

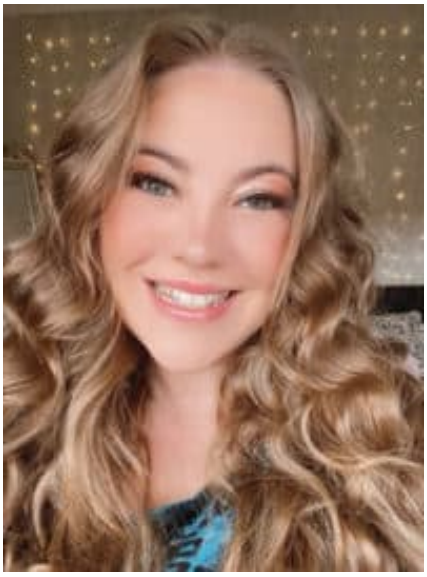
Description

How to Ace Your Uni Interview and Secure that Offer!

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Summary



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Applying for a midwifery degree is one of the scariest and bravest things you can do. The application process is equally exciting and exhausting and some tenacious individuals put themselves through it year after year, desperate to secure that coveted offer that will help make them a midwife.

Midwifery degrees are so competitive that it’s a huge achievement to simply be invited for an interview, so congratulations if you’re reading this in that position.

Now all that stands between you and that much yearned for offer is a 20-minute opportunity to prove why you’re deserving of a place on the course. Read on for how to do it…

Introduction

When I applied to study midwifery at the tender age of 17, I was lucky to receive four interview invites. Looking back on my very first interview experience is hilarious now – I had the interview skills of a potato. But little naïve me didn't know any better because she didn't have a blog like this to help her. I realised I had to up my game and went on to secure more than one offer.

I now interview midwifery applicants at a couple of universities – the university that made me a midwife and, ironically, the one I was rejected from following my laughable first interview experience. The advice I give here isn't specific to the universities I interview for, these are some helpful tips to increase your chances of success.



ce to shine and you know yourself best in

It's an unfortunate but true fact that first impressions are formed within seconds of meeting somebody so, contrary to the popular advice "wear something you're comfortable in", my advice is to wear something which successfully portrays how much an offer would mean to you. Nothing's going to be as comfortable as jogging bottoms (and you *can* wear them if your interview is online!) but smart clothing doesn't have to be ridiculously uncomfortable.

I like to see applicants who have made an effort in their appearance by dressing to impress in smart attire such as office-style clothing (shirt/blouse with tailored trousers/skirt/dress). Either flats or heels are fine providing the shoes are fairly formal (no trainers). But don't despair, this doesn't mean no colour!

> Colour is good as it makes you stand out and expresses your personality.

For my most recent registered midwife interview I wore a pink blazer which made me feel so confident. As for makeup and hairstyle, that's completely up to you – so long as you're clean and presentable, do what makes you feel your best.

I've heard advice about tying hair up, not wearing false lashes or nail polish, removing piercings and wearing navy blue in an attempt to make interviewers subconsciously picture you as a midwife. That's fine if you want to do these things but honestly I've not given any more offers to people who do this compared to those who present the opposite! In fact, I love to see individuality so don't feel obliged to dye your hair a natural colour or cover your tattoos or any other facets of uniqueness.

Body language

To emanate confidence when you're understandably nervous, stand tall, roll your shoulders back and take long strides instead of shuffling along with your head down. And don't forget to smile! When you're anxious you can forget to do this but for me nothing beats good eye contact and a genuine smile which lights up your eyes.

I think people underestimate what a huge role posture and body language play in an interview, particularly for a midwifery degree. I need to be able to envisage you on placement interacting with strangers. We do allow for nerves but you're going to be just as nervous on placement as you are now so how you behave in the interview setting is an important indicator. I discuss more about this below.

Mindset

Mindset is everything: believe you're not good enough and the interviewers will too. Remember that you're wildly capable of fulfilling your ambition and that you were born to do this. If ever there was a time to work on your self-esteem it is now, as doing so will get you far.

It'll enable you to regain some control and switch the power dynamic by making the interviewers want *you*. It excites me so much when I leave an interview thinking, "wow, I really want that applicant to accept their offer, I want this to be the university that makes them a midwife because they're incredible and we'd be lucky to have them".

I love seeing applicants who are confident in themselves and their abilities (humility and graciousness distinguish between confidence and arrogance). Make us not only want to give you an offer but be desperate for you to accept it as you'd be an asset to the university.

Communication

How you speak is as equally important as what you say. I love when people speak emphatically, engagingly and confidently with passion lighting up their eyes. Make me want to converse with you and wish the interview didn't have to end. It's important to be a professional version of yourself but still your best authentic self. Show us who you really are. Those with an unusual back story or hobby stick in my mind so have a think about what makes you stand out and why you're deserving of a place.

> You must show us how well you've prepared for the interview and how much you want this.



However, when we're nervous we tend to talk too fast – so take a deep breath and speak slower so your answers appear conversational rather than rehearsed.

I love it when applicants are chatty and build a rapport because it helps me imagine them as a student midwife. Being friendly and smiley despite your nerves is important because it gives us an idea of how you'd be on placement. You're bound to be anxious in that unfamiliar environment but pushing though is essential as you'll have families who need you to be their rock and it'll be your role to put them at ease.

Preparation

You can never start prepping too early! Interview invites can be short notice so to avoid last-minute panic I'd recommend beginning prep as soon as you submit your application, if not before if possible. We're all different so it's important to figure out what works for you but this is how I personally prepare:

1. Make a list of potential interview questions and everything I need to research into.
2. Do the research, taking detailed notes.
3. Time to craft my answers! I write them out in full, ensuring they sound conversational rather than in formal essay-style prose (this will appear unnatural when spoken so practice your answers aloud, ensuring you allow time to take breaths etc).
4. Keep rewriting answers in fewer and fewer words until each question has only a few words attributed to it. From these few words I can recite my answer in full as I've committed it to memory.
5. Practise delivering my answers authentically. This can be done by recording yourself and watching it back and by asking for candid feedback from mock interviews with family/friends.

Potential questions

Remember that if you don't understand a question, you won't be marked down for asking the interviewer to rephrase it or clarify what they mean. For obvious reasons I can't divulge specific interview questions and each university varies

anyway, however you can't go wrong preparing answers about:

- Why you want to be a midwife
- What you understand the role of the midwife to be
- The pressures you'll encounter during your degree, how you'll overcome them
- The challenges midwives face
- Why you would make a good midwife
- What your strengths and weaknesses are
- Why you've chosen this particular university
- Current issues in midwifery (keep reading for more on this)

To assess your values, you may be asked a scenario-based question, e.g. how you would respond in a given situation. You may also be asked to speak about a time you demonstrated a certain attribute the interviewers ask you about. So have a think about moments you've been proud of yourself for the way you managed a situation either in your personal or professional life.

A word about buzzwords…

Absolutely zero marks are attributed to how many buzzwords you can drop in so refrain from using them if they don't genuinely fit into what you're saying. It's obvious when people slip them in with no understanding as they don't relate to the context.

Current issues in midwifery

Unless you've been living under a rock, you'll know that there are loads at the moment! You only have to turn on the TV to see all the problems in maternity and the wider NHS so whilst it's totally fine to discuss these, when someone speaks about something a bit more hidden from the media, it shows they've really done their research.

For example, a couple of years ago somebody chose to talk about the new model of supervision for midwives and that demonstrated to me deeper research as this wasn't really publicised in the media. To help you choose a current issue, I recommend signing up to emails and checking the websites and social media of places such as:

All4Maternity
The Student Midwife and The Practising Midwife journals
MIDIRS
British Journal of Midwifery
Royal College of Midwives
Nursing and Midwifery Council
AIMS
Association of Radical Midwives

Do I need a topic of specialist interest?



I can't guarantee that you'll be asked about it at every interview, however it's not worth the risk to not have one in my opinion. A topic of specialist interest is an area which you're particularly passionate about and thus have conducted further research into compared to your general understanding of midwifery.

Some people pick something they have personal experience of (e.g. baby loss, VBAC or home birth), but equally it can be something which you read about and it piqued your interest so you conducted further research into it.

Lots of people talk about continuity of care, staff burnout, the midwife shortage, COVID-19 etc and there's nothing wrong with this but I personally love it when an applicant discusses something a bit more niche, e.g. biomechanics, the impact of birth position on perineal trauma or labour progress assessment without vaginal examinations.

When we're asking the same question up to 30-times a day, it's nice for us to hear something different. Your topic is personal to you though so if you can put a different spin on something or offer an alternate insight into one of the more common topics, go for it!

Sell yourself!

The vast majority of people find it difficult to talk about themselves but as this is an incredibly competitive degree, you have to show the interviewers why they should pick you over others. Due to the fact that you only have a limited time with the interviewers, you need to identify your strengths and transferable skills and slot them into your answers, even if the question isn't explicitly about your strengths.

For example, whilst answering a question, link it to the work experience you did, what skills you gained from that and why it's transferable to midwifery. Don't be afraid to bring up things you already discussed in your personal statement as some interviewers haven't even read your statement (each university varies).

Also, as interviewers we need to pick people who we think will successfully complete the degree. So please feel free to demonstrate your commitment by briefly discussing things such as your support network, childcare arrangements,

willingness to relocate, learning to drive, creating a designated study space etc.

> None of our questions are designed to catch you out – we want you to succeed in the interview, we want you to do well!

I love scoring people highly, which results in an offer, as I know how much it's going to mean to them. It takes me back to when I received my offers.

Sell yourself so we have no option *but* to give you an offer! Something which some applicants do to go above and beyond is bring a portfolio to an in-person interview, showcasing their achievements, certificates of relevant training they've completed and perhaps a reflection of an event.

You are not marked down if you do or do not bring a portfolio so don't feel obliged but if you've got something you particularly want to show us then feel free to bring it. If you don't have time to make one then focus instead on strong interview prep as this is where the marks are.

A note about notes…

A common query is "am I allowed my notes?" and the general answer is no. I can't speak for every single university but I've not heard of a university allowing notes to be taken into an interview. As some interviews are still online due to the pandemic, some people do use their notes.

As an interviewer, it's obvious when somebody is reading something, both by looking down/sideways/behind their laptop camera and by the way in which their speech changes. Therefore, the safest thing to do is prepare so well that you don't need your notes. Also, some universities ask applicants to show them the room so they can check you don't have notes. Don't get caught out!

Question etiquette

At the end of the interview you'll be given the opportunity to ask any questions you may have. There's a common misconception that it looks bad if you don't ask something but I want to assure you that it does not. You're not marked on whether you ask a question so whether you do or not doesn't influence our decision.

If you have a genuine question then of course go ahead and ask it but just make sure it's not something you could have easily found the answer to on the university website as this shows you haven't done your research into the course so could actually have a detrimental effect.

And lastly, remember to…

- Show a deep insight into the role of the midwife. The most common reason for applicants being unsuccessful is not demonstrating enough understanding about the midwife's diverse role. If you know it, show it!
- Demonstrate your awareness of the positives and negatives of the role so it's clear you're not wearing rose-tinted glasses.
- Never say "I want to work with babies!" Midwives have little to do with them, it's mostly about the woman/birthing person.
- Incorporate the six C's into your answers, either implicitly or explicitly.
- Possess a basic comprehension of the NMC Code so you can drop the odd reference into your answers. For example, in a scenario-based question you may say "as the NMC require midwives to respect people's right to decline to treatment, I would…"
- Weave things you've learned from reports/books/journals into your answers. I love it when somebody drops in a statistic which shows they've done some deeper research. My recommended reads include the latest MBRRACE report, independent reviews such as Ockenden and Kirkup, Savings Babies' Lives, Better Births and anything by Sheena Byrom and Sara Wickham.

I hope these tips are useful and want to wish you all the very best of luck future midwives! Just remember that no one is

you and that is your superpower. Now go forth and smash those interviews!

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