



Basic Survival 101

There are many reasons why people choose nursing as a career. Sometimes it is the person's lifelong dream, sometimes the person wants to make a career change, and other times the person seeks a secure job. Whatever the reason, it is important to understand what nursing is—because understanding what is expected of an RN in today's health care industry explains why nursing school can be difficult.

Nursing is not a do-as-you-are-told job. It is a profession that demands the ability to interview, observe, assess, analyze, coordinate, collaborate, document, improvise, supervise, delegate, educate, interpret, counsel, give, and take. The RN must be ready, willing, and able to multitask on an on-going basis. It takes much more than a nice personality, a ready smile, and good intentions to make a good nurse. It also takes a tremendous knowledge base, critical thinking skills, decision making skills, communication skills, and a commitment to continual learning.

How can you survive—and succeed? For starters, know what is expected of you. Where do you find that information?

- College catalogue of courses
- Nursing Department student handbook
- Semester orientations
- Course syllabi

Now that you know the rules, follow them. Part of the job of your instructors is not just to impart knowledge, but to show you how to be a health care professional. In the clinical area and in the classroom from day one, start practicing to be a professional nurse. Be on time, be courteous, be appropriately assertive when needed, ask questions, and do your work.

Dealing with Change

The Nursing Department is part of the larger community college setting. Like all organizations, changes are made from time to time. These changes may affect you directly and may not be to your liking. Sometimes none of us like the changes, but change occurs in all systems and we deal with it. This will be true in any health care system you work in as an RN, as well.

Tips for Success

Take Care of Business

- Make nursing school your **FIRST PRIORITY!**
- Take classes seriously and start out studying hard.
- Keep up with classroom work—there is too much material to play catch up.
- Be prepared for three times more work than you ever imagined.



- Get a tutor if necessary.
- Make sure you have a social/family support system.
- Work at a job minimal hours. Instructors mean it when they say, “no more than 20 hours if you want to be successful.”
- Get to know your instructors.
- Don’t just memorize material—learn to apply it.
- Keep your sense of humor.

Take Care of Yourself

- Set aside time for yourself, friends, and family.
- Take care of your health.
- Exercise, eat right—it will keep you sane.
- Don’t spend all your time studying.
- Don’t forget to sleep.
- Use breathing and relaxation exercises to relieve stress and calm yourself.

Take Care of Each Other

- Build a support system with your fellow students.
- Join a study group.
- Eat lunch together and don’t talk about classes and clinicals.

Take One Day at a Time

- Take it one test, one patient, one day at a time.
- Once something is done, block it from your thoughts and don’t allow yourself to continue to worry.
- Give up being perfect and be happy for what you are achieving.
- Looking at the overall picture can be daunting. Take one step at a time.
- Do what is healthy and works for you to feel calm.

Reference

Chenevert, M. (1995) *Mosby’s Tour Guide to Nursing School*. St. Louis, Mosby Publishing.