

The New Nurse's First 90 Days

A practical checklist for building safe habits, confidence, and career direction - one shift at a time.

Start with the right expectation

You are not supposed to know everything on your first day. Your job is to practice safely, recognize what you do not know, ask early, learn deliberately, and become more reliable with each shift.

Days 1-30	Days 31-60	Days 61-90
Build safe foundations Learn the unit rhythm, locate policies and resources, understand escalation paths, practice organized assessments, and ask for feedback every shift.	Improve consistency Strengthen prioritization, recognize patterns sooner, communicate changes clearly, and identify where your workflow repeatedly breaks down.	Develop direction Track your progress, name the skills you still need, evaluate specialty fit, and create a focused learning plan for the next six months.

A reliable shift system

Before the shift	Review your assignment, identify time-sensitive priorities, locate help, and clarify anything you do not understand before the pace increases.
First hour	Complete required assessments and safety checks, review critical information, identify immediate risks, and communicate concerns early according to local policy.
During the shift	Reassess, cluster work when appropriate, document close to the care provided, update the plan, and avoid waiting until a concern becomes a crisis.
Before handoff	Close documentation gaps, confirm outstanding work, organize the story of the shift, and give a clear handoff that separates current facts from unresolved concerns.

Ask early when... A patient's condition changes; an order or direction is unclear; you do not know how to use equipment; the assignment feels unsafe; or you are unsure which problem comes first.	After a difficult shift Separate facts from self-judgment. Identify what happened, what you did, what you need to learn, who can help, and the single change you will make next shift.
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Do not let one hard week choose your entire career

A difficult orientation, unit, schedule, or relationship can distort how you see the profession. Evaluate the pattern, not just the worst shift.

Is this specialty a reasonable fit?

Energy	Does the pace energize you, drain you, or simply challenge you while you are learning?
Patient population	Do you want ongoing relationships, rapid turnover, high acuity, procedure-focused work, or community-based care?
Work pattern	Which schedules, call expectations, physical demands, and team structures are sustainable for you?
Learning	Are you becoming more capable with support, or repeatedly being placed in situations without adequate preparation?
Values	Does the environment support safe practice, respectful communication, learning, and appropriate escalation?

Before enrolling in another program

1. Name the role What job are you trying to qualify for? Do not start with the degree; start with the role.	2. Check the requirement Is the degree actually required, preferred, or simply common? Verify licensure and employer expectations.	3. Price the full decision Include tuition, fees, time, schedule disruption, and the income difference the education is realistically likely to produce.
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Your 90-day reflection

What I can now do more reliably	
Skills or situations where I still need support	
Feedback I have received more than once	
One capability I will deliberately build next	

Get help now when You believe an assignment or situation may be unsafe; your physical or mental health is deteriorating; you face harassment, discrimination, retaliation, or threats; or you feel pressured to practice outside your competence or scope.	Next step Use the appropriate clinical, supervisory, employee-assistance, licensing, union, or emergency resources available in your setting. This guide does not replace local policy or professional advice.
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Educational resource only. Follow local policy, professional standards, applicable law, and qualified clinical direction.