
College of Registered Nurses
of Nova Scotia



***Becoming a
Registered Nurse
in Nova Scotia***

Requisite Skills & Abilities

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Introduction & Purpose

The professional practice of nursing in Nova Scotia is defined in the *Registered Nurses Act* (RN Act: 2006) and *Regulations* (2009), and also reflected in the *Standards for Nursing Practice* (2004) and *Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses* (2008). Through the RN Act, the nursing profession is also granted the authority to set standards of education and practice for its members, with an obligation to protect the public and serve the public interest. The baccalaureate degree in nursing is the approved nursing education program for all new nursing graduates.

The practice of registered nurses (RNs) encompasses clinical practice, administration, education, research, consultation, management, regulation, policy, and system development. Through their education programs, nursing students (newly graduated RNs) gain the theoretical and practical foundation to practise safely, competently, compassionately and ethically as ‘generalists’ in diverse practice environments — ranging from large urban to remote rural settings (e.g., hospitals, communities, homes, clinics, schools, residential facilities). They are prepared to provide individualized nursing care to people of all ages and genders across the spectrum of diversity¹, in situations related to: health promotion, prevention and population health; altered health status, including acute and chronic health conditions and rehabilitative care; and, hospice, palliative and end-of-life care.

Approved nursing education programs are required to provide a breadth of nursing knowledge and varied practice learning opportunities. Upon graduation all new RNs in Nova Scotia are expected to have the capacity to meet the entry-level competencies for registered nurses, established by the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia (the College), and to be able to practise within the context of the College’s *Standards for Nursing Practice*. These entry-level competencies, which are broad based, reflect the minimum level of practice expected of registered nurses in order to provide the public with safe, competent, compassionate and ethical nursing care. They also aim to ensure that entry-level registered nurses are able to function in today’s realities and are well equipped with the knowledge and skills to adapt to changes in health care and nursing.

This document, which is designed to inform potential nursing students, admission officers, nursing faculties, disability and equity officers, and the general public of the general demands and performance expectations of registered nurses in Nova Scotia, has been adapted from a similar document developed by the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (CRNBC). Prospective nursing students may find the following information on requisite skills and abilities particularly useful in identifying their fit with the requirements of nursing (RN) as a career choice and/or identifying their potential need for accommodation in becoming a member of the nursing profession².

¹ The concept of diversity recognizes that each person is unique, and encompasses, but is not limited to, a person’s age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, physical abilities, sexual orientation, educational background, religious beliefs, political beliefs and geographical location.

² Accommodation is the adjustment of a rule, practice, condition, or requirement to take into account the specific needs of an individual or group with one or more of the protected characteristics in the *Human Rights Act*.

Requisite Skills & Abilities

Nursing students need certain basic skills and abilities, with or without accommodation, in order to meet the entry-level competencies for registered nurses in Nova Scotia. These requisite skills and abilities (RSAs) are formally defined as those required for admission to and progression through a nursing (RN) program, as well as for initial registration in the nursing profession. The College considers RSAs fundamental to the provision of safe, competent, compassionate and ethical nursing care in the best interest of the public.

The following seven categories of requisite skills and abilities were developed by the College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia (CRNBC), and adopted by the College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia:

Cognitive

1. Remember information over a brief period of time.
2. Remember information from past experiences.
3. Problem-solve to develop professional judgment.
4. Reason to develop professional judgment.
5. Exercise critical inquiry³ skills to develop professional judgment.
6. Apply mathematical skills and abilities in order to:
 - add, subtract, multiply and divide
 - calculate ratios, percentages and apply algebraic equations.

Examples: The student can make sense of complex knowledge; use knowledge and theory appropriately; use past experience to inform current decision making.

Behavioural

1. Manage own behaviour well enough to provide safe, competent and ethical nursing care.
2. Engage with self and others to create a safe environment.
3. Respond appropriately in situations that are stressful or that involve conflict.
4. React appropriately to giving and receiving physical touch and working in close proximity with a full range of clients.
5. Fulfill responsibility as part of a team.
6. Manage time appropriately.

Examples: The student remains calm in stressful situations; recognizes client priorities; and

³ This term expands the meaning of critical thinking to encompass critical reflection on actions. Critical inquiry means a process of purposive thinking and reflective reasoning where practitioners examine ideas, assumptions, principles, conclusions, beliefs and actions in the context of nursing practice.

responds appropriately in conflict situations.

Communication

1. Speak and understand spoken English well enough to avoid mixing up words and meanings: includes the ability to understand complex medical and technical knowledge.
2. Write and understand written English well enough to avoid mixing up words and meanings.
3. Recognize own non-verbal signals and interpret those received from others while considering individual differences in expression and associated meaning.

Examples: The student recognizes her/his own non-verbal behaviour; demonstrates awareness that each individual's behaviour has different meanings; listens appropriately to clients.

Interpersonal

1. Develop professional relationships and rapport with individuals and groups for the purpose of education, support and counseling.
2. Recognize the needs of clients and colleagues.
3. Recognize the importance of maintaining interpersonal boundaries.

Examples: The student recognizes the importance of maintaining interpersonal boundaries with clients; supports clients to make healthy choices; recognizes the importance of client perspectives and feelings.

Physical

Ability to perform each of the following requisites well enough to provide client care and participate in educational activities:

1. Stand and maintain balance
2. Manual dexterity
3. Move within limited spaces
4. Push and pull
5. Perform repetitive movements
6. Perform complex sequences of hand eye coordination
7. Bend
8. Reach
9. Lift
10. Walk
11. Climb
12. Carry objects

Examples: The student can carry a case weighing 8 kg up a flight of stairs; give intramuscular injections; remove wound sutures.

Sensory Perceptual

Ability to perceive with each of the following senses well enough to provide care and participate in educational activities:

1. Sight
2. Hearing
3. Touch

Examples: The student can accurately assess blood pressure and pulse; read the small print on medication packages and bottles; and assess client colour.

Environmental

Ability to function in the presence of each of the following commonly encountered and unavoidable environmental factors:

1. Noxious smells
2. Disease agents
3. Distractions
4. Noise
5. Chemicals
6. Unpredictable behaviour in others

Examples: The student can recognize dangers in the client environment; tolerate disposing of body waste; and tolerate unpleasant odors.

RSAs and Accommodation

The Nova Scotia *Human Rights Act* (1991) prohibits discrimination on a number of characteristics, including physical and mental disabilities⁴. Accommodation is the adjustment of a rule, practice, condition, or requirement to take into account the specific needs of an individual or group with one or more of the protected characteristics in the *Human Rights Act*.

Although there is no specific reference to accommodation in Nova Scotia's Human Rights Act, policy in other provinces (e.g., Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2004) stipulate that accommodation does not require post-secondary institutions to lower the academic or non-academic standards to accommodate students with disabilities nor does it relieve students of the responsibility to develop the essential skills and competencies (i.e., to meet entry-level competency requirements).

⁴ No person shall discriminate against a class of individuals on account of age; race; colour; religion; creed; sex; sexual orientation; physical or mental disability; an irrational fear of contracting an illness or disease; ethnic, national or aboriginal origin; family status; marital status; source of income; political belief, affiliation or activity; and that individual's association with another individual or class of individuals having characteristics referred to in the aforementioned examples (*Human Rights Act and Regulations*, 1991).

To determine if an RSA is reasonable and justifiable, the Supreme Court of Canada, in the Meiorin Case (1999), identified the following three-part test:

1. Is the requirement rationally connected to the objective of the service being provided?
2. Is the requirement adopted in good faith to accomplish this purpose?
3. Is the requirement reasonably necessary to accomplish this purpose?

According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2002), decisions pertaining to RSAs should not be made on the basis of an individual's diagnosis or limitation, but on the individual's demonstrated ability to meet the performance requirement.

Although there is limited research in relation to students with disabilities meeting the RSAs, the College and nursing education programs in Nova Scotia have noted an increasing number of students requesting accommodation throughout their studies and for the writing of the Canadian Registered Nurses Examination).

While the general public may lack understanding of the intellectual, behavioural, emotional, and physical requirements of the nursing profession, informing prospective students of program expectations should enhance their ability to identify if nursing is an appropriate career choice for them and/or identify areas potentially requiring accommodation.

Anyone who questions whether they have the RSAs for admission to or progression through a nursing (RN) education program should contact the institution to which they intend to apply (e.g., the disability office and/or educational program). To assist in determining eligibility for accommodation, prospective applicants must be prepared to disclose the nature of their disabilities and other relevant information. Educational institutions/regulatory bodies are expected to hear these disclosures without discrimination and to treat all related information in a confidential manner. Institutions/regulatory bodies are also expected to work with prospective students/members to determine reasonable accommodation.

Universities and regulatory bodies must balance their obligations to uphold individuals' rights with the requirement to ensure graduates of approved programs achieve entry-level competencies for safe nursing practice. For more information on the College's document entitled *Entry-Level Competencies for Registered Nurses in Nova Scotia* go to www.crnns.ca.

Conclusion

RSAs are the basic skills and abilities required by nursing students to meet the entry-level competencies for registered nurses in Nova Scotia. Being familiar with these RSAs could be beneficial to prospective nursing students – to help them identify their fit with the requirements of nursing (RN) as a career and/or identifying their potential need for accommodation should they decide to pursue this route for their future. This document could also serve as a valuable tool for guidance counsellors in facilitating discussions on nursing as a career choice, as well as for educational institutions and nursing faculties in providing fair and reasonable accommodation for individuals applying for and/or progressing through a nursing (RN) education program, when appropriate.

In the event that prospective or current students recognize their need for accommodation in relation to the RSAs (to enter or progress through a nursing education program), they should proceed with their request at the earliest opportunity. It is also important to note that accommodation should be a collaborative process, in which all parties strive to meet their obligations and responsibilities in good faith.

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