

NEW GRAD NURSE First Year Nurse Planner & Guide

A Practical Guide



**RN Transition to
Practice**

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FIRST YEAR NURSE PLANNER & GUIDE

Bridging the Gap from Student to Confident Nurse

Name: _____

Unit / Specialty: _____

Start Date: _____

Preceptor: _____



Welcome to Your First Year

This planner is your companion for the most transformative year of your nursing career. It is designed to help you track your growth, process your experiences, stay organized through orientation, and build the confidence that nursing school could only begin to teach.

How to use this planner:

- Work through each section in order during your orientation phase
- Use the monthly reflection pages throughout your entire first year
- Return to the reference tools (clinical checklists, scripts, etc.) whenever you need them
- Be honest in your self-assessments — this planner is for you, not your manager

You were made for this. Let's get started.



What's Inside

SECTION	TITLE	PAGES
1	Before You Begin — Your Mindset Reset	Setting intentions, fears, strengths
2	Orientation Roadmap — Your First 90 Days	Week-by-week milestone tracker
3	Daily Shift Planner	Shift prep, brain sheet, handoff notes
4	Clinical Skill & Competency Tracker	Skill log, confidence ratings
5	Communication Scripts & Quick References	SBAR, difficult conversations, escalation
6	Monthly Reflection Pages (12 months)	Wins, struggles, growth, goals
7	Relationship Map — Your Support Network	Preceptor, charge nurse, mentors
8	Wellness & Burnout Prevention	Self-care check-ins, warning signs
9	Career Vision — Where This Year is Taking You	Specialty goals, certifications
10	Notes & Journal Pages	Free-write space



SECTION 1 — Before You Begin: Your Mindset Reset

Before your first shift, take time to ground yourself. This section is about knowing where you are starting from so you can see how far you grow.

1.1 Why I Became a Nurse

Write freely. Come back and read this on hard days.

1.2 My Biggest Fears Right Now

My Fear	What I Can Do About It
• Making a medication error • Not knowing what to do in an emergency • Asking too many questions • Being judged by experienced nurses • (add your own)	• Double-check every med using the 5 Rights • Practice code scenarios; ask to observe • Remember: asking questions = patient safety • Most nurses remember being new; ask anyway

1.3 My Strengths I'm Bringing to This Role

- Clinical strength: _____
- Personal quality: _____
- Communication style: _____
- One thing nursing school taught me well: _____

1.4 My Intentions for This Year

Complete these sentences:

- By the end of orientation, I want to feel _____
- By Month 6, I will have learned _____
- By Month 12, I want to be known for _____
- One thing I will not compromise is _____



SECTION 2 — Orientation Roadmap: Your First 90 Days

Research shows that the first 90 days are the most critical for new nurse retention and confidence. Use this roadmap to track your progress week by week.

2.1 Milestone Overview

Phase	Key Focus Areas	Target Week	Completed
Weeks 1–2	Hospital orientation, policies, EMR basics, unit layout, meet the team	Week 2	☐
Weeks 3–4	Shadowing preceptor, first supervised patient assignments, time management basics	Week 4	☐
Weeks 5–6	Increasing patient load, practicing shift handoff (SBAR), IV/med competencies	Week 6	☐
Weeks 7–8	Managing 3–4 patients with support, identifying early warning signs, documentation	Week 8	☐
Weeks 9–10	Independent patient care with preceptor present, critical thinking scenarios	Week 10	☐
Weeks 11–12	Full patient assignment, preceptor stepping back, end-of-orientation evaluation	Week 12	☐

2.2 Weekly Check-In Template (repeat for each week)

Week #: _____ Date: _____ Preceptor: _____

3 things I did well this week:

- _____
- _____
- _____

1 thing I want to improve next week:

- _____

A clinical situation I want to debrief or understand better:



SECTION 3 — Daily Shift Planner

Use one page per shift. This section is designed to be printed and used repeatedly, or completed digitally.

3.1 Pre-Shift Prep Checklist

- Review patient census and assignment
- Pull up labs, vitals trends, and orders from last 12 hours
- Note any pending tests, procedures, or consults
- Prepare your brain sheet (see 3.2)
- Identify which patient needs the most attention first

3.2 Brain Sheet Template

(One column per patient — designed for 4-patient assignment)

Patient 1	Patient 2	Patient 3	Patient 4
<i>Dx / Reason for admit</i>	<i>Dx / Reason for admit</i>	<i>Dx / Reason for admit</i>	<i>Dx / Reason for admit</i>
<i>Key vitals / trends</i>	<i>Key vitals / trends</i>	<i>Key vitals / trends</i>	<i>Key vitals / trends</i>
<i>Meds due (times)</i>	<i>Meds due (times)</i>	<i>Meds due (times)</i>	<i>Meds due (times)</i>
<i>Pending labs/tests</i>	<i>Pending labs/tests</i>	<i>Pending labs/tests</i>	<i>Pending labs/tests</i>
<i>Priority concern</i>	<i>Priority concern</i>	<i>Priority concern</i>	<i>Priority concern</i>
<i>Family/discharge notes</i>	<i>Family/discharge notes</i>	<i>Family/discharge notes</i>	<i>Family/discharge notes</i>

3.3 End-of-Shift Reflection (2 minutes)

One clinical win today: _____

One thing I'll do differently next shift: _____

Energy level leaving today (circle): 1 2 3 4 5



SECTION 4 — Clinical Skills & Competency Tracker

Track every new skill you perform. Rate your confidence after each attempt. Watch your confidence grow over time.

Confidence Rating Scale

- 1 = Need step-by-step guidance every time
- 2 = Need prompting but can mostly complete
- 3 = Can perform with occasional check-ins
- 4 = Independent and consistent
- 5 = Could teach this to someone else

Skill / Competency	1st Attempt	2nd Attempt	3rd Attempt	Sign-Off Date	Notes
IV insertion					
Foley catheter insertion					
NG tube insertion					
Blood transfusion administration					
Central line dressing change					
Trach care & suctioning					
Chest tube management					
Wound care / VAC dressing					
SBAR handoff communication					
Rapid response recognition					
12-lead ECG acquisition & basic interpretation					
Code blue / CPR participation					
Patient/family education					
Discharge planning & teaching					
Custom skill: _____					
Custom skill: _____					



SECTION 5 — Communication Scripts & Quick References

Nursing school taught you what to assess. This section helps you say it out loud clearly and confidently.

5.1 SBAR Quick Reference

SBAR — Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation

- S — Situation: "I'm calling about [patient name], in room [X]. I am concerned because..."
- B — Background: "They were admitted for [reason]. Relevant history includes..."
- A — Assessment: "I think the problem is... Their vitals are... Their labs show..."
- R — Recommendation: "I'd like you to [come assess / order / change the plan]."

5.2 Escalating a Concern to a Physician

If you feel dismissed but still concerned:

- State the facts clearly and calmly (vitals, trends, what you observed)
- Say: "I'm concerned and I want this documented that I called."
- If still unresolved: escalate to charge nurse or use chain of command
- Document everything: time of call, who you spoke with, what was said

5.3 Asking for Help Without Feeling Like a Burden

- "Can you take a quick look at my patient? I want a second set of eyes."
- "I've never done this independently — would you mind walking through it with me once?"
- "I'm not sure I'm reading this correctly. Does this look right to you?"

5.4 Responding to a Deteriorating Patient

- Call for help FIRST, then assess
- Start ABCs: Airway, Breathing, Circulation
- Apply oxygen, get vitals, pull up the chart
- Call rapid response or MD with SBAR ready
- Assign a second nurse to document if available
- Stay at bedside until situation is stabilized



SECTION 6 — Monthly Reflection Pages (12 Months)

Repeat this page for each of the 12 months of your first year. Reflecting consistently is one of the most evidence-based ways to build clinical confidence and prevent burnout.

Monthly Reflection Template — Month ____ (____ to ____)

My biggest clinical win this month:

A situation that was hard and what I learned from it:

How I am feeling about my role right now (circle one):

Overwhelmed Anxious Neutral Growing Confident Thriving

My self-care this month (rate 1–5):

- Sleep quality: 1 2 3 4 5
- Physical activity: 1 2 3 4 5
- Social connection: 1 2 3 4 5
- Time away from work stress: 1 2 3 4 5

My focus for next month:

- Clinical goal: _____
- Personal goal: _____



SECTION 7 — Your Support Network Map

Nurses who thrive in their first year rarely do it alone. Map out your people.

Role	Name	How They Can Help Me
Preceptor		Primary guide for clinical skills and orientation
Charge Nurse		Escalation support, shift-level decisions
Trusted Colleague		Peer support, day-to-day questions
Nurse Manager		Career support, concerns, advocacy
Educator / CNS		Educational resources, competency support
Mentor (outside unit)		Long-term career advice
Personal support person		Emotional support outside of work



SECTION 8 — Wellness & Burnout Prevention

Burnout in new nurses often begins in the first year. Recognizing the warning signs early is one of the most important skills you can develop.

8.1 Early Warning Signs of Burnout

Watch For These Signs	What To Do
• Dreading every shift (not just occasionally) • Feeling emotionally numb with patients • Increased errors or near-misses • Crying before, during, or after shifts regularly • Withdrawing from coworkers and friends • Physical symptoms: headaches, insomnia, illness	• Talk to your preceptor or manager honestly • Seek peer support or an EAP counselor • Practice a post-shift decompression routine • Take your days off seriously — fully disconnect • Revisit your Section 1 'Why I Became a Nurse' • Ask for a schedule adjustment if needed

8.2 Post-Shift Decompression Ritual

Design your own. Circle what works for you:

Walk / Run Music in the car Call a friend Journal Shower ritual Exercise Cook
TV / decompress Other: _____

My personal decompression plan:



SECTION 9 — Career Vision: Where This Year Is Taking You

Your first year is the foundation, not the ceiling. Start thinking about where you want to go.

9.1 Specialty Interest Exploration

- Specialty I'm most curious about: _____
- What draws me to it: _____
- Someone I can shadow or talk to in that specialty: _____

9.2 Certification Goals

- Certification I want to pursue in Year 1–2: _____
- Eligibility requirements: _____
- Estimated study timeline: _____

9.3 12-Month Career Milestones

- Month 3: _____
- Month 6: _____
- Month 9: _____
- Month 12: _____

9.4 Letter to My Future Self

Write a letter to yourself to open at the end of your first year. Remind yourself why you started, what you hoped to become, and what you want to celebrate.



SECTION 10 — Notes & Journal Pages

Use these pages for anything: clinical notes, questions to look up, things you want to remember, or free-form journaling about your experience.



You are exactly where you need to be.

Keep going.

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