

Examples of great strengths in nursing:

- Critical thinking skills
- Teamwork
- Self-control
- Adaptability
- Calm under pressure
- Empathy
- Strong work ethic
- Organizational and planning skills
- Training/mentoring
- Reliable/dependable
- Communication (be specific)

Of course these are general strengths. When you are preparing for the interview think about how your strengths will apply for the job you are seeking.

One of the questions that people tend to find difficult to answer is “*what are your weaknesses?*”

We all have weaknesses. The interviewer knows this. The key is to not divulge weaknesses that would stop you from getting this job. And if you do have weaknesses that would impede your performance on that particular job, then maybe you need to reconsider the job entirely.

The “weakness” question can actually work to your advantage. Here are a few examples of answers that work. I am not suggesting you use these answers, just review them to get an idea of how you can spin your weaknesses into a positive.

- “My biggest weakness is organization but recently I have been able to solve this problem by creating a list system for myself that helps me to stay organized and actually has made me more efficient.”

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- “My #1 weakness is getting involved with too many people and projects, I love to help. I have been resolving this lately by prioritizing and asking myself if the issue is relevant to me and my role and also is there someone better suited to help.”

## *d. “What was the greatest accomplishment in your last job?”*

Be sure to tell a specific story of accomplishment. The best way to approach this question is to think of an attribute or strength that you have that contributed to an accomplishment.

Example:

- Do you have strong organizational skills? Think of an accomplishment that required top level organization skills. Keep the story short and concise. Get to the point.

## *e. “What do you like about this specialty of nursing?”*

If this specialty is not new to you, think of concrete aspects of the specialty that you enjoy.

If the specialty is new to you, then relay the answer based on what you learned in school, coupled with what you have learned through your research and communication with nurses currently working in that specialty.

## *f. “Why should we hire you?”/ “Why are you the right person for the job?”*

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Highlight your skills, qualifications, and experience in relation to this particular job. Give specific examples of how these qualities will be a contribution to the workplace/patients/clients/organization/etc.

## ***g. “Why do you want to leave your current job?”***

Once again, have specific reasons but refrain from bad mouthing the organization or individuals that you currently work with.

Remember, nobody likes complainers. Your interview is not the place to start whining and complaining about a current situation. This also is a blatant display of negativity. Avoid this at all costs. You want to be honest but not “negative nelly”.

## ***h. “How do you stay current in the field of nursing?”***

Staying current demonstrates that you are a self-motivated learner. Here are a few examples:

- Attending nursing/health care conferences
- Reading nursing journals
- Conducting online research
- Reading relevant books
- Being an active member in relevant associations

## ***i. “What are your future/career goals?”***

This question can be tricky. You want to be honest about your goals but make sure to include characteristics such as loyalty and commitment. Interviewers are not typically looking to keep hiring and replacing people. It is costly and time consuming. They are more interested in committed individuals.

## ***j. “Do you have any questions for us?”***

**Your answer to this question should never be “no”.**

There may be things the interviewer said that you were not familiar with, ask about them. I remember during my interview for my nursing informatics position

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the main interviewer mentioned a vendor they were using to supply a piece of the technology. I had never heard of them. I took this opportunity to ask about the vendor so that I could make a note and do my research on this company. This shows a genuine and strong interest in one aspect of the position. It also shows initiative.

Also, this is another area where your research can really come into play. Was there anything that you found in your research that you would like to know more about?

**Here are a few more questions that are not as common but you should be prepared in case you are asked:**

- *How do you get along with/deal with difficult co-workers?*
- *How do you handle “problem” patients/families?*
- *How do you deal with your workload if you’re unit/dept. is short staffed?*
- *How have you handled emergency situations that happen during shift change?*

A final “during the interview” tip: before you leave the interview, make sure you get the interviewer’s business card and/or contact information. This will be important in your follow up activity.

## After the Interview

### 1. Write Notes

Almost immediately after the interview (for example in your car before you drive away), start writing notes. This is obviously the time when your memory of the interview event is sharpest. These notes will help you when crafting your thank you note.

They can also help you if there is a 2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> interview which may not happen for weeks. You do not want to trust that you will remember details of the interview. Write notes instead.

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Suggestions on notes to write:

- How you think things went/general impression/thoughts
- What seemed to be of most importance to the interviewer
- Was there anything that stood out during the interview (positive and negative)?
- How could you have “sold” yourself better?

## **2. The Thank You Note**

As soon as possible, you need to email the interviewer a thank you note. This step is ignored by most candidates. Because of this, it is just one more way you can stand out from the crowd. The purpose of the ‘thank you’ note is twofold:

1. Thank them for their time
2. (Most importantly) Reinforce ALL of the reasons that you should be hired for the job.

Use the notes you wrote after the interview to refresh your memory of the high points of the interview and what seemed most important to the interviewer. Make the letter short and sweet.

Remember, people are busy. They will probably treat the letter like a resume and scan it quickly. Use effective and concise language to get your point across efficiently.

## **3. The Follow-Up Phone Call**

As mentioned above, most people are busy. They are busy with their day to day activities, squeezing interviews in here and there when they can.

Unless they are in a desperate situation, hiring you is not a priority. You want to “gently” remind them of yourself and the interview.

It is generally accepted that 2-3 days after the interview you follow up with a **quick** phone call just to “check in” with them and see how the process is coming along.

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If a decision has not been made, they may explain what they are waiting for. For example, they may say they are interviewing other candidates or waiting for another hiring authority to discuss it with or they will need to schedule a 2<sup>nd</sup> interview you.

They may also advise you to “check back in” next week/few days/whenever. Write this down and follow up as instructed; not before and not after.

## BONUSES:

**Tips from a Nursing Director** who has interviewed countless nurses during her career.

I interviewed one of my previous nursing directors, Andrea Davis RN BSN, for this report.

Andrea is The Director of Advanced Clinicals (CPOE) at HCA Columbia Hospital, West Palm Beach. She has held various nursing and nursing management positions such as Nurse Manager, Charge Nurse, Telemetry Nurse.

Andrea provided phenomenal insights for what nursing managers are looking for when they are interviewing. Pay close attention to the answers, they are loaded with more tips and information to help make you a more powerful interviewee.

Here is a transcript of the questions I asked Andrea:

1. **Question: As a Director and former Nurse Manager, what specifically do you look for when interviewing candidates?**

**Answer: Bright, eager personality; eye contact; firm handshake; well dressed; knows something of the facility; confident of their skills; inquires of the nursing culture at the facility**

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2. **Question: Are there any “red flags” or things that stand out as negative things an applicant can say during an interview?**

**Answer:** Being poorly dressed for an interview; bringing your significant other to the interview; having NO questions.

3. **Question: Can you think of any memorable things (extremely positive or extremely negative) that an interviewee has said?**

**Answer:** Positive things include why they love nursing or what made them become a nurse. Relating a story of when they feel most rewarded in their job. One nurse talked about holding someone's hand while they passed away.

Negative things include how burned out they were at their last job, demanding certain days or hours. One nurse came in and told me up front she would not be working weekends. She was not hired. One candidate who brought her spouse allowed him to ask and answer a large portion of the questions. (That happens more than you would think). Did not hire her.

4. **Question: What general advice would you give to new graduate nurses regarding interviews?**

**Answer:** Research the facility you are applying to work for. Have pertinent questions (it shows you are interested); understand you cannot start at the top; you may not get the best shift or preferred days; be eager to learn; DRESS WELL

5. **Question: What general advice would you give to experienced nurses regarding interviews?**

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**Answer: Research the facility you are applying to work for. Have pertinent questions (it shows you are interested); show your skills (chemo, peritoneal dialysis, PICC, etc.); show that you stay current with Nursing trends and issues; DRESS WELL**

## Tips for the new graduate nurse:

Here are a few specific tips for new grads; **use them in addition to all of the other tips in this report:**

- Use examples/experiences from your clinical rotations during the interview. Try to recall specifics that relate to the job you are applying for. For example, your most challenging/rewarding patient/experience.
- Do you have any certifications such as ACLS? As a new graduate, you are competing with experienced nurses for positions. The competition in certain regions is now very tough. You will need to be patient and diligent in your job search. Because of this, when you do land an interview, you **MUST** be prepared and shine!
- Do you have prior medical experience? Maybe you can volunteer at a local free clinic or medical center? Do not leave any of that information out during the interview.
- Remember that a lot of the positive qualities interviewers are looking for are “soft skills” (not necessarily nursing function skills). For example:
  - Positive attitude
  - Self-motivated
  - Honest
  - Loyal
  - Flexible/Adaptable
  - Problem solving skills
  - Prioritization skills

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- Capacity to learn

Highlight the skills that you already have during the interview.

If you had work experience before nursing school, think about how that can help contribute to this job you are applying for.

Perhaps you did customer service or had an extremely detailed or analytical job? Did you perform regular evaluations? Some of those qualities would also be great for nursing jobs. Explain that and give specifics.

I truly wish you the best for your next nursing interview!

I am confident that if you follow the tips and insights in this guide, you will set yourself apart from most other candidates.

Feel free to browse the website (<http://transitionsinnursing.com/>) for more information and help for taking your nursing career to the next level.

The only thing I ask is that you do 2 things for me.

1. **Thing #1** email me and let me know your feedback on this report ([Alicia@TransitionsInNursing.com](mailto:Alicia@TransitionsInNursing.com))
2. **Thing #2** Tell your nurse friends/co-workers/family about this report and let them know they can get their own at:  
<http://transitionsinnursing.com/free-stuff/interviews/>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Alicia-Joy Pierre, RN** is an online copywriter for the health industry. She also helps fellow nurses to connect with their inner genius and make career transitions that make their hearts sing and their purses happy (and wallets too.-can't forget the guys).

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