

# Is a Postdoc Right for You?

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1. Identify what you want & can do
2. Prioritize what's important to you
3. Be open and creative



# What (& Why) is a Postdoc?

# NIH/NSF Definition: Postdoctoral Scholar

An individual who has received a doctoral degree (or equivalent) and is engaged in a temporary and defined period of mentored advanced training to enhance the professional skills and research independence needed to pursue his or her chosen career path.

# What is a Postdoc?

- Mentored training, post-PhD
- Temporary (1-? Years)

## Purpose?

- Gain technical and professional skills that advance your career
- Enhance your publication profile

**Do you want/need  
to do a postdoc?**

# Pros

Learn new skills or methods

Work more independently

Training step in many fields

# Cons

May not prepare you for desired career

More time in "training" mode

Lower pay or benefits

# Considerations: Career

- Sector
  - Academia (what kind of institution?), industry, government, nonprofit...
- Role
  - Research-focused or not?

# Considerations: Pivot

- Would a postdoc help you shift from where you are to where you want to be?

# Considerations: Skills

- What skills do you need to succeed in your next step?
- Is a postdoc the best way to gain those skills?

# Avoid “Default Postdoc”

“Only 62% of biological and life sciences students (56% in other fields) reported having thought about their careers to a large or great extent. Those who had thought more about their careers are less likely to plan a postdoc, especially in the biological and life sciences.”

*Henry Sauermann & Michael Roach, [“Why pursue the postdoc path?”](#) Science (2016)*

# How to apply for postdocs

# Where to find?

- Who do you cite frequently?
- Who have you met in your field?
- Activate your network
  - Who do your adviser, mentors, and fellow students know/know of?
- Who just got funding?
  - <https://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/>
  - <https://pamspublic.science.energy.gov/WebPAMSEExternal/interface/awards/AwardSearchExternal.aspx>
- Investigate programs for specialized postdocs (such as teaching intensive).

# Choosing a Postdoc

- Evidence that PI/postdoc program provides good mentoring opportunities
- What career stage is the PI/mentor at?
- Where are the former postdocs after ten years?
- What are the active research areas?
- What are opportunities for research and teaching?

# Professional Connections

- Let connections know that you're looking for a postdoc

# Application Process: Materials

- CV
- Cover Letter (or Email)
- Research Statement

# Application Process: Method

- Can be a formal job posting
  - More common for humanities and some social sciences
  - Also used for formal postdoc programs or fellowships
- Can be contacting the adviser directly
  - More common for STEM

# Cold Email

One possible structure:

- 1-2 sentences introducing yourself (and connecting to their group)
- 2-3 sentences on current and past research
- 1-2 sentences on skills/techniques
- 1-3 sentences on what you could contribute to their group

Make it feel customized and specific!

# Articulate Your Value

- Articulate what you have done
- Connect your goals with program/research/PI goals
- Emphasize strengths & accomplishments

Balance:

- What will you contribute to the group/institution?
- What will you gain from the postdoc?

# Before You Accept: Questions to Consider

- How are research directions decided?
- How often do postdocs publish and present at conferences?
- Will you be able to develop desired skills?
- What mentoring do postdocs receive?
- Where are former postdocs employed?
- What are the details of the offer, including start date and benefits?
- **Is this the right fit for you?**

# During Your Postdoc

# Make the Most of Your Postdoc



Be focused on your goals



Communicate clearly with mentor

# Develop Intentionally

- Check in with yourself (and your mentor) frequently
- Are you making the progress you want?
  - Skills, publications, networking...
- Use an Individual Development Plan to guide your activities

# Know Your Timeline

- When will you start applying for other jobs?
- When will you stop being a postdoc?
  - Make an agreement with yourself before you start
  - 3 years is a good baseline maximum

# Discussion