GUIDE

to

SURVIVING
YOUR NURSE
PRACTITIONER
PROGRAM

You’ve decided to become a NP, now how do you get through school?

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Your nurse practitioner program won’t be easy. It will be mentally taxing and time consuming. You will have to balance family, friends and work along with your education which is not an easy task. As a nurse practitioner myself, I know you can make it through your NP program and hope to offer some helpful advice along the way. In this eBook I have compiled popular posts discussing 4 major aspects of the nurse practitioner education- Coursework, Clinical Hours, Certification and Career Beginnings.

For more information or to contact the nurse practitioner community for further advice visit my blog at MidlevelU.com.

Best of luck with your NP education!

Erin Tolbert, RN, FNP-C
PART 1: COURSEWORK

The day-to-day life of a nurse practitioner student can be grueling. You are balancing clinical hours, class time and homework not to mention the activities required by everyday life. The following posts give a few words of advice from someone who’s been there.
Nurse Practitioner Programs are tough. They are demanding of your mental and physical energy and most of all your time. How do you make it through?

1. **Make friends.** Having a few good friends in your nurse practitioner program will make a huge difference in your next few years. You can help each other with homework, give advice regarding clinical sites and have someone to meet for happy hour after class!

2. **Get to know at least two of your professors.** Even if you don't especially like or care to know your professors, make an effort to have a few who know your name and a little bit about you. This will come in handy when you need recommendations for your first job and also ensure that if you encounter any problems finding a clinical site, getting into a class etc. you will have a faculty advocate.

3. **Make the most of your clinical experience.** Clinical preceptors serve as wonderful references when you are later looking for employment as they have directly worked with you in the clinical setting. Clinical preceptors are also a great source of contacts for future employment. Work hard in your clinical sites and they may recommend you to a friend or even hire you themselves.

4. **Be an active learner.** As with any type of schooling, it is tempting to complete the minimum class requirements and move on to other things. Your nurse practitioner program is the time to learn more! Set aside extra time each day to do some additional research. Keep a list of questions you have from class or clinical and look them up on your own time when you get home. Subscribe to a monthly nurse practitioner journal and start reading. You will never regret this- especially the first time you are working alone in the clinic, trust me.

5. **Don't stress...enjoy!** You are embarking on a new career path. Look forward to furthering your education. Although your life is about to get very busy, using your mind in a new way and expanding your social circle will add richness and enjoyment to your life.
After paying thousands of dollars to your nurse practitioner program, spending weekends writing papers and long days completing clinical work, your NP education should be entirely thorough, right? Wrong. I'm sorry to say, your nurse practitioner program won't teach you everything. What gaps can you expect to find in your NP education and how do you overcome them?

1. How Do You Find a Job as a Nurse Practitioner?

Shocking, I know. Personally my nurse practitioner program, as well as many others across the country according to students I have spoken with, missed this little detail. I entered my nurse practitioner program with the sole purpose of becoming employed as an NP. Then, once my clinical hours were over, no instruction arrived on how to actually go about becoming employed in my area of interest. Here are a few practical ways you can make connections to help you find a job as a nurse practitioner:

- Create a good working relationship with your clinical instructors. They will know the job market in their area and just may be in-tune to some employment opportunities for new nurse practitioner graduates. If not, at least they can provide a solid recommendation to your future employers.
- Put on your business suit and visit local clinics to hand out your resume in person. Don't give your resume to the front desk secretary, ask to speak with the physician, NP or clinic manager who hires nurse practitioners. Even if this particular clinic is not currently hiring, when a position opens up your name will be more likely to come up if the employer has met you personally.
- Read my story. As a nurse practitioner, I had a few strokes of luck in finding my first job but also had to work hard to land my ideal nurse practitioner position. These three posts, When Will You Find Your Dream Job as a NP?, You've Finished Your NP Program Now How Do You Find a Job?, How I Found a Job Within One Week of Graduation will offer some insight into finding a job from a nurse practitioner who has had similar struggles.

2. Your First Year of Practice Will be Terrifying
Stress, tears, pulling out one's hair, dread and doubt often mark the first year of nurse practitioner practice for recent graduates. Two years of schooling simply cannot teach you all you need to know to perform your job well. You've got the basics but now on-the-job learning begins. Not only do you have a lot to learn, but unlike your clinical experience you must also juggle the pressures associated with medical practice - billing, working quickly and efficiently and fitting in four appointments each hour.

The best thing you can do to set yourself up for less stress and ultimate success in your first year as a NP is to work for a helpful, supportive and understanding supervising physician or nurse practitioner. Read the posts 4 Characteristics You Should Look for In Your First Supervising Physician for a bit more insight. The first year of practice as a nurse practitioner can be tough. But, if you stick it out things will get better. I promise.

3. How You Will Be Paid - And How Much

Most nurse practitioners (and patients) graduate assuming they will be paid a standard salary or hourly rate. Unfortunately, most employment contracts are not quite as clear cut. Some hospitals and clinics pay based on productivity, others a blend of a base rate topped with incentive pay. Others offer a standard salary or hourly rate with a bonus structure. Most employers will also offer a retirement plan, such as a 401K with additional employer contributions. Nurse practitioners should also expect a continuing education allowance to help pay for licensure and continuing education credits. Here are a few previously published posts to help give you some direction in contemplating payment structures, salaries and contract negotiation:

- Nurse Practitioner Productivity Payment: How Does it Work? The medical unit of productivity, the RVU, can be difficult to understand. If you are offered a position paid based on the RVU read this post and Part 2, for a thorough explanation.
- Top 10 Highest Paying Nurse Practitioner Specialties This post will help you determine just how much you should expect to earn in different areas of the nurse practitioner profession.
- 7 Things You Should Consider in a Nurse Practitioner Employment Contract Exactly what offerings should you expect from your first employer? Read this post before attending your first job interview.
- 3 Lowest Earning Nurse Practitioner Specialties Not to worry, even if your specialty of interest makes this list of lowest paid NP's you are still in good shape.

Yes, I too would like to think the practical side of becoming a nurse practitioner - finding a job and getting paid fairly - would be covered more extensively in the NP program curriculum. Unfortunately, in most nurse practitioner programs it is not. I hope these posts help you navigate the gaps in your NP education.
School supplies have begun to line the isles of the Target and Wal-Mart stores near you. The malls are frantically marking down swimsuits and shorts to make room for Fall boots and jeans. It is time to start thinking about Back to School. Are you ready?

For those of you starting a nurse practitioner program this year, anxiety and anticipation are high. Will you have time to balance friends, family and your nurse practitioner program? Will you land a good clinical placement or will your nurse practitioner clinical hours have you driving 90 minutes each way? Will the spotty internet connection at your house shut down in the middle of one of your online exams? These are all valid concerns (especially as I experienced them all in my own nurse practitioner program).

Not to worry, you will make it through. What can you do to make the most of your nurse practitioner program experience?

1. **Get to Know Other Nurse Practitioner Students.** Almost everything in life is more fun with a friend. Make a concentrated effort to get to know a few individuals in each of your courses. This will help ensure success in your education as you will be able to study with others, help each other with assignments and learn to navigate the nurse practitioner profession together. You may also make some lifelong friendships.

2. **Study Hard.** If you are entering a nurse practitioner program, I assume you have a passion for health. Don’t just study the required material for your courses, do additional learning on your own. Medical journals and websites have excellent articles about different diseases and treatments. Find a good journal or website to follow and do some additional reading once or twice a week to help further your learning. This will significantly benefit you in your future nurse practitioner employment.

3. **Be an Excellent Clinical Student.** Your preceptors will see your ability as a clinical student as a predictor of how well you will do as a nurse practitioner. If you are engaged and reliable in your clinical experience they may write you recommendations for future employers or even hire you themselves. Clinical preceptorships are often a great place to start when looking for nurse practitioner employment in the future so place high importance on your clinical performance.
4. **Meet Your Professors.** It can be easy to slide into the back of the classroom each day and casually sip your morning coffee while you listen to a lecture. You are now in a professional program so take a more active role in your education. Getting to know your professors will result in job referrals and recommendations. You will need these when you graduate from your nurse practitioner program.

5. **Have Fun!** Yes, I know, this is the typical cheesy, lighthearted final point on a top-five list, but it is good advice. I look back on the years in my nurse practitioner program as some of the best in my life. I made lasting friendships, and took advantage of living in a new city. I ate at new restaurants with friends, took weekend trips and spent time with friends. You can only study so much, right? Despite the lack of income and the busy lifestyle being a student can bring, remain hopeful and excited for your new career.
Overwhelmed? What to Do When Your NP Program Becomes Too Much

I follow many nursing blogs and frequently have readers contact me seeking advice on how to make it through their NP programs. I have observed one major theme in my online interactions with other nurse practitioners and NP students: a lot of us are overwhelmed. Making it through your nurse practitioner program is frustrating, time consuming and challenging. The fast pace of the NP education can leave you feeling as if you are drowning. So how do you make it through?

Based on my own personal experiences as a nurse practitioner student and the fact that I was able to complete my NP program without completely losing my mind (some of my friends and family may not agree), I would like to offer a few words of advice to struggling NP students.

1. Have Reasonable Expectations of Your Performance

Ever heard the phrase 'sink or swim'? This pretty much describes the NP clinical experience. You preceptors are asking you to do things for which you are not adequately trained. You feel like you have to know how to treat every medical condition known to man day 1 at the clinic. When you start feeling the frustration and pressure your clinical hours are heaving upon you, do a reality check. "Even though my preceptor is a physician, I am not nor do I want to be, therefore I do not need to learn as much as them". Or, "my preceptor has 15 years of experience working as a nurse practitioner, no matter how late I stay up studying, I will not learn all of this information in my first 15 days of my clinical experience". You will learn slowly and it will be frustrating- but you will get it! Even after you graduate, you will still be green and need to get some experience under your belt before you feel confident and competent in your work. Keep your expectations of yourself and your abilities reasonable and the crushing feeling of your NP program obligations will begin to lift.

2. Prioritize

Now that the school year is in full swing you are probably balancing clinical hours, paper writing and test taking. Thanksgiving break cannot come soon enough. Take your work one thing at a time. Swamped with a list of questions you scrawled down during your busy day at the clinic? Ignore most of them and pick the 2 or 3 that you feel are most
important. Don't waste your time looking up things that are probably insignificant. Did you tell yourself you would do 2 hours of independent study every day so you can become a more proficient practitioner? Well, you might not make hit your goal everyday. A very wise high school teacher I once had drew the following table in teaching me to prioritize:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Not Urgent</th>
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<tr>
<td>Important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
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Place your daily or weekly tasks into a similar table. Complete the 'Urgent and Important' box first, follow it with tasks falling under 'Urgent and Not Important', then make your way to 'Not Urgent and Important'. You may not have time to get to the unimportant, less pressing things on your to do list but that's OK. It is better for you to keep your sanity!

3. Make Time for Yourself

I know, it sounds counterintuitive, but if you don't take some time to your self every once in a while to relax and do something you enjoy, you will become stressed out, burned out and pooped out. You have to get away from your nurse practitioner obligations on a regular basis. Take a long walk, read a book or buy your favorite trashy mag and flip through it while you watch TV. Cleaning your house does not count. If you don't take a little time to get away I can guarantee you will not be successful in your NP endeavors. You will end up bitter and frustrated.
Clinical hours are the most important part of your nurse practitioner education. This is where your classroom knowledge will be practically applied. It is important to make the most of your clinical experience as this knowledge will be necessary in your NP career.
Oh, the dreaded nursing school clinical hours. Former nurse practitioner students have warned you of the time commitment and frustration they may present. What you may not know is that some nurse practitioner programs will not find physicians or other nurse practitioners to precept you in order to complete your clinical hours. In many nurse practitioner programs, you will be required to secure your own clinical placement and preceptor to train you.

Finding your own clinical preceptor can be a daunting task, especially if you plan to attend school away from your home. What are the best ways to locate a clinical preceptor willing to train you in your effort to become a nurse practitioner?

1. **Work With Your University**

Many nurse practitioner programs will assign you a clinical placement allowing you to complete your NP program with greater ease and less stress. I highly recommend finding a program that will place you with a preceptor. If this isn't an option, don't despair. You will be able to secure a clinical placement it may just take a bit of work. Your first step should be to contact your program director at the school you plan to or are attending. They likely have a list of area medical providers willing and ready to host students.

2. **Contact Friends and Family**

As the nurse practitioner profession becomes more prominent, it is likely your friends or family members know a few NP's. Physicians or physician assistants will do as well. Contact medical providers with whom you have connections and ask them if they would be willing to precept you in your nurse practitioner program. Make sure you have details from your professors regarding the number of hours and days each week you will need to be with them in their clinic. Providers will be more willing to precept you if offer a clear picture of the commitment they are making.

3. **Ask Current and Former Students**
Your nurse practitioner program will likely require that you complete your clinical hours under the supervision of more than one preceptor. This is a benefit in that training with multiple providers exposes you to different styles and methods of medical practice. It does create more work for you in that you need to find multiple preceptors. Current and former nurse practitioner students will be happy to connect you with their favorite past preceptors. Getting recommendations for preceptors from NP students will help insure you have a pleasant clinical experience.

4. Ask Your Personal Medical Providers

No luck finding a preceptor yet? Time to get more innovative. If you have and like your own family physician or NP, consider stopping by his or her office to see if this individual would be willing to become your clinical preceptor. Even if they are personally hesitant to make the commitment, they may have connections with other providers who enjoy hosting nurse practitioner students. Visiting the clinics of prospective preceptors is better than calling. If prospective preceptors see you are well put together and present yourself professionally it will lend you more credibility than a quick chat on the phone. You will be less forgettable in person.

5. Search Preceptor Networking Websites

Although rare, online networks connecting nurse practitioner students with clinical preceptors do exist. Most that I found had few or no postings but one website, ENPNetwork.com, contains multiple postings from physicians and NPs looking to train nurse practitioner students. You might just get lucky and find a posting in your area.
Clinical hours are one of the most dreaded and time consuming parts of nurse practitioner school. Not only do you have to spend the day at your clinic or hospital assignment, you have to go home and spend at least an hour writing about it afterward. It can be very tempting to passively follow your preceptor while sipping your coffee, wondering what the drug reps are bringing for lunch and contemplating whether or not you are going to make it to Happy Hour later. My advice: don't waste your clinical time! (I do, however support going to Happy Hour after clinicals)

Use clinicals to your advantage. When you graduate, you may be left alone at the clinic to treat patients on your own. Are you going to be ready? Use your nurse practitioner clinical experience to help you become great at what you do. You are attending your nurse practitioner program because you hope to become employed as a nurse practitioner; use your clinical experience to your advantage. Clinical instructors are one of the best sources of job recommendations so excel!

How do you make the most of your nurse practitioner clinical experience? Bring a notebook and write things down as you learn them. This helps you to remember them later. When you have questions, write them down so you can look them up at the end of the day.

Ask smart questions. Your preceptors are actually at work. They are getting paid for what they do and the number of patients they see so their time is valuable. If you don't know something but can easily look it up when you go to lunch or get home, write it down and look it up later. For example, if you can’t recall the mechanism of action of a specific drug, look it up later. If you have a complex question or a question about a treatment plan, then do ask your preceptor.

Be proactive. You will not learn if you do not do things yourself. If you want to learn how to suture, watch it once then ask to do it on your own with supervision from your preceptor next time. You are going to have to do things on your own at some point so start now! It is much better to ask your preceptor who has volunteered to teach you
than track down a busy coworker and beg for help in your first job. You will look unprepared to your employer (and you are!).

Clinical placements lead to future employment connections, positive recommendations and gaining nurse practitioner experience. You may have a long commute, work with someone you don't like and be exhausted at the end of the week. That's OK. Approach nurse practitioner clinical hours energetically and be willing to learn. Work hard. It will be worth it.
PART 3: CERTIFICATION

You must begin your NP program with the end in mind. Upon completion of your nurse practitioner program you will take a national NP certification exam making you eligible to practice. Start studying long before the end of your program so you are prepared.
Towards the end of my family nurse practitioner education, my professors began to discuss the process of nurse practitioner licensing and certification. The process was never clearly laid out by my nurse practitioner program and I found myself confused by the process. So, here are the steps to obtaining the credentials you need to practice as a nurse practitioner.

1. Check Your RN License

You should already have a license to practice as a registered nurse as this is required by all nurse practitioner programs prior to clinical placement. Make sure your license is up to date. If it is near to expiration, renew it.

2. Take the Nurse Practitioner Certification Exam

You will need to take a nurse practitioner certification exam, usually through the ANCC. If you are a family nurse practitioner student, you may take the exam through the ANCC or the AANP. I recommend studying for the exam by doing practice questions. You can find these online or through books available for purchase.

3. Apply For a State Advanced Practice Nursing License

Once you pass your nurse practitioner certification exam, you may apply for an Advanced Practice Nursing License from the state in which you wish to practice. These forms can be found online on your state government website.

4. Get a DEA Number

Your employer will want you to be able to prescribe medications. In order to do this, you must apply for a DEA number. You can do this online on the DEA website. It is costly, so if you have a job lined up, check to see if your employer will cover this expense.

5. Credential Yourself With Insurance Carriers

The good news- you don't have to do this on your own! After you are hired, your employer will get you credentialed with insurance carriers so that you can be paid by insurance companies. The Medicare application must be completed first as all other
insurance companies base their information off of this document. Your office manager
or a member of human resources will usually take care of this paperwork.

Congratulations! After you have completed this process you will be licensed and
qualified to practice as a nurse practitioner.
Even if you have some time before you graduate from your nurse practitioner program, the national certification exam has probably crossed your mind. How should you study? What is the most sure method of passing the exam? Having taken the exam myself, I have experienced how anxiety-provoking the national certification experience can be. Your ability to practice as an NP rides on your results therefore it is essential to prepare adequately, but how do you start?

Hands down, the best way to study for the nurse practitioner certification exam is to do practice questions. In my attempt to study for the exam myself, I went back through text books, reviewed my old notes and also purchased a few books containing practice questions. I found that my old notes and text books were unhelpful in my preparation. They contained so much information that they caused my stress level to go through the roof. I was so overwhelmed by the amount of information I was supposed to have learned and couldn't remember that my study time was spent memorizing material that did not appear on the exam at all.

So, what helped me the most in my preparation? Practice questions! I would recommend this as the only necessary method of study for the AANP and ANCC certification exams. Somehow, authors of these study books have unbelievable insight as to what will appear on the exam. In fact, many questions in my exam appeared almost exactly in my study books. NP certification study books contain loads of practice questions prompting you to review the exact information you need. Which books helped me the most?

I am a family nurse practitioner and therefore used study books geared toward this specialty. My favorite NP certification study books include Margaret Fitzgerald's *Nurse Practitioner Certification Examination and Practice Preparation* and Hollier and Wirfs' *Family Nurse Practitioner Certification Prep Exams*. Fitzgerald's book contains case-studies, discussion and the all-important practice questions to effectively guide your study sessions. If you are not studying for the FNP certification exam, the book is also offered for multiple other specialties. Hollier and Wirfs' book is an excellent supplement as is provides hundreds of practice questions to get you up-to-speed. Although I did not
use Barkley and Associates' materials to study for my exam, I have heard they offer excellent NP certification study materials as well.

If you are disciplined and will do practice questions and review on your own, I do not think it is necessary to attend a live review course. I have heard many nurse practitioner students say that in live courses, instructors tell you what topics are most important to study for the exam, but you are still left review and learn the material on your own. NP students often feel their time would have been better spent studying a review book rather than paying hundreds of dollars to attend a live review session. My advice? Complete 20-50 practice questions each day depending on how much time you have before your exam. When you get a question wrong, review the material you have learned covering that topic to familiarize yourself. We look forward you officially joining the nurse practitioner community soon!
PART 4: CAREER BEGINNINGS

You began your nurse practitioner education with the ultimate goal of starting a new career. How do you get started with the NP career after graduation?
With the abundance of articles discussing the rapid expansion of the nurse practitioner profession, it seems like it should be easy to find a job as a nurse practitioner after graduation from a NP program. While this is sometimes the case, it may be more difficult than recent news articles make it seem. What are the best ways to find a job after graduation from your nurse practitioner program?

Ask your clinical preceptors. Clinical preceptors have relationships with other medical providers and will be able to alert you to any clinics or hospitals they know are hiring. Even if your preceptors do not know of anyone who is currently hiring, ask them what providers or companies they would suggest working for. Contact these prospective employers and even if they are not currently hiring, ask for a face-to-face meeting so they can meet you in person. This way, when they are hiring they will remember you and consider you as a candidate for the position.

It can be difficult to find employment as a nurse practitioner without experience. Let employers know you are aware of your lack of experience as a nurse practitioner and give them reasons to hire you anyway. Letting them know you realize you lack work experience as a nurse practitioner but "had a preceptorship at a busy clinic where I saw over 20 patients a day" or "have six years of nursing experience in the emergency room" will go a long way in the eyes of a prospective employer.

Call local clinics to see if they are hiring. Many clinics may not have jobs posted but know of upcoming needs and may be able to offer you employment in the near future.

In my own experience, I have found that responding to job postings online has been the least effective method of securing employment as a nurse practitioner. It has left me frustrated and waiting for responses to my inquiries that never came. This being said, do search online as you never know what opportunities may be available but do not make this your only method of seeking employment.

Finally, if you don't find your dream job immediately, do not be discouraged. Sometimes your may have to take a less desirable nurse practitioner position for one or two years
to gain experience and make yourself more marketable. Use these years to learn as much as you can and make connections in the healthcare community and you will soon have the job of your choice.
You started your NP program with the purpose of ultimately working as a nurse practitioner. Why is it then that so many nurse practitioner program graduates have difficulty finding jobs after graduation? I think you need to be willing to get creative and do some thinking outside the box. No, I'm not talking about renting a billboard to advertise yourself, just being a little craftier than other NP graduates entering the job market. Let me tell you my story.

A few months prior to completion of my FNP program, I began to start thinking about entering the "real world". My life as a student was coming to an end and I was going to need to start making some money- quickly. I did not have any experience working as an RN; I was in an accelerated bridge program getting my RN and NP degree all at once. Working as an RN wasn't a great backup plan for me seeing as I had no experience with floor nursing. Also, there was the dreaded certification exam. I couldn't take that until I had graduated. Then, I had to wait on my certification to process before I could get my state license, then I had to wait for my license in order to get a DEA number... Working with the government never goes quickly as far as I'm concerned so I had at least two months until all of my paperwork processed and I was actually a certified, DEA number carrying nurse practitioner. The problem? I could not go two months without buying groceries and paying my rent and I was tired of mooching off my parents.

As I was doing the research regarding how long it would take me to get certified, I came across a loophole in TN State law. I could work for 90 days as an NP prior to having my TN advanced practice nursing license as long as I worked under the supervision of a physician. This would allow me to start working while simultaneously going through the dreaded certification process. However, if I were to find a job, I would not yet be able to prescribe medications because I did not have a DEA number.

Now that I had a solution to finding immediate employment despite the problem of the lengthy NP certification process, I looked for a job. After applying to multiple NP jobs on sites like careerbuilder.com, I became frustrated. No one was calling me back. Most job postings asked for two to three years of experience which I did not have. Then, I
began to essentially "cold call" medical practices in my area. This is where I had my big break.

I searched online for "primary care clinics Nashville" and "urgent care Nashville" finding clinics in my area I thought looked like good prospects for my first job. On sites that had a comments section, I simply wrote a quick e-mail explaining that I was a nurse practitioner looking for employment with an intended start date around August 20. For clinics that did not offer online comment forms, I simply called the clinic and asked the receptionist to give my contact information to the practice manager. I contacted about ten clinics and finally got a response! A family practice/ walk-in clinic about 15 minutes from my house was looking for a new NP. During my interview, I explained that I would be officially certified by October 1, but based on state law I could practice as an NP as long as a physician was on site and willing to sign my prescriptions until this date. I was hired on the spot!

If you are graduating from an NP program, research the laws in your state to see if they allow recent NP graduates to begin practicing temporarily without official certification. Don't overwhelm your prospective employers by explaining this process in painstaking detail- simply offer them a quick, concise timeline of when you will be fully certified and explain any limitations you will have until you are fully certified.

I believe employers are looking for hard workers and agreeable personalities as much as experience. By contacting prospective employers directly, you are showing them you are motivated and interested in their practice. You will get better responses from employers by contacting them directly rather than going through a recruiter or an online job search engine.

Most of all, when looking for your first nurse practitioner position be confident! Even if you are a new grad, you have something to offer. Know your state laws, be aggressive in looking for jobs and you will get hired!
The first step toward landing your ideal job as a nurse practitioner is creating a killer resume. Your resume is a snapshot of you. If it is disorganized, or sloppily put together, your prospective employer will assume the same about your personality and work ethic. If you are missing key elements in your resume, your prospective employer will not get an accurate picture of your abilities and experience. So what is important to include in your resume as a nurse practitioner? Healthcare employment experts at HEALTHeCAREERS.com recommend including the following 5 things to make your resume stand out above the rest:

1. **Customize Your Resume**

   Read the job description for which you are applying and make a list of keywords that your prospective employer lists as important. Sprinkle these words throughout your resume. If you are applying for multiple jobs, you should use this method to create a resume specifically tailored to each position.

2. **Highlight Your Education and Certification**

   The non-medical employment sector often emphasizes experience over education. However, as a nurse practitioner certification is important. You are not eligible for hire if you have not completed all of the necessary components of your education. List your certification and licenses early in your resume. If your prospective employer requires additional certifications such as ACLS or PALS, completing these courses and listing them on your resume prior to application will be valuable.

3. **Clinical Experience- Yes, Even if You are a New Grad**

   If you are an experienced nurse practitioner, you will have no problem with this section of the resume. Simply list your prior work experience. If you are just finishing your nurse practitioner program, even if you don't feel like you have any experience as an NP, you do! List the names of clinics where you completed your clinical hours and outline the skills you have learned. Medical volunteer experience also counts and should be listed.
4. Include Non-Medical Skills

Can you speak spanish? Are you a wiz at computer repair? There are many non-medical skills an employer may find valuable. If you have any talents or abilities that could potentially make a positive impact in a clinic or hospital, be sure to include them. Unique experiences or abilities can also make your resume stand out so an employer remembers you above other candidates.

5. Appearance Counts

Make sure your resume is well organized and easy to read. Have your friends and family look it over pointing out any areas that may be confusing or unclear. Keep your resume clean and simple.

Finding a nurse practitioner position can take time. As you interview, continue to tweak your resume to address any concerns employers may have about your education or certification. Be persistent and you will land your ideal NP position.
As a new nurse practitioner, I was so excited to have found my first NP position that I did a terrible job of contract negotiation— in fact, I didn't negotiate at all. Not only did I not negotiate any points in my contract, I also did not seek understanding on matters in the contract that lacked clarity or needed further explanation. Big mistake. Don't assume your employer has your best interests in mind. They may, and I hope they do, but make sure everything you have agreed upon is written in detail in your employment contract to protect yourself and ensure you are treated fairly should a discrepancy arise regarding your terms of employment. What issues should you consider negotiating in your nurse practitioner employment contract?

1. Salary

I will begin with the obvious. Of course, as a nurse practitioner you want to make some money. How much do you ask for? The average nurse practitioner is paid a salary of $90,583. Nurse practitioners paid on an hourly basis earn an average of $47.63 an hour. Use these numbers as markers in considering the offer your potential employer presents. Working in a specialty clinic should pay more than average (see our list of nurse practitioners salaries by specialty). If you have very little or no experience as a nurse practitioner, you can expect to make less than average. Being paid on an hourly vs. salaried basis can make a difference in your career. If you are paid a salary and frequently find yourself staying at the clinic or hospital late, you will be frustrated as you are "working for free". Being paid on an hourly basis may give you more flexibility and ensures you are paid for any extra hours you put in. If your prospective employer offers you a low salary or hourly rate, reference the average NP pay as a way to negotiate a better income.

2. Bonuses

This is where my first nurse practitioner contract negotiation experience went bad. If your employer offers productivity bonuses, make sure your contract states exactly how bonuses will be paid and when. Make sure you understand your potential employer's bonus structure in detail. If the bonus structure is not well defined or the employer is not...
willing to define exactly how much you will be paid you should be wary. My first employer had an ill-defined bonus structure that promised to pay out up to $25,000 a year based on productivity. I worked very hard and was never paid a bonus at all. Be careful of empty promises regarding bonus payments.

3. Continuing Education Allowance

Most employers offer nurse practitioners a continuing education allowance to help pay for licensing fees as well as continuing education courses required to maintain your nurse practitioner certification. This is a great perk as licensing can be expensive. Continuing education conferences are also a great way to take a vacation and meet other fellow nurse practitioners. Typically, for nurse practitioners continuing education allowances run anywhere from $1,000 to $4,000 each year. The average allowance is around $1,500. I would not consider this a make-or-break contingency of employment but it is definitely something you should consider in your contract negotiation. If your employer offers an amount on the lower end of the spectrum you may want to ask for a higher allotment.

4. Insurance Benefits

Most employers offer some form of health and dental insurance. In my opinion, health and dental insurance are often receive too much attention by NP’s looking for employment. If you are relatively young and healthy and you do not like the plan your prospective employer offers or if the employer does not offer insurance, you may be able to get an individual plan at an affordable rate. My employer does not offer health insurance. Before I signed my employment contract, I was able to get an individual health plan for only $85/ month. Because my employer paid a much better salary than other clinics where I was looking to work, it was worth it for me to forgo working somewhere where the employer offered a traditional health insurance plan.

5. Retirement Benefits

You should pay attention to retirement benefits offered by your prospective employers and consider them heavily. If your employer offers a 401K match or contribution, you could end up with thousands of dollars deposited each year into your retirement account. As a nurse practitioner, I have seen a wide variety of offerings among employers. Some clinics do not offer any retirement plans, others offer an IRA type plan with no contribution while others put a set amount or a percentage of your income into a 401K account. Make sure your retirement benefits are stated in your contract.

6. Schedule Flexibility

There is a lot to be said for a flexible schedule. Working longer shifts and fewer days each month may be beneficial to you if you like to travel or simply enjoy time off during the week. If you have children and need a regular 9-5, longer work days may not be the best option for you. Consider your lifestyle and scheduling needs in considering
employment. One of the best things about being a nurse practitioner is the wide variety of schedule offerings available. As a nurse practitioner, I have discovered the joy of the 3 or 4 day work week and can never go back! I would highly recommend an employer who gives at least one weekday off. If this is a perk you want, ask for it when you are negotiating your contract and get it in writing.

7. Vacation Days

As a nurse practitioner, you are going to need to take some vacations! This will help you prevent burnout. You also need to plan for family obligations etc. Most employers offer two or three weeks of paid vacation. If you think you will need extra time, be sure to negotiate a few extra vacation days into your contract- two weeks of vacation gets used up quickly. If your employer does not offer paid vacation, make sure your schedule is flexible enough that you can get away on occasion.
Still have questions or need encouragement in making it through your nurse practitioner program? Check out my blog at www.MidlevelU.com.