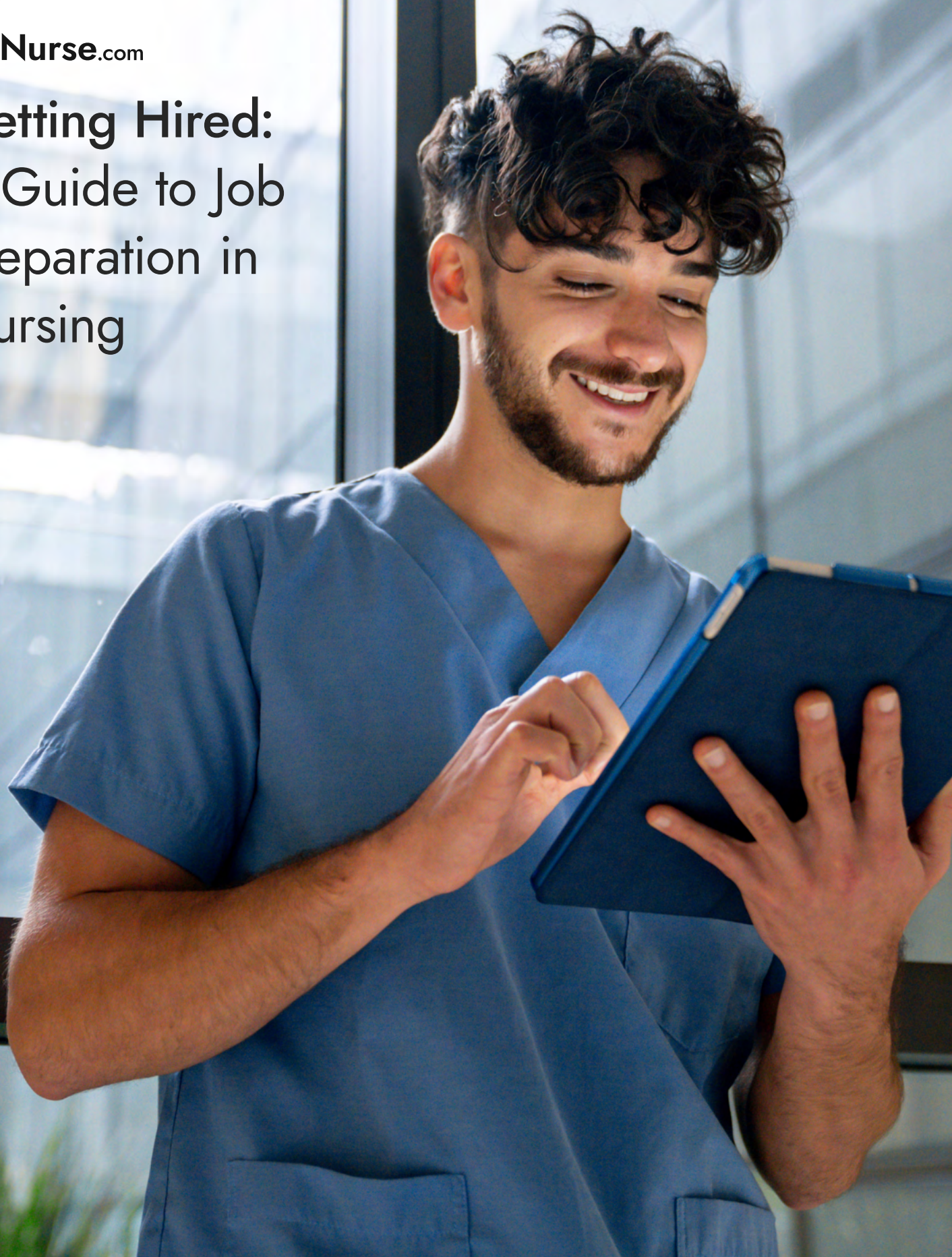




Getting Hired: A Guide to Job Preparation in Nursing





CURRENTLY, OVER
4 MILLION RNs

are currently employed across the U.S.

+ the profession is projected to
GROW BY 6%

through 2033.

Securing your next nursing job takes more than just submitting a resume — it requires thoughtful planning, self-reflection, and a personalized approach. Today's healthcare employers, whether hospitals, clinics, or everything in between, aren't just seeking qualified professionals — they're after people who genuinely align with their values, culture, and mission.

This guide is designed to support you through every step of your job search journey. Whether you're a new graduate or a seasoned RN exploring new opportunities, you'll find practical resources to help transform your job search from overwhelming to strategic.

Understanding the job market

The job market is constantly shifting. While overall demand remains high, the opportunities available vary by specialty, setting, and geographic location.

Understanding where the opportunities are is just one part of the equation. It's also essential to know how to read between the lines of job descriptions. Hiring managers often list preferred qualifications that reflect the unit's pain points or priorities.

To begin your job search, it's important to look deeper than just Indeed and LinkedIn. Hospital career pages, specialized nursing job boards like [Nurse.com](https://www.nurse.com), and healthcare-focused staffing agencies can reveal roles not widely advertised. Sign up for alerts, network with alumni, or attend virtual job fairs to expand your reach.

Writing a compelling cover letter

Even in an era dominated by digital applications, a well-written cover letter can set you apart. It serves as a bridge between your resume and the job itself.

A strong cover letter should include:

- ✓ A **compelling introduction** that names the specific role and where you found it.
- ✓ A brief **overview of your experience**, highlighting the most relevant clinical or administrative skills.
- ✓ A **tailored message** that connects your values with the mission of the organization.
- ✓ A **clear call to action** encouraging follow-up or an interview.

Common mistakes include making the letter too long, repeating your resume verbatim, or using a generic template. Instead, treat your cover letter like a personalized pitch — concise, genuine, and aligned with the role.

[Your Name]

[City, State ZIP Code]

[Your Phone Number]

[Your Email Address]

[Today's Date]

[Hiring Manager's Name]

[Their Job Title]

[Hospital/Facility Name]

[Address]

[City, State ZIP Code]

Dear [Hiring Manager's Name],

I am writing to express my interest in the [Job Title] position at [Hospital/Facility Name], as advertised on [Where You Found the Job Posting]. With my nursing education, clinical experience, and passion for providing high-quality patient care, I am confident that I can contribute positively and effectively to your team's success.

As a [Your Most Recent Credential, e.g., Registered Nurse or Licensed Practical Nurse], I bring [Number of Years] of hands-on experience in different healthcare settings, including [e.g., medical-surgical units, long-term care facilities, and outpatient clinics]. During my clinical rotations at [Clinical Site/Hospital Name], I developed strong competencies in patient assessment, medication administration, and interdisciplinary collaboration. I am particularly skilled in building rapport with patients and their families, providing empathetic and holistic care tailored to individual needs.

One of the things that drew me to [Hospital/Facility Name] is its commitment to [Mention a known value, achievement, or program specific to the institution — e.g., "integrated patient-centered care" or "Magnet-designated nursing excellence"]. I am excited about the opportunity to work in an environment that values innovation, collaboration, and continuous learning. I'm BLS- and ACLS-certified, proficient in electronic health record documentation (including [EMR system used, if known]), and dedicated to maintaining the highest standards of professional ethics and evidence-based practice.

In addition, I have been recognized for my strong work ethic, critical thinking, and calm demeanor in high-pressure situations. I believe these qualities, combined with my readiness to continue learning and growing, would make me an asset to your team.

Thank you for considering my application. I welcome the opportunity to discuss how my background and enthusiasm align with your facility's goals. My resume is attached for your review. I look forward to the possibility of speaking with you further.

Sincerely,

[Your Full Name]

Creating a standout resume

Your resume gives employers a first look at what you bring to the table.

An **effective nursing resume** should include:



CONTACT INFORMATION

List your full name, phone number, professional email, and a link to your LinkedIn profile, if you maintain one.



EDUCATION

List your degrees in reverse chronological order, including your graduation date and school name.



PROFESSIONAL SUMMARY

Give a short overview of your experience, clinical strengths, and career goals.



SKILLS AND SPECIALTIES

Emphasize clinical skills, spoken languages, and familiarity with EMR systems.



LICENSURE AND CERTIFICATIONS

Include your RN license number and expiration date, along with certifications like BLS, ACLS, PALS, or any specialty credentials (e.g., CCRN).



AWARDS OR ACHIEVEMENTS

Unit-based honors, DAISY Awards, or performance recognitions can help you stand out.



CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

List your most recent job, including your title, unit type, facility name, and employment dates. Use bullet points to highlight specific responsibilities and outcomes (e.g., patient ratios, EMR systems used, procedures performed).



PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

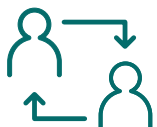
Membership in nursing organizations adds value, especially for specialty roles.

Use keywords from the job description and adjust your summary and experience to reflect the role's priorities. Keep your formatting simple and scannable, especially since many employers use ATS that may not read some designs correctly.

Preparing for interviews

Preparation is the foundation of a successful interview and helps ensure professionalism and an understanding of your audience.

Nursing interviews can take many forms:



ONE-ON-ONE



PANEL-STYLE



VIRTUAL

Before your interview, research the organization thoroughly. Understand its patient population, read recent news about it, and review its mission and values.

In virtual settings, lighting, background, and attire matter just as much as in-person presence. Practice looking into the camera when speaking and maintain eye contact.

Mastering interview questions

Nursing interviews often combine behavioral and clinical questions. Knowing how to approach both will significantly improve your performance.

BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

Behavioral questions offer insight into how you've handled real-life situations. The idea is that past behavior is one of the best predictors of future performance. Employers want to hear how you solve problems, communicate under stress, and collaborate with others — not just what you *would* do, but what you've *actually* done.



The best way to respond is with the STAR method:



SITUATION

Briefly explain the context.



TASK

Describe your responsibility in that situation.



ACTION

Walk through the steps you took.



RESULT

Share the outcome and any lessons learned.

COMMON BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

- ✓ Describe a situation when there was a miscommunication within your team. What happened, and how was it resolved?
- ✓ Describe a time you dealt with a difficult patient or family member.
- ✓ Tell me about a time when you had to quickly adapt to a major change on your unit.
- ✓ Share a time when you made a mistake or experienced a “near miss” with patient care. What did you learn?
- ✓ Describe a situation where you led a project, task, or training session.

CLINICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

In many nursing interviews, you'll be presented with clinical scenario questions. These are designed to assess your clinical judgment, prioritization skills, and how you respond under pressure.

You may be asked to describe how you would:

- ✓ Manage a deteriorating patient on a medical-surgical floor.
- ✓ Triage multiple patients in a busy ED.
- ✓ Respond to a code blue.
- ✓ Handle an unexpected complication post-op.
- ✓ Recognize and escalate signs of sepsis or stroke.

The key here isn't just giving the right answer — it's walking the interviewer through your clinical reasoning. They want to understand how you process information, prioritize interventions, and work within a team environment.

Don't be afraid to think out loud and show your clinical reasoning. There's no embarrassment in acknowledging when you'd call for backup. Knowing your limits is a sign of maturity.

FREQUENT AND SURPRISING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

While behavioral and clinical scenario questions are the core of most interviews, don't overlook the common soft skill and personality questions, as well as the occasional curveball meant to test your creativity or adaptability.

Understanding the intent behind these questions can help you prepare thoughtful, confident responses that leave a lasting impression.

EXAMPLES

“Why do you want to work here?”

This question may sound basic, but it’s often used to gauge whether you’ve researched the organization and understand its values and culture. Avoid vague answers like “because it’s a great hospital.” Instead, speak specifically about:

- The organization’s Magnet status, clinical reputation, or community involvement
- A mission or value that aligns with your own
- Opportunities for professional development or specialty experience

“What are your strengths and weaknesses?”

For strengths, choose something that reflects your clinical skills or interpersonal abilities (e.g., remaining calm under pressure, patient advocacy, organization). For weaknesses, avoid clichés like “I work too hard.” Instead, be honest, self-aware, and focused on growth. When in doubt, choose a weakness that can be quickly improved with practice, such as a technical skill or area of expertise relating to the unit/clinic where you’re interviewing.

Prepare also for curveball questions such as, “If you were a medical device, what would you be and why?” or “What animal best represents your nursing style?” There’s no “right” answer, but the key is to tie your response back to a positive trait.



What to bring and how to dress

First impressions count. Whether you're meeting virtually or in person, your attire should be polished and professional. Avoid scrubs, even if you're coming from a shift.

Appropriate outfits could include semi-formal pants and a blouse, a simple dress or pants with a blazer, or a conservative business suit. For virtual interviews, choose solid colors, avoid busy patterns, and make sure the background is tidy.

Items to bring or have on hand for in-person interviews:

- Several clean, stapled copies of your resume
- Copies of licensure, certifications (BLS, ACLS), and immunization records
- A professional reference list
- A small notebook and pen for notes

Assembling a portfolio with these items and additional evidence of your achievements, such as performance reviews, CEU certificates, and patient letters, can also set you apart.

Post-interview strategies

Your interaction with the employer doesn't end once the interview concludes. Within 24 to 48 hours, send a thank-you email to everyone present at the interview.

When writing your email, be sure to:

- ✓ Restate your interest in the position.
- ✓ Discuss specific conversations you had during the interview and what you took away from them.
- ✓ Remind the reader what makes you a great fit for the job.
- ✓ Tailor each message to the person you're sending it to.
- ✓ Keep it short and sweet — no more than around 300 words.

Also, be sure your spelling is correct and that you've gotten everyone's names right. The last thing you want to do is lose out on your dream job because of a simple error. Read it over a few times before sending it off.

If you haven't heard back within the timeframe they mentioned, follow up politely. Restate your interest and ask for an update on the hiring process.



References and letters of recommendation

References should be selected strategically. Prioritize supervisors, preceptors, or colleagues who can speak to your clinical judgment, communication, and reliability. Be sure to ask their permission first.

When listing the contact information and other details for references, present it clearly in this format:

Jane Smith, RN

Nurse Manager, Sunrise Medical Center

Former Supervisor

JANE.SMITH@EMAIL.COM | (555) 123-4567

Arrange your references in a dedicated section of your resume or as a separate document.

A letter of recommendation can reinforce your clinical skills, professionalism, and dedication. When requesting a letter of recommendation, make it easy and include:

- ✓ The job title and organization
- ✓ A copy of your resume
- ✓ Points you'd like them to highlight

Subject: Letter of Recommendation Request

Dear [Mr./Ms./Dr./Professor Last Name],

I hope you are doing well. I am reaching out to kindly ask if you would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me as I apply for a nursing position with [Job Title] at [Hospital/Clinic/Organization Name].

During our time working together at [clinical site, school, unit, or job], I really valued your guidance and support. I believe you can speak to my clinical skills, professionalism, and dedication to patient care, qualities that are important for this role.

The application deadline is [insert date], and I would be happy to provide any materials you might need, including my resume, the job description, and a list of key experiences or strengths you could include.

I understand your time is valuable, and I truly appreciate your consideration. Please let me know if you feel comfortable writing this recommendation or if you need anything from me to assist with the process.

Sincerely,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Phone Number]

[Your Email Address]

TIP

Send a follow-up thank-you email to your recommenders and keep them updated on your job search.

Recognizing your digital presence

Hiring managers often check online profiles before calling candidates. Make sure your LinkedIn is updated, professional, and includes a summary that reflects your experience and interests.

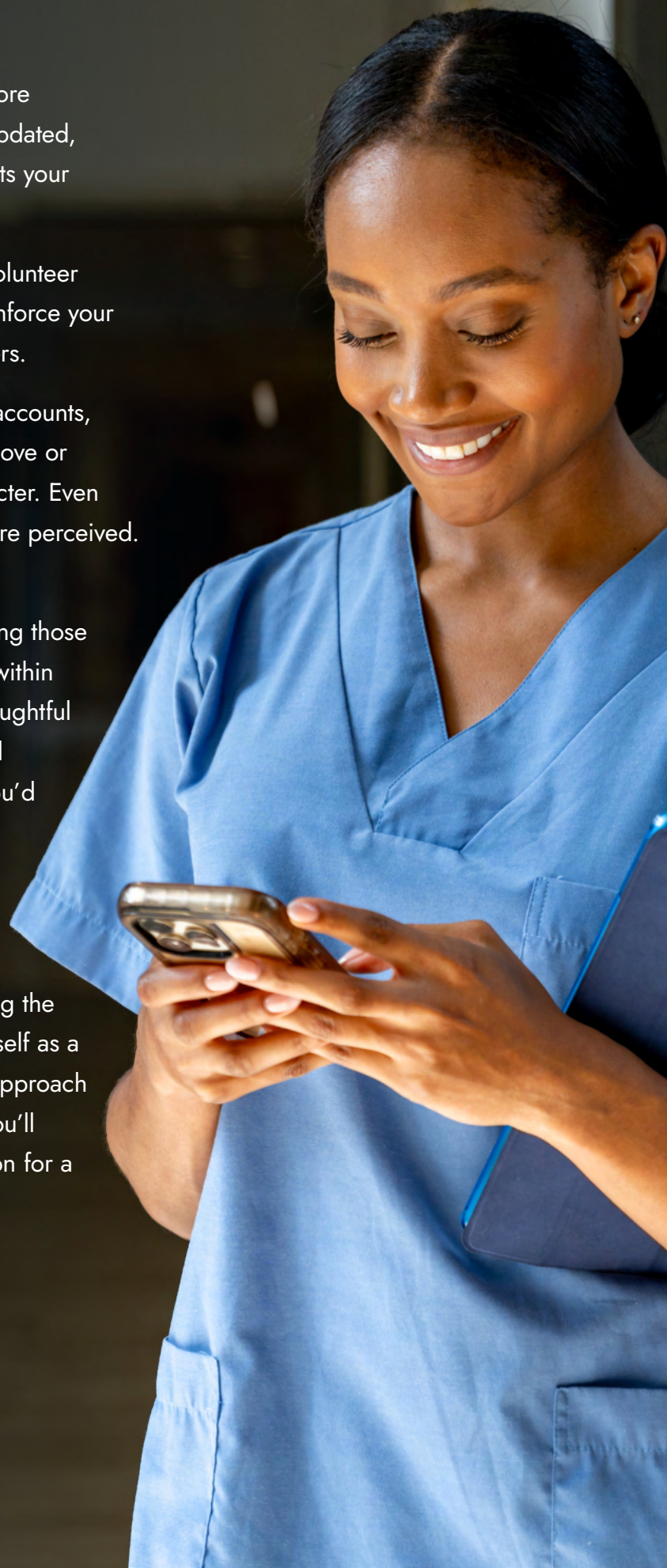
Don't be afraid to highlight your certifications, volunteer work, or continuing education. This can help reinforce your qualifications and make you stand out to recruiters.

Also, do a quick self-audit of your social media accounts, including Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Remove or hide posts that may reflect poorly on your character. Even comments on public pages can impact how you're perceived.

If you haven't already, this is also a great time to [connect with other nurses](#) on LinkedIn, including those working at organizations you're interested in or within your area of nursing. Reach out to them with thoughtful questions regarding industry trends, culture, and employee satisfaction to weed out companies you'd prefer to avoid.

Making your mark

Preparing for a nursing job goes beyond meeting the basic qualifications — it's about presenting yourself as a compassionate, capable, and confident nurse. Approach your job search with clarity and intention, and you'll stand out to hiring managers and set a foundation for a career full of fulfillment and success.





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