



INTERVIEW PREPARATION AND SKILLS



INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on taking a powerful step toward your next big opportunity! Whether you're entering a new field, advancing your career, or simply looking to sharpen your skills, this ebook is designed to equip you with a clear, structured approach to interview preparation that sets you apart from the competition.

Job interviews can be intimidating—but they don't have to be. With the right preparation, you can walk into any interview with confidence, clarity, and a compelling story that showcases your value.

The goal of this ebook is simple: to give you a step-by-step process you can follow before any interview to maximize your chances of success. By the end, you'll have a personalized toolkit that allows you to show up as your most prepared, professional, and authentic self.

Here's what you'll learn:

- ✓ **How to conduct strategic, effective research before your interview**

- ✓ **How to prepare insightful, organised notes that keep you on track**

- ✓ **How to identify and communicate the unique strengths you bring to the table**

Whether it's your first interview or your fiftieth, this course will help you present the best version of yourself. Let's get started!

When preparing for an interview, keep in mind that you're trying to determine if the organisation is the right fit for you, just as the interviewer is trying to select the best candidate for the role. You need to learn as much as you can about the organisation through research and prepare questions that give you insight about organisational culture, leadership styles and expectations of the position

Throughout this section we will break down what to research and where, so you can make an informed choice about whether this is a good fit for you as well as if you are a good fit for the organisation.

THE POSITION / ROLE

Gaining a thorough understanding of the **job position** can significantly increase the chances of a successful interview.

It's beneficial to grasp what the daily responsibilities include as this enables you to formulate relevant questions for the interview, which helps to demonstrate your understanding of the role and your suitability for it.

Additionally, researching the role prior to the interview can assist you in determining if the position aligns with your career goals.

So where do you go to research a position and what questions do you ask?

1. you can meet with others that have either fulfilled the position or one similar or those that have fulfilled the role in the past. Meeting with others in a similar role can offer you an opportunity to pick their brains and find out some quality information such as what are the biggest challenges about the role and what is great about the role.

2. Shadow days are always a great option. By accessing your Professional Development Leave and shadowing someone in the position you are interested in can give you an insight in to the daily task and requirements of the position.

3. Contact the panel chair - this is a must do! By speaking to the panel chair you will be able to determine what type of applicant they are looking for. What are the traits and attributes that they are most interested in and whether any particular experience is required. This step however, should be completed prior to submitting an application. If you wait until you have been offered an interview then it's too late and they won't be able to speak to you about the role to ensure a fair recruitment process.

4. Questions to ask when conducting this research includes:

- a. What kind of day to day tasks are expected?
- b. Is there anything that is a key focus of the role?
- c. What type of person are you looking for? (a great question for the panel chair)

HEALTH SERVICE



Each HHS will have a set of values, mission and / or vision. These will generally be included in all or some of the interview questions. There is a heavy focus in today's environment to recruit a person that aligns with the HHS's values rather than just on skills and experience. The thought is that skills can be taught but if you recruit the wrong type of person then you end up with a management problem and potentially a culture problem. It's important then to know what the values of the organisation are and ensure not only that you align with them for the purpose of the recruitment process but also to ensure it is the right position for you.

You also want to ensure that this is the right place for you. If you are looking for high acuity patient care and the hospital is a small metropolitan hospital that transfers or diverts the type of patient cohorts that you would ideally care for then this research will

ensure you make the correct choice. I have worked with many people who have been highly skilled and successfully recruited to roles only to find out that the type of nursing they would like to do wasn't within the scope for the hospital. Researching the Clinical Services Capability Framework (CSCF) levels for the hospital can help with this information.

The CSFS is a suite of documents that outlines clinical and support services. It provides a standard set of minimum capability criteria for service planning and delivery in both public and private hospitals. This criteria will provide valuable information around the complexity of the patients that are cared for within the facility.

This is an important step of the process as it's important to ensure that the facility meets your needs for your career just as much as you meeting their needs.

CULTURE

Culture is an important part of the picture. Knowing whether there is a culture problem before going into the interview can be important in determining the direction that you can expect the panel to take regarding questions. This could also be a deciding factor for you to determine if the culture and environment of the organisation or service is suited to you.

One of the best places to look is on their website for information, then check out their social media pages for recent news, this will provide you with up-to-date information about the health service and an insight into the workplace culture.

Other places to do your research:

- LinkedIn
- Online - Web pages
- Social Media outlets
- Strategic plans (usually published online particularly for public organisations)
- Organisational profiles e.g. Unions such as QNMU service profiles, this will tell you about the unit to which you are applying. It's full of information and you can request this of the unit when you contact the hiring manager before you apply.

This information can give you an impression of the tone and personality of the organisation, as well as what they value. No matter how good a job seems, it's important that you fit within the organisation culture and share similar personalities and values.

PREPARATION

PANEL QUESTIONS

Now you've done the research, its time to make sure you are prepared and have everything you need to go in to the interview.

Write down the questions you want to ask? This should be completed before the interview as interview nerves will often get in the way of you remembering your questions.

The best questions to ask are ones that show the panel that you have a grasp on the position and you are able to step straight into it.

Example: if you are expected to manage staff perhaps a question regarding the current culture or fte that you will be managing is a great question to ask.

As a general rule of thumb its a good idea to have at least 2 or 3 questions to ask the panel at the end of the interview. Remember the way you enter and leave the interview will have a lasting impression so ending on a high note by demonstrating your understanding of the role and the current challenges is a great way to end!

MANAGING YOUR INTERVIEW NERVES

Interview nerves can be the death of an interview. Having some exercises that can help to reduce the nerves will allow you to stay focused and remove some of the cognitive load that can be created by increased anxiety and stress.

A very simple exercise is to practice deep breathing. When we are anxious and our heart rate increases and we start to increase our rate of breathing. By taking long slow breaths our body is effectively tricked into slowing our heart rate and therefore reducing our stress levels. Increased oxygen will also allow us to think clearer. Have you ever been standing in front of a room full of people to give a speech and all of a sudden your mind goes completely blank? This occurs because we are holding our breath, starving our brains of oxygen. By taking a long slow breath and delivering an injection of oxygen to our brain we will suddenly regain our thoughts and are able to continue.

.....
.....

WHAT YOU BRING TO THE TABLE

Ensuring you are clear about what you bring can be a powerful and very effective method of ensuring you enter the interview with confidence. In the next activity write down 50 things you bring to the table. For each skill or attribute that you write, connect it to a time and place that you have displayed that attribute or skill. By doing this you are able to connect to the attribute and really own that it is within you. It's important to make it to 50, you will find that that first 10 - 20 are often fairly simple but it is when we hit our blocks that the real work starts. Push through and get to 50, I promise you there are at least 50 things you bring to the table, you just have to own it!!

KEY SKILLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

At times this can be the first time you meet a recruiter and first impressions are lasting. If you are unprepared this shows and doesn't set a good first impression. Recruiters are looking for people that really want the job and if you don't put any effort into preparing this tells them that you aren't really interested in the job.



1. Prepare for what you will be asked

This all comes back to the research you have already done in your preparation time. When you asked ‘What type of applicant are you looking for?’ This was your key to knowing what type of questions they will ask as they will be molded around ensuring that’s exactly what they get. If they have a culture problem you can almost guarantee there will be a question around culture. If they are looking for a clinical expert they may have a simulation or advanced clinical question. Try to prepare as many of the questions as you can think of so you can use your notes on them in your preparation time.

2. Don’t lie during your interview

This may seem obvious but it will surprise you how often as a recruiter we have caught applicants out in a lie. The most common lie is claiming others work as their own. You often don’t know who all the panel members are or their background so never assume you can get away with a lie. It is very easy to get caught out in an interview lying and it sends a very poor message to the recruiter that you lack professional integrity. Just avoid it at all costs. The truth will always serve you much better than a lie.

3. Turn up prepared with your notes and any other documents you have been asked to provide

We discussed your notes which will help you during your very short preparation time and also gives you a chance to read over while you wait. This can help with the adrenaline rush which often has our minds going blank. It is also a great idea to have any documentation the panel ask for as this will speed up the recruitment process if you are successful.

4. Dress appropriately

Again, this may seem obvious but too often do we see people turn up in inappropriate clothing. Avoid:

- ⦿ Clothing that is too casual - shows you don’t really care enough to put in any effort
- ⦿ Clothing that looks messy or unkept - iron your clothes, no rips or tears
- ⦿ Nothing low cut or too short for the ladies. It’s an interview not a night club.

Neat and tidy clothing that shows you’ve put in some effort and respect the process. Uniforms are fine as long as they are not daggy or unkept.

It’s important to dress for the job you want, not the one you have. If you’re unsure what to wear, opt for business casual

5. Show interest in the panel but don’t fawn over them

A job interview is an opportunity for you to show the interviewer that you’re a good fit for their company. You don’t want to come across as too eager, but you also don’t want to be too disinterested. A good way to strike this balance is by showing genuine interest in the interviewer’s needs without being overly obsequious.

Be sincere and enthusiastic about the position and company—but don’t overdo it.

6. Body language

The first impression you make is when you enter the interview room. Greet everyone, stand up straight and walk with confidence. Maintain an open and friendly stance. Do not let your bag or other belongings come between you and the people you are meeting. This body language is a classic self-preservation action and conveys feelings of fear or insecurity.

Respect personal space - While you want to maintain open and positive body language, you do not want to be so exuberant that you start invading the personal space of the interviewers.

If you do happen to get a little too close, the interviewers will likely back away to maintain a respectable distance. Use your best judgement here to avoid coming across as overly eager.

Maintain eye contact - a lack of eye contact communicates indifference, disinterest, and a general lack of confidence. Just be careful not to stare which can happen if we maintain too much eye contact.

Watch your hands - they are one of the first signs that a person is nervous or uncomfortable. When seated, it's best to position your hands in your lap. Resist the urge to fidget or make stress-relieving repetitive movements. When you are speaking, avoid excessive hand gesturing. Showing restraint with your hands while showing enthusiasm at the same time is the ultimate mark of confident body language.

Smile - the key to communicating positive body language through smiling is balance. While you should never smile to such an extent that it's unnatural or uncomfortable, you must

generally default to smiling wherever possible.

This communicates to the interviewer that you are enthusiastic, warm, and trustworthy. Smiling or indeed laughing at appropriate times also conveys confidence in yourself and the situation. The very act of smiling has also been proven to increase mood levels – which in turn causes you to smile more and makes you a more attractive candidate.

Maintain correct posture - Sit up straight during the interview, and lean in slightly toward the interviewer when they are speaking to you.

This gives the impression that you are actively engaged in the conversation in a calm and relaxed manner. Avoid slouching at all costs.

Mirror the body language of the interviewer - Mirroring body language has been shown to increase trust and rapport between individuals, building a strong connection in the process. To build this connection, match the intensity or duration of handshakes, smiles, nods, and gestures. Of course, you must do it in such a way that it does not come across as blatant copying – which has the opposite effect on building a connection.

Leave as you entered - If you walked into your interview in a calm, confident, and relaxed manner, then it is important to leave the interview in the same fashion. Parting handshakes and a polite goodbye will do the trick in most cases. However, avoid collecting your things and rushing out the door – even if you do have somewhere to be



7. Answer concisely

This point may seem counterintuitive to some. After all, the purpose of an interview is to sell yourself through words – right?

This is true only to a certain extent. Confident individuals tend to use 10 words to say what a nervous individual might say in 100 words, and often much more effectively. Excessive talking is a clear sign of nervousness and takes valuable time away from an interviewer accurately assessing your candidacy. Relax, and answer questions concisely. Most importantly, stay on topic and answer what is being asked.

8. Learn how to listen

Some say that listening is an art, but it doesn't have to be. You should always nod occasionally to signal that you are listening to the interviewer and agree with what they are communicating.

It's also important to be genuine in your effort to listen to the interviewer. If you pretend to listen or are simply waiting for the interviewer to stop talking, your facial expressions will communicate disinterest in the interview and likely in the position too.

9. Always finish the interview with some questions

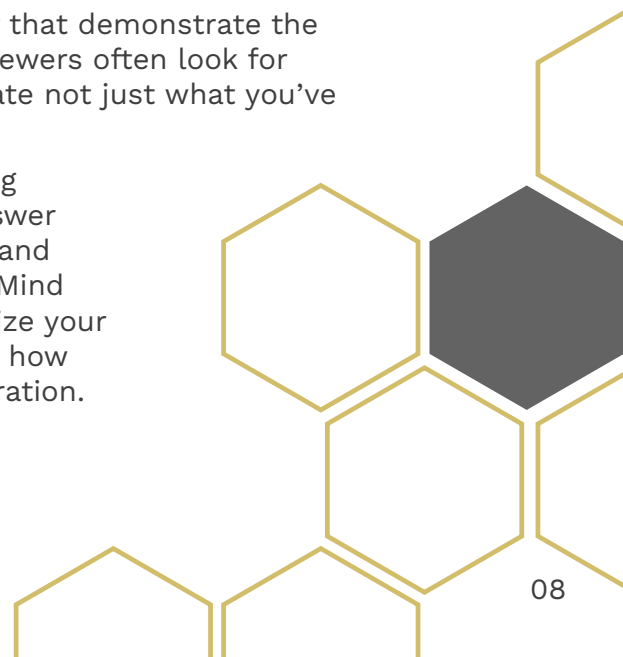
The best questions to ask are ones that show you understand the role or their problems. An example is if you are applying for a leadership role such as NUM, ask what the FTE is that will report to you and what are the current deficits. Or even if there are culture issues, perhaps ask what has been done to date to assist in improving the culture.

STRUCTURING YOUR INTERVIEW ANSWERS

Now that you've learned the key skills for preparing for interviews, it's time to put them into practice! Below are lists of example questions you can use to refine your responses. Whether you practice with a friend or in front of a mirror, the goal is to become comfortable and confident when answering interview questions.

For each question, it's essential to have examples ready that demonstrate the specific skills or behaviors being asked about, as interviewers often look for concrete evidence of your experience. This helps illustrate not just what you've done, but how you've done it.

One of the most important skills to master is structuring your responses. This ensures that you stay on track, answer the question directly, and keep your responses concise and impactful. Two great methods to help with this are the Mind Map and the STAR model, both of which help you organize your thoughts and stay focused on key points. Let's dive into how you can apply these techniques to your interview preparation.





MIND MAP (GREAT FOR A CONFLICT QUESTION)

Using a mind map to brainstorm responses for interview questions can be an incredibly effective method to organize your thoughts and ensure you are well-prepared. It allows you to visually structure your responses, making it easier to recall important details and showcase your skills, experience, and personality during the interview. Here's how you can use a mind map for interview preparation:

Steps for Creating a Mind Map for Interview Questions:

1. Start with a Central Theme

Begin by writing down the main theme or question you are focusing on at the center of the mind map. This could be a specific interview question (e.g., "Tell me about a time when you demonstrated leadership") or a general category like **skills, experience, or teamwork**.

- ⦿ **Example:** If you're preparing for a question about leadership, the central theme could be "Leadership Example" or "Leadership Skills."

2. Branch Out with Key Points

From the central theme, create several branches to represent the key areas that you want to highlight in your response. These branches could correspond to various aspects of your experience, personality traits, or skills that relate to the question.

- ⦿ **Example Branches:**

- **Situation/Context:** Describe the situation where you demonstrated leadership.
- **Task:** What was the specific challenge or goal you were aiming to achieve?
- **Action:** What steps did you take to address the situation?
- **Result:** What was the outcome, & how did it benefit the team or organization?

3. Add Sub-Branched with Details and Examples

Once you have your key areas identified, start adding sub-branches under each one with more specific details, examples, and outcomes. This is where you can get creative and brainstorm multiple experiences or instances where you demonstrated the key points. You can jot down small notes or bullet points, which will allow you to expand on your answer naturally during the interview.

- ⦿ **Example Sub-branches under Action:**

- "Organized a team meeting to discuss the challenge."
- "Delegated tasks based on individual strengths."
- "Provided clear & consistent communication."

4. Refine and Narrow Down Ideas

After your initial brainstorm, you may have many different ideas and examples to choose from. Review your mind map and highlight the strongest, most relevant examples that best showcase your skills, leadership, or experience. Narrow down your ideas to those that will make the most impact in the interview.

- **Example:** If you brainstormed multiple leadership examples, you might decide that the example where you successfully managed a team through a crisis is the strongest, as it demonstrates both leadership and problem-solving under pressure.

5. Group Ideas Under Themes

If you're preparing for multiple questions, it can help to group your ideas under specific themes. For example, you might have a section for teamwork, leadership, conflict resolution, etc. For each theme, add sub-branches with different examples and outcomes to illustrate your competency in each area. This allows you to use the mind map to prepare multiple responses at once.

- **Example Themes:**

- **Teamwork:** How you collaborate with colleagues, resolve conflicts, or support others.
- **Problem-Solving:** Examples where you've found creative solutions to challenges.
- **Patient Care:** How you handle difficult or emotionally charged situations.

6. Review and Refine Your Responses

Once you have completed the mind map, you can start drafting responses based on the structured thoughts you've organized. Use the mind map as a reference to ensure your answers cover all the key points without rambling. This ensures your responses stay concise, relevant, and well-organized.

- **Tip:** Try to use real examples and outcomes that demonstrate how your actions benefited the team or patient. Use specific numbers, percentages, or other data when possible to provide concrete evidence of your success.

7. Final Adjustments for Interview Notes

Once you've narrowed down the best examples and points from your mind map, you can create a final version of your interview notes. This should be a more concise, bullet-pointed summary of the information you've gathered. The mind map can still serve as a useful tool during the interview for quick reference, or you can carry it as a cheat sheet if allowed.

Example of a Mind Map for Leadership Interview Question:

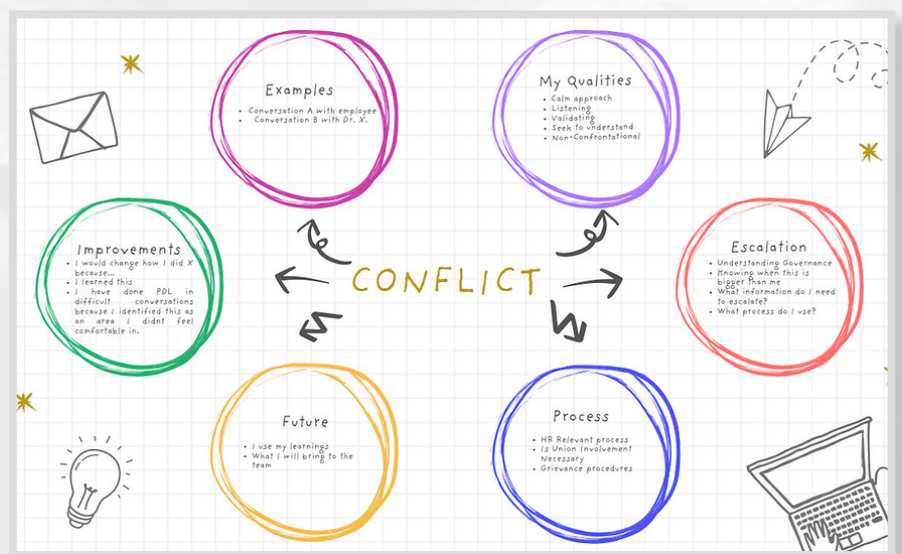
- ⊙ **Central Theme: Leadership Example**
 - **Situation/Context**
 - Hospital's ED was overwhelmed with patient influx after a traffic accident.
 - Team was under stress and needed immediate coordination.
 - **Task**
 - Ensure smooth patient triage and effective use of staff resources.
 - Maintain calm & keep the team focused.
 - **Action**
 - Delegated patient care based on acuity levels.
 - Coordinated with multidisciplinary team (doctors, physiotherapists) for efficient treatment.
 - Communicated with the team to maintain morale and efficiency.
 - **Result**
 - Reduced patient wait time by 30%.
 - Positive feedback from both the team & patients about the quick & organized care.
 - Increased team cohesion under stressful conditions.

Why Mind Mapping Works for Interview Preparation:

- ⊙ **Visual Clarity:** The mind map helps break down complex situations into simpler chunks, making it easier to recall details when you're in the interview.
- ⊙ **Organized Thinking:** It provides a structured way to think through your experiences, allowing you to avoid rambling and stay focused on the key points.
- ⊙ **Creativity and Flexibility:** You can adapt your mind map as needed depending on the type of question asked or the direction of the conversation.
- ⊙ **Enhanced Memory Recall:** Having a visual representation of your experiences makes it easier for you to remember important examples & articulate them more confidently during the interview.

Conclusion

Mind mapping is a powerful and creative way to organize your thoughts and prepare for interview questions. It allows you to brainstorm ideas, clarify your examples, and ensure your responses are structured and relevant. Whether you are preparing for specific behavioral questions or a general interview, the mind map gives you a clear framework to showcase your experiences and demonstrate your suitability for the role.



STAR MODEL (SITUATION, TASK, ACTION AND RESULT)



The **STAR model** is a structured approach used to answer behavioral or situational interview questions. It helps you frame your responses in a clear and concise manner, ensuring you highlight your skills, experience, and how you handle challenges. The STAR acronym stands for:

● Situation

This is where you set the scene and provide the context of the scenario. It's important to briefly explain the background of the situation you're describing. This could be a challenging project, a conflict, or a difficult task you encountered in your previous role.

- **Example:** "In my previous role as a charge nurse, we were experiencing a sudden influx of patients in the ER due to an accident, and our staff was stretched thin."

● Task

Describe the specific task or challenge that you faced in the situation. This highlights your role and what was expected of you in that scenario. It is important to focus on your responsibility.

- **Example:** "As the senior nurse on duty, my task was to ensure that patients were triaged and assigned to the appropriate treatment areas while also managing staff assignments effectively."

● Action

This is the most important part of the STAR method. Here, you explain the specific steps you took to address the situation. Focus on the actions you took, demonstrating your skills and decision-making abilities.

- **Example:** "I immediately assessed the patient load and redistributed assignments among the nursing staff to ensure that high-priority cases were dealt with first. I communicated clearly with the team and coordinated with the doctors to ensure quick patient care. I also ensured that we were all calm and working efficiently under the pressure."

● Result

Finally, explain the outcome of the situation. This is where you showcase the positive impact of your actions and how it benefited the team, patients, or organization. Whenever possible, use quantifiable results (e.g., reduced wait times, improved patient satisfaction, etc.).

- **Example:** "As a result, we were able to manage the increased patient load effectively, reducing wait times by 30% and ensuring that all patients received timely care. The team remained calm and focused throughout, and we received positive feedback from patients and the department head."

WHY USE THE STAR MODEL?

- **Clear and structured answers:** The STAR method allows you to break down complex experiences into simple, understandable answers.
- **Demonstrates problem-solving and critical thinking:** It shows how you approached and overcame challenges.
- **Highlights specific achievements and skills:** You can showcase the impact of your actions in any given situation.

The STAR model is particularly helpful for answering questions like, “Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a difficult patient” or “Describe a situation where you showed leadership under pressure.” It ensures you provide concrete examples and focus on what you did to resolve an issue, making your responses more memorable and effective.



20 INTERVIEW QUESTION EXAMPLES FOR A CLINICAL NURSING POSITION



These questions are designed to assess not only the clinical skills of a candidate but also their ability to work effectively within a healthcare team, maintain professionalism, and adapt to changing situations.

- 1.** Can you describe your clinical experience and how it aligns with the responsibilities of this role?
- 2.** What motivates you to provide the best possible patient care in a clinical setting?
- 3.** How do you handle high-pressure situations, especially in an emergency or critical care environment?
- 4.** Describe a time when you had to manage a difficult or challenging patient. How did you approach the situation?
- 5.** How do you stay organized and prioritize patient care during busy shifts?
- 6.** What strategies do you use to ensure clear and effective communication with your team members during shifts?
- 7.** How do you handle disagreements or conflicts within a healthcare team? Can you give an example?
- 8.** Describe a time when you worked with a multidisciplinary team to provide patient care. How did you contribute to the team?
- 9.** How do you approach collaborating with other departments (e.g., physiotherapy, pharmacy) to ensure the best outcomes for patients?
- 10.** What role do you see yourself playing in a team, and how do you adapt your working style to fit with others?
- 11.** How do you maintain professionalism and compassion when working with difficult or emotionally distressed patients and families?
- 12.** How do you handle feedback from colleagues or supervisors, and how do you apply it to improve your practice?
- 13.** What would you do if you witnessed a colleague making an error in patient care? How would you address the situation?
- 14.** Tell us about a time when you had to adapt to a change in patient care protocols or policies. How did you handle it?
- 15.** Can you describe your experience in mentoring or supporting less experienced team members or new nurses?
- 16.** What do you think makes a successful nursing team, and how do you contribute to fostering that success?
- 17.** How do you ensure that you stay up-to-date with current clinical practices and guidelines?
- 18.** Describe a situation where you had to advocate for a patient's needs within the team. How did you handle it?
- 19.** How do you balance providing patient care with maintaining good team dynamics, especially during stressful periods?
- 20.** What do you value most about working in a healthcare team, and how do you contribute to creating a supportive environment for your colleagues?



20 INTERVIEW QUESTION EXAMPLES FOR A NURSING LEADER POSITION



These interview questions focus on assessing the candidate's leadership, management skills, clinical knowledge, and ability to support and guide a nursing team effectively.

- 1.** Can you describe your leadership style and how you apply it in managing a nursing unit?
- 2.** How do you prioritize tasks and responsibilities when managing a team of nurses?
- 3.** What strategies do you use to manage staffing levels, especially during periods of high demand or staff shortages?
- 4.** How do you ensure that patient care standards are consistently met within your unit?
- 5.** Can you provide an example of how you've handled a conflict between staff members?
- 6.** How do you support the professional development and training of your nursing team?
- 7.** How do you approach budgeting and resource management for your unit?
- 8.** What methods do you use to assess and improve the quality of care provided by your team?
- 9.** How do you ensure effective communication between different teams and departments in the hospital?
- 10.** How do you handle situations where a staff member is not performing to the expected standard?
- 11.** Can you describe your experience with performance appraisals and how you motivate your team members?
- 12.** How do you stay updated with current clinical practices and ensure that your team is also kept informed?
- 13.** Tell us about a time you implemented a new policy or procedure. How did you handle the change management process?
- 14.** How do you deal with complex or challenging patient care situations while ensuring your team remains supported?
- 15.** How do you foster a positive and supportive work environment in your unit?
- 16.** What strategies do you use to promote and ensure patient safety within your team?
- 17.** How do you handle the administrative tasks associated with being a Nurse Unit Manager, and how do you balance these with clinical responsibilities?
- 18.** Describe a time when you had to advocate for resources or support for your unit. How did you go about it?
- 19.** How do you ensure compliance with hospital policies, regulatory requirements, and accreditation standards?
- 20.** What do you think are the most important qualities for a Nurse Unit Manager to possess, and why?