

About Your First Year of Nursing

# Stressed Out



## An Insider's Guide to Success

- Transition from student nurse to RN
- Overcome reality shock
- New nurse survival skills
- Tools, tips, and tricks for a smooth first year  
... and much, much more

Patricia A. Duclos-Miller MS, RN, CNA, BC

# Contents

List of figures .....	viii
How to use this book .....	x
About the author .....	xii
Acknowledgements .....	xiii
Introduction .....	xiv
<b>Part One: Before you begin .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Chapter 1: Before you start looking for your first job .....	3
Step one: Self-Assessment—be honest but true to yourself .....	3
Where do I look? .....	5
How do I compare hospitals/organizations?.....	5
What is the ANCC Magnet Recognition Program®? .....	6
Collective bargaining: What is it?.....	7
Job search essentials.....	8
Professional courtesy .....	26
References .....	26

<b>Chapter 2: Today's demands on the nursing graduate.....</b>	<b>27</b>
The nursing shortage: The facts .....	27
Stresses and challenges for the new graduate.....	32
Bridging the generation gap .....	37
Words of wisdom: Remembering how we treat people.....	40
Concerns exercise: Answers.....	42
References .....	42

**Part Two: Transitions .....45**

**Chapter 3: Orientation: One of the keys to a successful transition.....47**

The real learning begins .....	47
Welcome to orientation .....	48
What's your learning style? .....	54
The five key elements of a good orientation program .....	56
Preceptor versus mentor: Why both are needed .....	64
Extending orientation .....	68
Peer support groups .....	69
Additional programs .....	69
References .....	72

**Chapter 4: Transitioning from student nurse to RN.....73**

Changing roles .....	73
Addressing the difficulties of transition .....	74
The gap between school and the working world.....	84
New grad worries: You are not alone.....	85
The unavoidable meltdown.....	86
Clinical competency .....	87
Working with the team.....	91
Priority-setting exercise answers.....	96
References .....	97

<b>Chapter 5: Overcoming reality shock .....</b>	<b>99</b>
A whole new world .....	99
Reality shock: What is it? .....	100
The phases of reality shock .....	101
What you didn't learn in school .....	105
References .....	112

**Part Three: Increasing confidence ..... 113**

<b>Chapter 6: Combating horizontal violence.....</b>	<b>115</b>
The scope of the problem .....	115
What is horizontal violence, exactly?.....	116
Horizontal violence's impact.....	118
Getting to the root of the problem .....	119
The consequences of horizontal violence .....	121
How do I handle it?.....	122
Working with management.....	123
Strategies you can take .....	127
Know your rights .....	129
References .....	130

<b>Chapter 7: A guide to critical thinking.....</b>	<b>133</b>
Learning how to think like a nurse: Head versus hands.....	133
The roots of critical thinking .....	134
Definitions of critical thinking.....	135
Characteristics of critical thinkers.....	137
Critical thinking in nursing .....	138
Learning the art of critical thinking.....	138
Testing one, two, three .....	140
Final thoughts.....	142
References .....	142

<b>Chapter 8: New-nurse survival skills .....</b>	<b>145</b>
---	------------

Survival skill #1: Stress management.....	145
Survival skill #2: Effective communication .....	155
Survival skill #3: Conflict resolution.....	160
Helpful Web sites.....	165
References .....	165
<b>Chapter 9: Legal pitfalls in nursing.....</b>	<b>167</b>
Understanding law: The essentials.....	168
Managing your risk.....	170
Your documentation: Truth or consequences.....	172
Handling documentation errors .....	177
Adverse events: When a bad thing happens.....	178
Final thoughts.....	181
References .....	182
<b>Chapter 10: Looking to the future .....</b>	<b>183</b>
You made it.....	183
What's next? .....	184
Professional development.....	184
Planning your financial future.....	187
Helpful Web sites .....	194
Final words of wisdom .....	194
References .....	196

# Chapter 1

## Before you start looking for your first job

### Step one: Self-assessment—be honest but true to yourself

Before you begin your first job search you need to think about what you expect from nursing. In order to be successful in the profession, you will have to do a self-assessment first, and then apply for the right job.



In your self-assessment, ask yourself

- What do I want out of nursing?
- With what types of patients am I interested in working?
- What are my clinical interests?
- What size of organization and nursing unit best suits me?
- What are my likes and dislikes related to my potential job?
- What shift(s) can I realistically handle?
- Do I like a stable or constantly changing environment?

After you have answered these questions and developed a strong sense of who you are and what you are looking for, you can begin to determine what area of nursing best suits you—and vice versa. Here are some generalizations about the different types of nursing units to help you decide what type of nursing is best for you:

**Intensive Care Unit (ICU):** Do you like being a skilled technician? Do you have very good assessment and prioritization skills? Do you like to work with complex physiological patients and their families? Does the team work well together? How well do you tolerate stress?

**Emergency Department (ED):** Do you like working in a fast-paced environment? Can you handle unanticipated and ever-changing levels of acuity and diagnosis? Do you like to work with trauma patients? Can you handle death? Do you work well on a team? How well do you tolerate stress?

**Medical unit:** Do you like dealing with chronic diseases, chronic wounds, and diabetic management? How well could you deal with readmissions of the same patient?

**Surgical unit:** Do you like working with surgical wounds, post-operative care, and pain management? Do you like working with managed care? Do you like working with other professional members of the team, such as the physical therapist (PT), occupational therapist (OT), and speech language therapist (SLT)?

**Geriatric unit:** Do you like working with the elderly and getting to know them? Do you like having a predictable work day? Can you effectively monitor staff who are responsible for the direct care of the patient?

**Behavioral health unit:** Do you prefer process orientation to outcome orientation? Do you consider patient communication a higher priority than developing your technical skills?

**Obstetric unit (OB)/Parent-child health unit:** Do you like treating the same type of patient day in and day out? Do you like patient teaching and repetition?

**Pediatric (PEDS) unit:** Do you enjoy working with sick children and their families? Do you like patient teaching?



**Tip:** As you can see, each specialty is different—and each has its own challenges and rewards. You need to look carefully at which area fits your desired population of patients, desired level of disease management, communication style, and teaching skills. Be honest with yourself, and make a commitment to succeed and be happy in nursing.

## Where do I look?

There are many ways to search for the perfect job. The media have expanded from print (newspaper advertisements, journals, and newsletters) to Web sites and online advertising. In addition, there are live events that you can attend to help you with your search.

You should attend at least two career fairs that are exclusively for nurses. In addition, attend the open houses of any potential employers. These events provide a wonderful opportunity for you to speak with staff and tour the facility.

Another way to find a job is through networking and word of mouth. When you belong to a professional organization, there are always job opportunities that have yet to be posted or advertised, but are discussed among members at the meetings.

## How do I compare hospitals/organizations?

Quality indicators are now reportable to the public. There are many Web sites, such as *www.hospitalcompare.hhs.gov*, that will list the clinical quality indicators for each hospital, home health agency, and long-term care facility in the United States.



**Watch out:** On these sites, spend time looking at the organization's last JCAHO survey results, the last state/federal survey results, and some of the commercial "report cards" that are open to the public. These results will give you an idea of the organization's level of commitment to quality, especially in comparison to other organizations in the state and nation. And, with so many healthcare systems in financial crisis, make it a priority to find out about the financial security of the organization.

In addition to researching the organization as a whole, be sure to ask about the reputation of nursing leadership in the prospective organization. If you did your clinical work at the organization, you can do this by talking to nurses with whom you worked. If you are unfamiliar with the organization, have an informal chat with staff before your formal interview. Consider asking the following questions:

- What is the organization's leadership style?
- Do leaders promote nursing?
- Are they innovative and creative?



## What is the ANCC Magnet Recognition Program®?

Over the years, nursing has defined itself as a profession with high standards. One of the highest standards for an organization committed to nursing and quality patient care is the achievement of the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program®. As of 2006, less than 3% of hospitals in the United States have been awarded Magnet designation. Some of the key characteristics of Magnet status hospitals are



- The nurse executive is visible, influential, credible, and responsive. The value of the professional nurse is apparent.
- The administrative team listens and responds to its employees. Administration also recognizes the value of nursing. Dollars are put into the nursing budget, rather than taken away.
- The nurse leader articulates the importance of nursing to the administrative team, medical staff, and community members.
- There is mutual respect among the nursing, medical, and administrative staff. The goal is optimal patient care.
- The clinical staff works in a supportive, autonomous environment.
- Nurses are encouraged to move and grow to reach their potential. Nurses are financially supported to attend local and national conferences in order to stay abreast of current nursing trends.
- Nurses are provided the resources needed to perform their job, such as new equipment, better staffing and assistive help. They are paid well.
- Even with the nursing shortage, there are enough nurses who are satisfied and empowered in their role. They provide excellent patient care (Upenieks 2002).

Magnet-designated facilities report higher patient satisfaction scores, achieve better patient outcomes, provide more nursing care at the bedside, and have higher retention rates than non-Magnet designated organizations (Greiner and Hendrich 2006). For these reasons, pursuing employment at a Magnet-designated facility may prove to be an attractive option.

## Collective bargaining: What is it?

You may have heard the term “union” or collective bargaining. Collective bargaining may be defined as activities that occur between organized labor and the organization (your employer) that involve employee relations. An example of this is the discussion of a new formal written contract for those in a collective bargaining agreement.

There are many different collective-bargaining/union organizations across the country. They represent workers in almost all facets of the work world. Nurses are represented by some of the unions that also represent teachers, auto, and service workers. The hospital in which you are interested may have a nursing staff represented by a union such as the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the Service Employee Industry Union (SEIU), or the United American Nurses (UAN). Or, the hospital may be using non-traditional collective-bargaining approaches that have emerged over the last few years.



**Tip:** If you are seeking employment in an environment that relies on collective bargaining, you need to understand how the nurses are represented in the organization and ensure that the voice of nursing is being heard. The following are some common terms you may encounter:

**Interest-based bargaining (IBB):** a non-traditional approach to collective bargaining. IBB involves shared governance, and a collaborative problem-solving approach to workplace issues and nursing practice.

**Center for American Nurses (CAN):** an organizational member of the professional association, the American Nurses Association. The CAN represents the interests of nurses who are not formally part of a union. They encourage workplace advocacy as a means for the promotion of positive work environments.

**United American Nurses (UAN):** a traditional collective-bargaining unit that is affiliated with the American Nurses Association, but is a member of the AFL-CIO.

**Traditional collective bargaining:** a regulated collective-bargaining unit or union. The goal is to help its members gain control over practice, economics in the healthcare industry, and other issues that may impede the quality of patient care (Zerwekh and Claborn 2006).



**Watch out:** If you plan to join an organization that is affiliated with a union, you need to understand not only what membership in the union entails, but what is expected of you as a union member. For example, union membership requires payment of annual dues and participation in actions such as strikes.

**Figure 1.1: Unions—To join or not to join**

Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better wages</li> <li>• Better benefits</li> <li>• Better staffing ratios</li> <li>• Help with grievances</li> <li>• Solidarity</li> <li>• Protection from poor working conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No voice as an individual</li> <li>• Difficult to get rid of poor-performing nurses</li> <li>• Jobs and prime vacation time awarded to senior staff</li> <li>• Dues</li> <li>• Strikes</li> </ul>

## Job search essentials

### Résumés: The key to getting the best job out there

Presentation is everything. Remember the phrase, “It’s all in the packaging”? When it comes to your résumé, that phrase couldn’t be more true. Your goal is to impress anyone who may see your résumé come across their desk. A well constructed résumé will set itself apart from the dozens of others that your potential employer sees on a daily basis.



**Tip:** Use the correct font, usually 12-point type, Arial or Helvetica font. Use a quality paper in a neutral color (white or cream). Also, use a manila mailing envelope that is 8.5 x 11 inches, and that does not require you to fold your résumé. You want the finished résumé to look professional and show the employer that you are a conscientious person who pays attention to detail.



**Don't forget:** When preparing your résumé, include the following:

- **Name, address, and phone number.** This should appear at the top of the page. Most people center this information, but there are impressive résumés that use the right- or left-justified format. As you will be listing your contact information, be sure your answering machine or voicemail recording sounds professional—no hard rock, funny introduction, or

cute children on the recording. Remember that this is your potential employer's first contact with you. You want to project a good impression and show that you are serious about this job. You should also consider establishing a new e-mail address for your job search, especially if your current address is something like `fairygodmother@abc.com`.

- **Job titles.** These should be clear and understandable to the human resources department and hiring manager. Do not use abbreviations unless you also spell them out, e.g., "PCA (Patient Care Associate)."
- **Company names and dates,** which are an important indicator of your work history. List the month and year in which you began each job, as well as the month and year in which you ended your employment. Remember to list your part-time and summer work positions, as they illustrate your work ethic and project the image that you were able to manage school and work. Under each job, list the **job duties** that were required for the position. You can also highlight your achievements and demonstrate if you exceeded the expected job requirements.
- **Volunteer work,** if you have participated in a substantial amount. This shows that you have initiative, a commitment to civic duty, self-motivation, and leadership and communication skills.
- **Certification,** an important aspect of the nursing profession. Be sure to list all areas of certification on your résumé, including your CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) certification and any other related certifications.
- **Education,** listed by the highest level reached first. This section becomes less important as you gain experience as a registered nurse. Once you have acquired several years of applicable work history, you should put education after your employment history.
- **Secondary languages.** Given the increased diversity in our country, bilingualism is seen as a major plus-point by organizations. List this only if you are fluent in a second language. This means you are able to converse and interpret for others on your team.
- **Professional membership,** such as your membership in your state's student nurses' association or a nursing association on your campus, which demonstrates that you have an interest in your future profession.

- **Other categories.** Here you can include professional development and training you've undertaken that may support your new role. This section can be separate or you can include it as part of your education with the heading EDUCATION/TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT. If you have written articles, participated in a research study, or hold a certification, include this on your résumé. Also, if you have served in the military, be sure to list that information as well (under the heading MILITARY SERVICE).



**Watch out:** While including all of the aforementioned information is crucial, DO NOT

- include salary requirements/history (unless requested)
- write the word “résumé” at the top of the page
- include a “references available upon request” line (you will have a separate page for this)
- exaggerate or misrepresent your experience
- use abbreviations
- use “I” statements
- list reasons for leaving a job
- include religious or political group affiliations
- attach a photograph or include a physical description of yourself

### ***One page or two?***

There is a long-standing debate on the appropriate length of a résumé. Contrary to popular belief, a one-page résumé is not always the best. If you decide on a two-page résumé be sure that you do not include unnecessary or trivial information. Think in terms of relevance, not the number of pages. If you do end up with a second page, be sure to list your contact information on that page, in case it becomes detached from the rest of the document. You could use the “header and footer” tool for this.

### ***References page***

The best way to handle the required reference and recommendation list is to put it on a separate page. Be sure to include your contact information on this page as well. Figure 1.2 provides an example of a reference sheet.

Figure 1.2: Reference sheet

**Florence Nightingale**  
975 Warweary Way  
Northmeadow, IL 60610  
(403) 555-8732

### REFERENCES

#### Business

Robert Newbold, Nurse Manager  
General Hospital  
1000 Brandyway Avenue  
Willow, IL 60510  
(403) 555-6913  
RNewbold@willowhospital.org

#### Personal

Sally Ockajik, Registered Nurse  
41 Susset Terrace  
Willow, IL 60511  
(403) 555-7531  
sockajik@willowhospital.org

Wynette Mack,  
Patient Care Associate  
16 Pequabuck Street  
Fairfield, IL  
(403) 555-2351  
wmack123@global.net

#### Academic

Nicole Ianacone,  
Assistant Professor  
Willow Community College  
555 Batterson Avenue  
Willow, IL 60511  
(403) 555-1234  
Nianacone@willow.comm.edu

Joanne DiValentino,  
Assistant Professor  
Willow Community College  
555 Batterson Avenue  
Willow, IL 60511  
(403) 555-1235  
JDiValentino@willow.comm.edu

Leslie Larkin, Associate Professor  
Willow Community College  
555 Batterson Avenue  
Willow, IL 60511  
(403) 555-1236  
LLarkin@willow.comm.edu

**Power Words**

Include power words when you write your résumé and your cover letter. Also, keep a dictionary or thesaurus handy to help you find the right synonym.

**Figure 1.3: Power words**

- |                |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| * Achieved     | * Focused      | * Proposed     |
| * Adapted      | * Generated    | * Recommended  |
| * Analyzed     | * Implemented  | * Reduced      |
| * Assisted     | * Improved     | * Reinforced   |
| * Built        | * Increased    | * Researched   |
| * Collected    | * Initiated    | * Revised      |
| * Compiled     | * Introduced   | * Saved        |
| * Conducted    | * Maintained   | * Solved       |
| * Coordinated  | * Managed      | * Spearheaded  |
| * Created      | * Monitored    | * Streamlined  |
| * Decreased    | * Organized    | * Strengthened |
| * Delegated    | * Participated | * Supported    |
| * Demonstrated | * Performed    | * Taught       |
| * Drafted      | * Planned      | * Updated      |
| * Established  | * Prepared     |                |
| * Expanded     | * Produced     |                |

Figure 1.4: Model résumé

**Carol Anne Burke**

14 Covey Drive  
Alabaster, MA 01234  
Home: (213) 555-3694 Cell: (213) 555-7812  
caburke@farscape.net

**Desired position:** Staff nurse

**EMPLOYMENT**

Patient Care Associate  
Huntington Hospital  
Huntington, MA  
May 2004 – June 2006

**Responsibilities and duties:** Assisting the nurse in the care of medical-surgical patients.

**Specialized skills:** Phlebotomy, ECG, and minor respiratory therapy interventions.

**Accomplishments and achievements:** Employee of the month, September 2005.  
Numerous patient satisfaction surveys that include my name for providing quality care during the patient's hospitalization.

**EDUCATION**

Huntington Community College  
Huntington, MA  
Associate Degree in Nursing, 2006

**Course Work:** Medical-surgical: Huntington Hospital, Units F and G  
Obstetrics: Women's Hospital, Boston, Unit 5  
Pediatrics: Children's Hospital, Boston, Unit 9  
Behavioral health: Long Lane Academy, Ashford, MA

**Achievements, Awards/Scholarships:** Dean's List for all semesters, Massachusetts Nurses' Association Student Nurses' Foundation financial scholarship

**Certifications:** CPR, 2005

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

National Student Nurses' Association, 2004–2006  
Student Nurses' Association, Huntington chapter – served as secretary

**COMMUNITY SERVICE AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES**

Christ the King Catholic Church  
Ashford, MA  
Volunteer CCD teacher, 1999–2004

Habitat for Humanity  
Boston, MA  
Volunteer, 2000



### *Electronic résumé tips*

In this age of technology, you may see an advertisement for a job that requires you to submit your résumé electronically. Using your MS Word or Word Perfect format may not work well as an electronic submission. You should save your document as a rich text format (RTF) file to ensure it looks like it should on the receiving end. You can either cut and paste it into the online job application form or send it as an attachment. Once you have written your text version, e-mail it to yourself or a friend to see how it looks before posting it.



**Tip:** Guidelines for submitting an electronic résumé

- Left-justify the entire document.
- Avoid fancy fonts or characters. Use Arial or Helvetica font in 12-point type size. Check with the job ad—they may prefer 10-point.
- Avoid tabs and hard returns. They do not translate well in the electronic format.
- Avoid italics, script, underlining, boldface, underscoring, and bullets. Use an asterisk or dash instead of bullets. Use capital letters for emphasis.
- Avoid using horizontal or vertical lines.
- Avoid faxed copies, as they may become fuzzy on the receiving end. If it is really necessary for the employer to get your résumé quickly, send it overnight express.

### **Cover letters**

Once you have completed your research on the organization in which you are interested, you can sit down and write a custom cover letter. You did this research to develop a better understanding of the organization's mission, goals, and how well you will fit in. Keeping this in mind, your cover letter should demonstrate your interpretation of the organization's mission, how/why you feel you would be a good fit with the institution, and the skills and experience you offer. Do not repeat too much information that is already on your résumé, as this would just be wasting space. Just use key skills that are applicable to the job for which you are applying, if you feel it is necessary.

**Don't forget:** Cover letter rules

- Always send a cover letter with your résumé.
- Always address the letter to the appropriate individual. If you do not know his/her name and title, call the organization and ask.
- Always be clear and concise.
- Always limit the cover letter to three or four paragraphs.
- Always type your cover letter.
- Always use the same paper that you used for your résumé.
- Always proofread your cover letter very closely. (Then have someone else read it.)
- Always include the exact title of the position you are seeking.
- Always remember that the cover letter should indicate why you want to work for the organization. It should answer the question, "Why should I interview this nurse?"
- Always include a sample of what you know about the organization (based on the research you did). For example, you may want to cite the organization's impressive quality and clinical outcomes, their achievement of Magnet status, or their standing with patient or employee satisfaction scores.

Figure 1.5: Model cover letter

14 Covey Drive  
Alabaster, MA 01234  
Home: (213) 555-3694  
Cell: (213) 555-7812  
caburke@farscape.net

Mr. Herman Heinz  
Human Resources Manager  
Huntington Hospital  
100 Grand Street  
Huntington, MA 01235  
March 12, 2006

Dear Mr. Heinz:

*[Paragraph one: Explain why you are interested in the organization. Include any applicable, specific information concerning the organization, such as recently achieving JCAHO recertification.]*

I am seeking a staff nurse position in your hospital. I believe that you will find my clinical background and experience aptly fit the criteria for the position openings on the medical-surgical unit. As I have had many of my clinical rotations at your hospital and have also served as a patient care associate at Huntington, I am very familiar with the organization and would love the opportunity to serve as a full-time staff member.

*[Paragraph two: Briefly describe your clinical qualifications and accomplishments at school or work. Tie them into the job you are seeking.]*

Currently, I am completing my senior rotation at Huntington Community College and expect to graduate this May. Throughout nursing school, I have demonstrated the ambition to succeed and the ability to balance school work with part-time employment. As a PCA, I have received employee service awards due to my commitment to teamwork and patient satisfaction.

*[Paragraph three: Take the initiative and ask for an interview. Provide possible dates and times you are available. Always include a thank you for the HR manager's time and consideration.]*

Please let me know if you need any further information. I can provide references upon request. I am available on any Thursday and look forward to meeting with you to discuss employment options at your facility. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
(Handwritten signature)  
Carol Anne Burke

**Thank you letters**

Writing a thank you letter is part of job-search etiquette. It can be brief, but should reflect what happened during the interview and your continued interest in the position. If you forgot to mention something important about yourself, this is a good opportunity for you to include it. You should send a thank you letter within a day of the interview. A letter needs to go to anyone with whom you have had a formal interview—the human resources manager, the nurse manager, and any staff member. Be sure to get the names of any staff members who were in the interview room before you leave the unit. Figure 1.6 is an example of a thank you letter to the nurse manager.

**Figure 1.6: Model thank you letter**

Florence Nightingale  
975 Warweary Way  
Northmeadow, IL 60610  
(403) 555-8732

July 12, 2006

Nancy Brodey, Nurse Manager  
Unit N12  
Willow Hospital  
Willow, IL 60510

Dear Ms. Brodey:

Please accept this letter as a thank you for taking time out of your busy day on Tuesday. It was a pleasure meeting you and your staff. I was most impressed by the high professional standards that your staff demonstrated. They shared their unit accomplishments with me and made me want to become a contributing member of your team.

I am certain that my willingness to continue to learn and grow in the role of new graduate would be an asset to your team. Your commitment to patient safety and meeting quality goals is admirable, and I would appreciate the opportunity to be part of this work.

Once again, thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

[Handwritten signature]  
Florence Nightingale

Figure 1.7: The ABCs of getting a job

<b>A = Attitude</b>	Make sure you have a positive one.
<b>B = Benefits</b>	Look at the information carefully, compare each potential employer, and call human resources with any questions.
<b>C = Competencies</b>	Always be honest. No one expects you to be an expert. You can talk about your current competencies and talk about which ones you still want to learn.
<b>D = Directions</b>	Get them. Be sure you know where you are going so that you are not late for the interview.
<b>E = Eye Contact</b>	Be sure of yourself and make direct eye contact during the interview.
<b>F = Follow up</b>	After every meeting/interview.
<b>G = Goals</b>	Set realistic goals and be prepared to talk about them if asked.
<b>H = Handshake</b>	Make it firm but not overpowering.
<b>I = Interview</b>	Remember it only takes one to get you through the door and into the right job.
<b>J = Join</b>	Joining organizations will show your commitment to the profession. Remember to list your affiliations on your resume.
<b>K = Knowledge</b>	Do your research and know the organization you are interested in.
<b>L = Location</b>	Decide where is best for you. Can you afford to relocate?
<b>M = Money</b>	Get paid what you are worth. Search nursing journals and the internet for the salary ranges for your region and level.
<b>N = Network</b>	Get to know as many people in the field as you can. This can be crucial when it comes to finding your dream job.
<b>O = Organization</b>	Make sure your materials are organized, as well as your appearance. Have extra copies of your resume on hand during your interview—it shows you are put together and prepared (especially if someone needs a copy).
<b>P = Practice</b>	Practice, practice, practice your interviewing skills.
<b>Q = Questions</b>	Be prepared to ask questions of your potential manager.
<b>R = Résumé</b>	It's you—on paper.
<b>S = SOAR</b>	S = situation, O = obstacles, A = action, and R = results. Be prepared to give one example. See next page for more information.
<b>T = Thank you</b>	Thank everyone who helped you before, during, and after the interview. Include those you asked for references and letters of recommendation.
<b>U = Understand</b>	Get to know and understand yourself so that you are self-assured during the interview.
<b>V = Voice</b>	Speak clearly and do not use "um" and "uh."
<b>W = Writing</b>	Your documents must be error-free and clean.
<b>X = eXtra time</b>	Take a few minutes to double and triple check all of your work. If the final decision for a position comes down to you and another candidate, that one misspelled word on your résumé may be the reason you lose out.
<b>Y = Yahoo!</b>	Be sure and take time to celebrate your success in graduating from nursing school, getting the job you wanted, and achieving your goals.
<b>Z = Zero in</b>	Keep your eye on the prize! When you focus on your goals, success comes naturally.

## Preparing for the interview

The interview begins from the moment you enter the building. Be polite and appreciative with everyone you meet. A simple “thank you” will go a long way.



### **Don't panic: SOAR**

If you are the type of person who does not like to talk about themselves, you need to read this! You have skills and accomplishments. The interviewer will almost always ask you to talk about an accomplishment or something of which you are proud. Look at the achievements and successes that have helped you define your skills and traits. Those are the important qualities for which a potential employer is looking.

The following exercise, called SOAR, will help you identify your skills so that you will be able to communicate them at the interview. Use the exercise to get ready for your interviews.

**Situation:** Describe a situation from your clinical or work experience.

**Obstacles:** Describe the obstacles you faced.

**Actions:** List the actions you took.

**Results:** Describe the results you helped obtain and the benefits to your employer/classmates/patient.

Try to think of three or more SOAR examples and incorporate them into your preparation and practice interview. The following is an example:

**Situation:** Decreasing patient falls on Unit 5.

**Obstacles:** Not enough patient safety equipment on the unit/not all PCAs committed to the Quality Improvement (QI) project of reducing falls on the unit.

**Action:** Met with my nurse manager and discussed my suggestions of doing an inventory of the existing patient safety equipment. Sent broken equipment to maintenance. Gave the results to the nurse manager to order more equipment and started PCA walking rounds at the change of shift.

**Results:** Patient falls dropped by 50%.

### *Interviewing skills*

First, you need to dress for success. You cannot expect to land the job of your dreams looking like a college student. Think of this job interview as a business exchange. You are selling yourself and they are looking to buy the best product on the market. So, you need to spend some time and money on yourself. Consider this an excuse to go and buy that new suit or professional-looking outfit. The return on this investment will be well worth it. Look groomed, neat, and “put together.” If you look as if you are successful, you will be successful.

Second, if you are not good at interviewing or have never had a job interview before now, you will need to practice, practice, practice. Use your colleagues or a faculty member for mock interviews. Honing your interviewing skills will help you land the job you really want. Remember, the first five minutes of every interview are the most critical. The decision to hire is made with first impressions.

Figure 1.8 lists some examples of interview questions and why they are used.



Figure 1.8: Sample interview questions and rationales

Question	Rationale
Tell me about yourself.	Getting to know you
What will you bring to this position?	Self-awareness skills
What would you consider to be your best and worst traits?	Identifies your strengths and weaknesses
Describe a clinical assignment that did not turn out the way you planned. What did you do?	Problem-solving skills
What did you learn from that assignment?	Ability to learn from mistakes
Tell me what interests you about this position.	Interest
Describe a situation in which you had to work with someone you did not like.	Ability to work on a team
Describe how you would deal with an upset patient or family member.	Customer-focused skills
For what type of personality do you do your best work?	Working with management
Describe a situation in which you had to learn a lot in a short period of time. How did you manage this and what was the outcome?	Learning and initiative skills
Where do you predict nursing is going in the future?	Knowledge of the profession
Would you report yourself if you made a mistake?	Integrity
What do you do to alleviate stress?	Stress management skills
How well did you manage your assignments as a student nurse?	Organization skills
I am going to give you an assignment of the following three patients. How would you manage their care? Who would you go see first?	Prioritization skills
How would you handle a situation where someone for whom you were responsible made a serious mistake?	People skills Performance management skills
Where do you see yourself in five years?	Ambition

### *Asking the right questions*

Think of the interview process as a two-way conversation. It is important for you to ask questions to ensure that you are picking the right organization, and that it matches your personality, philosophy, and pay needs. Asking the right questions will get you the information you need to match your qualifications to the job. You will be able to evaluate the position and make a sound decision as to whether it is the right job for you.

Think in terms of question categories, such as

- Responsibilities of the position
- Resources available to meet the responsibilities (e.g., staffing, supplies, educational support such as orientation programs and continuing education)
- Performance measurements and timeframes
- Organization and unit culture

### *Sample questions to ask human resources and the nurse manager*

When you start your interview process you will first have to meet with the nurse recruiter or human resources manager. They will go over the generalities of the organization, the benefits, and information about the position for which you are interviewing. They will then ask you if you have any questions for them. You should be prepared to ask insightful questions. This is your chance to find out if this is the right job for you.



**Ask:** In addition to the title of the position, the salary range, the length of the orientation program, and the anticipated shift hours, you can ask

- How long have you been with the organization?
- Why do you enjoy working for this organization?
- How would you describe the philosophy of the organization?
- In your opinion, what is the most important contribution that this organization expects from its employees?
- What is the next step in the interview process?

In order to understand the level of competition for the position, what the position really entails, and what the style of the management team is, you could ask

- How do my skills compare with those candidates you have interviewed?
- What advice would you give to a new graduate?
- Can I have a written job description?
- Can you talk about the organization's commitment to equal opportunity and diversity?
- Is the executive team visible to the employee?
- What is the management style in the department of nursing?

When you meet with your prospective nurse manager, you want to demonstrate that you are prepared and should ask

- How long have you been with the organization?
- What attracted you to this organization?
- How would you describe your management style?
- How would you describe the level of teamwork on the unit?
- What specific skills from the new graduate would make your life and the team's life easier? What are some of the skills and abilities you see as necessary for a new graduate to succeed on this unit?
- How long is your orientation program? What are the details of the program? Do orientees receive feedback from their preceptors and staff? If so, how often?
- What are some of the challenges that I might encounter if I take this position?
- Can you give me an idea of the typical day and workload of this position?
- What is the availability of the physician after hours?
- What are the three most important goals for the unit?
- What do you see as the most important areas for improvement? Is there a way that the staff can help?
- Is it possible to meet with some of the staff nurses?
- How soon are you looking to fill this position?

**Keeping track of it all**

As your job search will most likely happen during the school year, you will surely be busy during this time. You will need a way to keep track of all of your submitted applications, cover letters and résumés, as well as any telephone calls made and received, and any follow-up and thank you letters sent. Figure 1.9 provides a handy checklist for you to use.

**Figure 1.9: Job-search checklist**

Organization address/phone	Date application/ résumé sent	Interview date/time	Thank-you letter sent after interview (date)	Job offer received (date)	Notes

## Professional courtesy

After completing your interviews, you will likely be contacted by a prospective employer. **If you are expecting more than one offer, that's okay. But it is not okay to say yes to all offers and then decide which one is best.**



**Watch out:** A Vice President for Nursing once told me that when a new graduate accepts a position with their facility but then goes to another facility, that new graduate is remembered and will not have another chance at her facility.

The professional way to handle multiple offers is to be honest and ask for more time to consider the offer. If Hospital A calls and makes you an offer, but you really prefer Hospital B, then thank them for the offer and ask if you can get back to them in 7–10 days. That way, you are still showing interest but also letting them know that you need more time to decide. Next, call Hospital B and ask them when they are planning to make a decision.

It is always okay to ask for time to consider any offer. Never say yes to an offer at the time of the offer. Tell the employer you'd like to call them back, and also tell them when you will call them back with your decision. Everyone should "sleep on" their big decisions.

## References

Greiner, A., and A. Hendrich. 2006. Advancing Knowledge through Collaboration: Putting nurses in the driver's seat. *Reflections on Nursing Leadership*. 2nd quarter. [www.nursingsociety.org/RNL/Current/feature7.html](http://www.nursingsociety.org/RNL/Current/feature7.html).

Provenzano, S. 2000. *Top Secret Executive Résumés*. Franklin Lake, NJ: The Career Press, Inc.

Upenieks, V. 2002. Assessing Differences in Job Satisfaction of Nurses in Magnet and Non-Magnet Hospitals. *Journal of Nursing Administration* 32(11): 564-576.

Thibeault, S. 2006. *Stressed Out About Nursing School*. 2nd edition. Marblehead, MA: HCPro, Inc.

Zerwekh, J., and J. Claborn. 2006. *Nursing Today: Transition and Trends*. 5th edition. St. Louis, MO: Saunders Elsevier.

# HCPro

## Order your copy today!

Please fill in the title, price, order code and quantity, and add applicable shipping and tax. For price and order code, please visit [www.hcmarketplace.com](http://www.hcmarketplace.com). If you received a special offer or discount source code, please enter it below.

Title	Price	Order Code	Quantity	Total
				\$
<b>Your order is fully covered by a 30-day, money-back guarantee.</b>			<b>Shipping*</b> (see information below)	\$
			<b>Sales Tax**</b> (see information below)	\$
			<b>Grand Total</b>	\$

**Enter your special Source Code here:**

Name

Title

Organization

Street Address

City

State

ZIP

Telephone

Fax

E-mail Address

**\*Shipping Information**

Please include applicable shipping. For books under \$100, add \$10. For books over \$100, add \$18. For shipping to AK, HI, or PR, add \$21.95.

**\*\*Tax Information**

Please include applicable sales tax. States that tax products and shipping and handling: CA, CO, CT, FL, GA, IL, IN, KY, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, NC, NJ, NM, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, TN, TX, VA, VT, WA, WI, WV.

State that taxes products only: AZ.

**BILLING OPTIONS:**

Bill me  Check enclosed (payable to HCPro, Inc.)  Bill my facility with PO # \_\_\_\_\_

Bill my (✓ one):  VISA  MasterCard  AmEx  Discover

Signature

Account No.

Exp. Date

(Required for authorization)

(Your credit card bill will reflect a charge from HCPro, Inc.)

**Order online at [www.hcmarketplace.com](http://www.hcmarketplace.com)**

**Or if you prefer:**

**MAIL THE COMPLETED ORDER FORM TO:** HCPro, Inc. P.O. Box 1168, Marblehead, MA 01945

**CALL OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE DEPARTMENT AT:** 800/650-6787

**FAX THE COMPLETED ORDER FORM TO:** 800/639-8511

**E-MAIL:** [customerservice@hcpro.com](mailto:customerservice@hcpro.com)

© 2008 HCPro, Inc. HCPro, Inc. is not affiliated in any way with The Joint Commission, which owns the JCAHO and Joint Commission trademarks. Code: EBKPDF

P.O. Box 1168 | Marblehead, MA 01945 | 800/650-6787 | [www.hcmarketplace.com](http://www.hcmarketplace.com)