



**Athabasca
University**

Preceptor Manual

Centre for Nursing and Health Studies

Faculty of Health Disciplines

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Open Letter to the Preceptor

Thank you for volunteering your time, knowledge, skills, abilities, and experience to assist nursing students to achieve the basic competencies of a newly graduated registered nurse. Your willingness to take on this added responsibility is much appreciated by Athabasca University (AU). Being a preceptor does take extra time and commitment and it is recognized that clear expectations and readily available resources and supports are necessary for you to be successful in this role.

Therefore, the Centre for Nursing and Health Studies (CNHS) has developed this document to assist you in the preceptor role. CNHS also will provide access to an AU instructor to respond to your questions and to assist you throughout the preceptorship experience. Please contact this instructor to clarify any of the information in this manual or as you need assistance when working with the student.

Being a preceptor is recognized by the College of Registered Nurses (CRNA) as one means of maintaining competence as part of the Continuing Competency Program. Thus, being a preceptor is a benefit to your professional growth. In Canada, it is a professional expectation that nurses take an active role in teaching students.

We hope you will also find the preceptor experience beneficial. Again, thank you for your time and commitment to nursing education and to the preparation of the new graduate.

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Introduction to the Preceptor Manual

This manual is designed to orient preceptors who work with Athabasca University (AU) students in clinical nursing courses.

Purpose of the Preceptor Manual

The purpose of this manual is to facilitate effective preceptorships that will help post-LPN BN students successfully meet the requirements and expectations of clinical nursing courses. The purpose of clinical nursing courses is to provide students with knowledge and practice to acquire the competencies required to fulfil the role of the RN in the health care system.

Objectives of the Preceptor Manual

1. Define the terms preceptorship, clinical practicum, preceptor, preceptee, and orientation.
2. Outline preceptor roles.
3. Identify expectations for the preceptor, student, and AU instructor during the clinical placement.
4. Describe principles and concepts of adult learning that may help promote student success during a preceptorship placement.
5. Outline strategies preceptors can use to effectively orientate, teach, and evaluate students.
6. Provide resources and background information related to the program to assist preceptors in their role.

Resources

This manual contains sufficient information to prepare preceptors for the preceptor role. The appendices provide preceptors with additional information. The AU Preceptor Manual provides an overview of preceptorship and can be used as a quick reference as needed during the practicum.

What is Preceptorship?

Athabasca University establishes formal legal contracts with a variety of health care agencies for clinical placement of nursing students to provide students with direct hands-on practice as part of their nursing education. Preceptorship is one means of facilitating the learning of clinical nursing practice.

Important Terms

Preceptorship in nursing refers to “a reciprocal and collaborative learning relationship between two, sometimes more, individuals with mutual goals and shared accountability for the outcomes and success of the relationship” (Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses, 2012, p. 3).

The **clinical practicum** is a key component of undergraduate nursing education whereby novice nurses are mentored to develop their professional knowledge, skills and values (Lafrance, 2018).

The **preceptor** is an experienced and competent nurse who serves as a clinical role model and resource person for learners. The preceptor facilitates and evaluates student learning in the clinical arena. Although preceptors are usually employed by clinical agencies rather than the nursing program, they provide supervision for nursing students during the nursing education process. Preceptors are resources and role models in a one-to-one relationship, socializing students into the nursing profession (Ward & McComb, 2017).

The **preceptee** is a student nurse enrolled in a clinical nursing course. Paired with an experienced nurse, the student (preceptee) learns by observing, following directions, questioning, and working alongside the preceptor. Preceptors facilitate learning through their ability to articulate expectations and observations about nursing practice, by being supportive and flexible, and by having the desire to teach/help other individuals to learn.

Orientation is the process that organizations use to introduce new employees to the goals, structure, policies and procedures, role expectations, physical facility and services within the work setting. In the preceptorship experience, a modified orientation is required to orient the student to the clinical area.

Roles of the Preceptor

Nursing preceptorships have become common in nursing programs. Preceptorships allow nursing students to acquire a basic level of knowledge, skills, values and personal attributes as well as become socialized into the profession or domain of practice (CNA, 2021). A preceptor assumes all following roles at one time or another:

- **Advisor:** a person who gives an opinion about what to do or how to handle a situation.
- **Teacher:** a person who instructs, coaches, prepares, educates.
- **Supporter:** a friend or ally.
- **Evaluator:** a person who gives verbal and written constructive feedback to improve performance.
- **Coach:** a person who guides or directs.
- **Encourager:** a person who facilitates courage, hope, or confidence to another.
- **Motivator:** a person who incites another to action.
- **Role model:** a person in a specific role who is to be followed because of his/her excellence in that role.
- **Transformer:** a person who helps another gain insight in learning how to better understand or approach something new.

Expectations of the Preceptor

1. Build a Relationship with Your Student

The first step in building the professional relationship begins with getting to know the student. If possible, the preceptor and student should meet prior to the first clinical day to become acquainted and to discuss (in general terms) what the student wishes to achieve during the practicum. The preceptor could also share details about the nature of the clinical area, the type of clients/patients, learning opportunities, and provide students with recommendations for preparation for the first day of the preceptorship.

Obtaining a sense of how the student learns can assist the preceptor in meeting student needs. A preceptor can learn about the student through informal means such as:

- Asking students to explain how they learn best. Have students give examples.
- Having students share past experiences of success in the clinical area and discuss reasons

the learning was positive.

- Asking students what type of supervision and teaching style they prefer.
- Describing your own teaching and supervising style to students and discussing how these fit with their needs.
- Sharing background information regarding their nursing experience.

2. Help Your Student Feel Welcome

Creating a culture of respect enables preceptors to accommodate students' learning needs (Chicca, 2020). Welcoming students and introducing them to others on the unit enhances mutual respect. Students report positive practicums when preceptors:

- Provide opportunities to link theory and practice.
- Encourage students to build their own professional competence and self-confidence.
- Model best practice.
- Promote a locale where they feel welcomed by practitioners into the ranks of the profession as fellow (yet developing) practitioners (Lafrance, 2018).

In some instances, a student may work with more than one preceptor. In such cases an early introduction to other staff nurses will make the transfer between nurses easier. It is also important to introduce the student to the manager and to explain the channels of communication on the unit. Help students feel like they are an integral part of the nursing staff.

Other ways that preceptors can help students feel welcome on the unit and help set them up to success include the following:

- Provide a tour of the physical layout of the unit. Take time on the first shift to tour students and acquaint them with the unit and the location of supplies, and resources.
- Explain the unit policies, protocols and procedures. Point out the most significant policies, protocols and patient care procedures. Emphasize that reviewing relevant procedures prior to performing new skills promotes safe patient care.
- Review documentation procedures and expectations of the student related to recording and reporting.

3. Help Your Student Set Learning Goals

Students may need the assistance of the preceptor in establishing learning goals for their preceptorship experience. Preceptors can guide students to achieve this by:

- Reviewing the types of patients/clients on the unit and the learning opportunities available.
- Asking students to explain what they have learned to date in the nursing program and in this clinical course.

Encourage students to refer to the CRNA *Entry-Level Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurse* (2019) and the course learning outcomes and as guides as they develop their learning outcomes for the preceptorship. **Appendix A** contains Clinical Course Outlines. Access the CRNA *Entry-Level Competencies for the Practice of Registered Nurse* (2019) using the following link: [entry-level-competencies-for-the-practice-of-registered-nurses-mar-2019.pdf](#)

4. Assist Your Student to Meet Course Learning Outcomes

An effective preceptor is a nurse leader that is clinically competent with a broad knowledge base and effective interpersonal skills such as clear communication, compassion and caring attitudes (Loughran & Koharchik, 2019). To provide teaching, support and coaching the preceptors can:

- Share their knowledge, skills, and expertise with the students.
- Consult with students to identify learning opportunities that arise in the clinical setting.
- Direct students to useful resources to supplement learning.
- Look for learning experiences that will help students meet their learning goals.
- Be readily available to the students.
- Communicate with students in a clear, understandable manner.
- Provide coaching to facilitate learning and let the student try new nursing skills.

5. Enhance Your Student's Critical Thinking

Critical thinking involves thinking in an analytical, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored way and is an essential way of thinking for registered nurses. Try to find ways to enhance the critical thinking abilities of students.

To foster development of a student's critical thinking skills preceptors can:

- Encourage students to ask questions.
- Rather than 'tell,' ask students to explain how they would approach problems.
- Respond to student questions with, "What do you think should be done?" If the student truly does not know, providing hints using open-ended questions helps the student through the problem-solving process.
- Support the student's movement to increasingly independent decisions and practice.

6. Inform Your Student about their Progress

Evaluation of the student is one of the major responsibilities of the preceptor. There are two kinds of evaluation: i) formative (ongoing informal feedback) and ii) summative (usually formal, written feedback on performance at specific time intervals). To provide effective feedback:

- Give feedback that is constructive (positive as well as areas for growth) throughout the entire practicum experience.
- Respect the confidential nature of the preceptor-student relationship.
- Consult with the AU instructor regarding any concerns about the student's clinical abilities and performance.
- Notify the AU instructor immediately in the event of a crisis that involves the student's personal or clinical practice.
- Let the AU instructor know when the student performs outstanding work that deserves recognition.
- Provide the teaching, support, and coaching needed to assist students in achieving the course.
- Provide a written mid-term evaluation of the student's performance and meet with the student to discuss. The written mid-term evaluation may take the form of a listing of strengths and areas for improvement.
- Compare your preceptor evaluation with the student's self-evaluation and discuss.

By the end of the course, use the Post-LPN BN Clinical Evaluation Tool and program outcomes (see **Appendices B and C**) to provide a written final evaluation regarding the student's performance. Include relevant examples to support your comments. Remember, this written evaluation should be discussed with the student and submitted to the AU instructor.

Expectations of the Student

Students have responsibility of ensuring they have the knowledge and skills required for the clinical area. The course outline will provide the preceptor with additional information regarding the knowledge and skills students are expected to bring to the clinical placement. The preceptor will negotiate the clinical learning experiences with the student and provide the learning experiences to meet the course outcomes. In general, students are expected to:

- Meet with their preceptors prior to the clinical experience.
- Learn or review the knowledge, skills, and theory necessary to make good judgments and provide safe nursing practice.
- Review and practice skills prior to assuming responsibility for client care.
- Communicate previous learning and competencies to their preceptor.
- Maintain and increase their competency base as they progress through the experience.
- Be open to a variety of learning opportunities that will enhance their nursing knowledge and skills.
- Take responsibility for their learning by asking questions and seeking guidance to acquire knowledge and skills necessary for competent practice.
- Adhere to the policies and procedures of the agency.
- Document and report in accordance with professional and agency standards.
- Maintain confidentiality by discussing patients/clients only in appropriate places and with appropriate people.
- Maintain safety from the point of view of both the nurse and the client/patient.
- Maintain a professional appearance when attending any nursing practice setting.
- Work the same schedule as their preceptor(s) and notify the preceptor and clinical area if they are unable to attend clinical practice as scheduled.
- Conduct ongoing self-evaluation and submit a written midterm and final self-evaluation.
- Complete an evaluation of the preceptorship experience and submit it to AU.

Expectations of the Instructor

Athabasca University provides a resource person for the preceptor. This person is the AU instructor who teaches the clinical course related to the preceptorship. The AU instructor will be accessible and available to the preceptor by phone and email. The AU instructor's role is to provide support and assistance to the preceptor and student throughout the preceptorship experience. Specifically, the AU instructor is expected to:

- Contact the preceptor to establish a relationship and clarify arrangements for the student's preceptorship experience.
- Provide guidance and support to the student and preceptor as needed.
- Maintain regular contact with the preceptor to monitor student progress during the preceptorship.
- Be available to the preceptor for assistance and support.
- Provide the preceptor and student with advice and assistance with any issues that arise during the experience.
- Provide the student and preceptor with expertise and assistance with midterm and final evaluations of student.
- Receive and use evaluation data from the student and preceptor to assign a grade for the clinical experience.
- Liaise with the CNHS and AU regarding issues and recommendations arising out of the preceptorship.

Addressing Specific Issues

Regardless of how a preceptor prepares, is informed, and supported, issues or concerns may arise. Generally, the preceptor should feel comfortable to address any issues or concerns with the AU instructor. "Red flags" or the feeling that things are not going well should be identified and shared with the AU instructor with a request for assistance and support. It is best to seek assistance early when problems first arise rather than waiting until these are major concerns or the student is failing.

Some areas of concern may include:

- conflict

- misconduct
- harassment and/or abuse
- clinical failure

Conflict

Conflict may arise between the preceptor and the student or between the student and other staff. Generally, the sooner the conflict is identified and managed the better. One-to-one communication between the parties is a starting point. The preceptor can seek advice and support from the AU instructor or the manager in the clinical area regarding how to manage preceptee-related conflict.

Misconduct

The student is expected to adhere to the policies and procedures of the agency and of AU. Any concerns that a preceptor has regarding misconduct should be communicated to the AU instructor immediately. The AU instructor will assist and provide advice regarding the process and consequences for the student.

Students whose behaviour places them, patients/clients, or the agency at-risk, or students whose performance does not meet the requirements of the nursing practice course, will be reported to the AU instructor who will communicate the behaviour to the appropriate faculty member from AU CNHS. Nursing practice agencies reserve the right to refuse to continue to provide nursing practice placement to any student whose performance does not meet agency standards.

Harassment and/or Abuse

Athabasca University is committed to ensuring the safety of students during nursing practice. The faculty recognizes that students, nurses and patients/clients may encounter situations involving abuse or harassment. Students and AU instructors are responsible for becoming familiar with the agency's policies and procedures related to harassment and abuse.

Clinical Failure

Student failure is one of the greatest fears and challenges for a preceptor. The preceptor needs to keep the AU instructor aware of concerns related to a student's progress and to seek help in assisting the student to meet the required learning outcomes. In the event a student fails,

the preceptor and AU instructor will work together to ensure that all necessary steps and procedures are taken. The AU instructor's primary role in this situation is to support the preceptor through the process.

Thank you!

Thank you again for your time, effort, and work as a preceptor. Your contribution to the learning and socialization of AU students is much appreciated. You have made a difference to the students and to the profession of nursing! **Appendix D** lists additional resources for you.

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Appendix A: Clinical Course Outlines

The Post-LPN BN program includes four required nursing practice courses:

- NURS401: Professional Practice with Adults Experiencing Health Alterations
- NURS435: Professional Practice in Mental Health Promotion
- NURS437: Professional Practice in Family and Community Health Promotion
- NURS441: Consolidated Professional Practice

NURS401 - Professional Practice with Adults Experiencing Health Alterations

Nursing 401: *Professional Practice with Adults Experiencing Health Alterations* is a 6-credit paced study online with a clinical practicum component. The course is paced over 14 weeks and includes 8 learning units including a four-week clinical practicum. The course gives you the opportunity to integrate and apply concepts from prior learning in anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, pharmacology, and the theoretical concepts of NURS 400, in the provision of nursing care for adults experiencing acute and/or chronic alterations in health. The Nursing 401 clinical practicum is based on nursing competencies as outlined in the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta: [Entry-to-Practice Competencies for the Registered Nurses Profession](#).

For more information about this course, access the following link:

[NURS 401: Professional Practice with Adults Experiencing Health Alterations](#)

NURS435 - Professional Practice in Mental Health Promotion

Nursing 435: Professional Practice in Mental Health Promotion This 16-week paced online course provides opportunities to integrate theory and develop further skills related to mental health promotion with a focus on individuals, families and groups experiencing mental health alterations. Consideration will be given to mental health promotion with vulnerable aggregates and recognition of psychiatric mental health disorders that emerge across the lifespan. Opportunities to apply nursing assessment skills, such as mental status examination, and nursing intervention strategies such as therapeutic communication will be facilitated. A current snapshot of the field of psychiatric nursing, including both current practice and future research

possibilities will be presented. A major focus of the course is a mental health promotion project. Nursing 435 is a six-credit course.

For more information about this course, access the following link:

[NURS 435: Professional Practice in Mental Health Promotion](#)

NURS437 - Professional Practice in Family and Community Health Promotion

Nursing 437: Professional Practice in Family Health Promotion an online paced study practicum course that provides opportunities to integrate theory and develop further skills related to family and community health promotion. Practice will occur in a variety of settings including community agencies, public health and home health. Each student's placement will be unique and grounded in the practice of the agency and preceptor and supported by the course instructor. There are opportunities to apply community and family assessment skills, and nursing intervention strategies in recognition of concepts outlined in community and family nursing assessment model(s). The practicum requirements include a community agency placement of 4 weeks - full time. Students will be assigned to a Registered Nurse preceptor and will be supported by an Athabasca University Clinical Instructor. Students will maintain regular contact with their Clinical Instructor. Students must successfully complete the practicum and all assignment requirements in order to pass this course. For more information about this course, access the following link:

[NURS 437: Professional Practice in Family Health Promotion](#)

NURS441 - Consolidated Professional Practice

Nursing 441: Consolidated Professional Practice is a focused practicum course completed with the guidance of a preceptor. This clinical course provides students with the opportunity for application, integration, synthesis, and further growth of nursing knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a selected nursing practice setting (e.g., mental health, medical-surgical, community health). The emphasis is on the complexity of nursing care with clients (individuals, families and/or aggregates).

For more information about this course, access the following link:

[NURS 441: Consolidated Professional Practice](#)

Appendix B: Post-LPN BN Clinical Evaluation Tool

To access the Post-LPN BN Clinical Evaluation Tool, please click on either of the following

links:

[Clinical Evaluation Form \(Word .doc format\)](#)

[Clinical Evaluation Form \(PDF format\)](#)

Appendix C: Post-LPN BN Program Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the post-LPN BN program, learners will achieve or exceed the following program learning outcomes:

1. Engage in baccalaureate registered nursing practice compliant with the College of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CRNA) current Entry-to-Practice Competencies for the Registered Nurses Profession while demonstrating registered nursing practice consistent with the present:
 - CRNA Nursing Practice Standards and all other CRNA standards and guidelines
 - CNA Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses
 - Health Professions Act (HPA), the practice statement in Schedule 24 of HPA, and the Registered Nurses Profession Regulation
 - Common law, provincial and federal legislation that directs practice
2. Integrate concepts of population health, primary health care and health promotion while working with individuals, families, and communities with complex alterations in health.
3. Synthesize theory, evidence-based practice and research while working with individuals, families, and communities with complex alterations in health.
4. Model leadership behaviours such as reflection, advocacy, and integrity to influence self and others toward goal achievement.
5. Function effectively as a baccalaureate registered nurse utilizing critical inquiry processes to act in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity.
6. Work collaboratively with other disciplines and across health care sectors.
7. Incorporate personal integrity, responsibility and accountability in employment, community activities and further study.
8. Demonstrate commitment to scholarship and lifelong learning that includes self-reflection, self-direction, and technological innovation.

Appendix D: Resources

Here are resources that might be helpful to you in your preceptor role.

Preceptor tip sheets:

- Effective Preceptors

<http://saskpreceptors.ca/documents/preceptor-basics/Effective-Preceptors.pdf>

- Preceptor Roles & Responsibilities

<http://saskpreceptors.ca/documents/preceptor-basics/Preceptor-Roles-And-Responsibilities.pdf>

- Time for Reflection

<http://saskpreceptors.ca/documents/preceptor-basics/Time-For-Reflection-Preceptors.pdf>

- Tips for teaching Adults

<http://saskpreceptors.ca/documents/Tips%20for%20Preceptors%20-%20NEW%202017.pdf>

- Why be a preceptor?

<http://saskpreceptors.ca/documents/preceptor-basics/Why-Be-A-Preceptor.pdf>

*These tip sheets were developed by Em M. Pijl Zieber RN, BSN © 2005, University of Lethbridge.

