

Strategies on Applying for and Obtaining a Postdoctoral Fellowship



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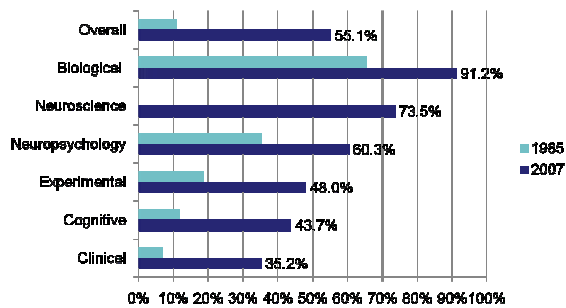
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What is a postdoc?

NIH/NSF definition a 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.

Trends in post-graduate employment
Percent of recent grads completing a post-doc



The initial decision
Reasons to do a post-doctoral fellowship

- Post-doc clinical hours (i.e., for licensure)
- Acquire an additional clinical specialization
- Gain experience with different levels of treatment
- Extend your expertise in your primary field of study
- Expand your expertise to include a secondary field
- Learn a new skill set or specific methodology
- Time to publish additional papers & your dissertation
- Other personal reasons

The initial decision
Clinical vs. research post-doc positions

Clinical	Research
35-45 hours/week clinical	40+ hours/week research
Different clinical rotations or treatment settings	Work in the lab of primary research mentor
0-5 hours/week for research	Clinical work on the side, as an elective, if available
Additional research on the side (weekends, etc.)	Some research hours can count for licensure

Exploring your options
Post-doctoral positions in clinical service

- Average length: 13 months
- 69% lasting 1 year & 10% lasting 2 years
- Child or adult focused
- Duties: assessments, consultations, insurance reviews, report writing, teaching, supervision, & face-to-face individual, family, group, and milieu interventions
- Levels of care: outpatient, partial, residential, inpatient
- Settings: Hospitals, private clinics, community clinics

Exploring your options

Post-doctoral positions in research

- Average length: 23 months
- 54% lasting 2 years & 20% lasting more than 2 years
- Consider what you want/need to get out of the post-doc
- Levels of independence (follow the money)
 - Project manager (most restrictive – paid by indirects)
 - In lab, but as an independent investigator
 - Independent investigators in a training program or center
- More on potential positions...

Exploring your options

Post-doctoral positions in research

- Find a research mentor, beg for a position; get paid by indirects or by start-up money
- Find a research mentor, propose a F-32
- Find an NIH training program, apply for a T-32
- Apply for other funding: departmental support, NARSAD, foundation money

Figuring out what you want

Three philosophies on choosing a field of study

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Similar field as your thesis work and/or pre-doctoral clinical training site | + lot of papers quickly/competent
- limited additional skill/training |
| 2. Different field / specialty | + add breadth to skills/training
- may be slow to publish |
| 3. Combination of old and new research or clinical experiences | The compromise position; learn new skills while reinforcing old competencies |

Figuring out where to go

Finding a lab or program for your post-doc

Identify labs or programs that fit your interests & goals

- ▶ Talk to your current mentor(s) and to post-docs
- ▶ Read primary papers that interest you
- ▶ Read other news and reviews in your field(s) of interest
- ▶ Attend conferences, seminars, lectures
- ▶ Utilize online resources:
 - Community of Science: www.cos.com 500,000 researcher profiles, etc
 - online social networks: Nature networks, LinkedIn, etc.
 - APA Monitor, gradPsych, PsycCareers: <http://psycareers.apa.org>
 - APPIG Directory website: www.appic.org
 - Federal postdoc grants and foundation awards

Figuring out where to go

Finding a lab or program for your post-doc

Do your homework:

- ▶ Check out the lab's / program's website
- ▶ Check out the lab's publications
- ▶ Check the records of past post-docs (if possible)
- ▶ Speak with current post-docs in the lab
- ▶ Check the lab's funding (NIH, NIDA, etc.)

Narrowing down your faves

Finding a lab for your postdoc

Some things to keep in mind regarding mentors

- **Junior PI's:**
 - ▶ Less extensive track record
 - ▶ Possibility of micro managing
 - ▶ Funding can be tight
 - ▶ Resources can be more limited (people, supplies)
 - ▶ Conflict over leaving the lab with project
- **Established PI's:**
 - ▶ Be aware of significant changes in fields-of-interest
 - ▶ Can get involved in a lot of "PI responsibilities" if PI is busy



Figuring out where to go

Aim for your future and the future of the field

Keep an eye on what lies beyond your post-doc...

1. Consider what fields are intellectually interesting now
2. Consider the future: what are growth fields, competition, etc.

- ▶ Departmental seminars, journal clubs, happy-hours
- ▶ News in Journals: *Science News*, *Nature Reports*, reviews, etc.
- ▶ Attend conferences
- ▶ Databases and Information Portals:
 - ex. APA Monitor: <http://www.apa.org/monitor/>
 - ex. Thomson-Reuters: <http://www.sciencewatch.com/>
 - ex. Elsevier: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/>

3. Consider what is being funded

- ▶ NIH: <http://www.nih.gov/>
- ▶ CRISP: <http://crisp.cit.nih.gov/>
- ▶ NSF: <http://www.nsf.gov>
- ▶ <http://www.grants.gov>

Figuring out what you want

Success is not just about breadth of training and skills

Don't ignore or underestimate personal considerations

1. Consider lifestyle factors that can have material & emotional consequences

- ▶ Where you like to live?
- ▶ Spouse/family members to support care for?
- ▶ Economic: <http://www.paycheckcity.com>

2. Evaluate your work style & the work environment

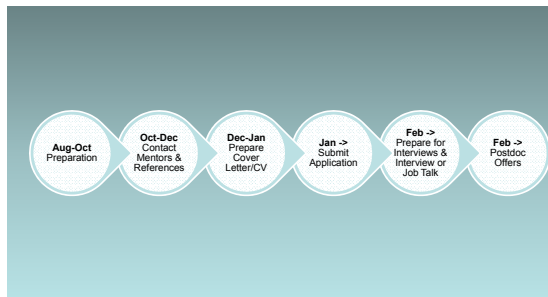
- ▶ Examples: Independent or need feedback? Prefer competitive or more collaborative environments?

3. Use your resources:

- ▶ Family, friends, lab mates, mentor, committee – ask them what your strengths & weaknesses are
- ▶ Assessment tools: Myers-Briggs, *People Styles at Work*, etc.

Figuring out where to go

Timeline for Postdoc Application & Interview



The application

Putting your decisions into action

- Finish papers and publish if at all possible.
- Ask mentor(s), advisors/committee for letters of recommendation
 - ▶ Letters should come from thesis member and at least 3 others
 - * Research postdoc – Letters from your research mentors
 - * Clinical postdoc – Letters from supervisors on Internship
 - ▶ Ask them if they will write a letter **before** you need them to write the letters.
- Prepare your CV
 - ▶ Visit the campus career center if you can or experienced help
 - ▶ Consider writing a resume as well – especially if doing an industry postdoc
- Prepare your postdoc 'job talk'

The application

Putting your decisions into action

Positions are provided based on your papers and a good recommendation or impression

- Write cover letters
- Send out letters and CV's
 - ▶ Follow-up with an email after a couple weeks and no longer than a month if you do not hear back
- Try to meet with potential postdoc mentors prior to applying
 - ▶ Attend meetings/conferences where you may meet them
 - ▶ If traveling through the area ask if you can stop by and talk

The application

Putting your decisions into action

- CV is a Living Thing = Professional life
- Present yourself – not who you think they want to see
 - Okay to emphasize different aspects of experience (e.g., research vs. clinical)
- There is no single correct format
- Highlight strengths, accomplishments & experience
 - Skimmable
 - 30 second test
 - Scrutiny-proof
- Organize with CATEGORIES
 - Arranged in order of importance
 - Reverse chronological order within categories

The application
Putting your decisions into action

Standard CV Categories:

- Name and contact info
- Current position (for postdocs)
- Education
- Honors and Awards
- Clinical Experience
- Research Experience
- Teaching Experience
- Publications
- Conference Presentations / Abstracts
- References

The application
Putting your decisions into action

Additional CV Categories:

- Additional Professional Experience
- Invited Talks
- Research Interests
- Technical Skills
- Media Presentations
- Professional Memberships
- Languages

The application
Putting your decisions into action

What NOT to include on CV:

- Too many "manuscripts in progress"
- Prose descriptions of your interests, experiences, goals (not true for many other kinds of jobs)
- For clinical positions:
 - Too much listing of "research experience" relative to clinical
- For research positions:
 - Additional training experiences (e.g., workshops attended)
 - Any detail on clinical experience.

The application
Putting your decisions into action

CV Take Home Message:

- Be yourself – tell your story
- Be organized – pay attention to flow of the CV
- Length – no hard rules but more than 5 pgs and less than 10 pgs
- Don't leave big gaps – let the reader see all the steps in your professional progression

The application
Putting your decisions into action

The COVER LETTER (CL)

- Provide a brief introduction of yourself
- Demonstrate that you understand the position you're applying for
 - 1st Paragraph is the outline of your goals for postdoc – framework for CL
- Show specifically how you are a good fit for that position
- If obvious questions (e.g., about time gaps), explain them in a professionally meaningful way
- What NOT to do
 - Don't describe your faults and weaknesses OR praise yourself
 - Don't write pages and pages – limit 2-3 pages, usually

The application
Putting your decisions into action

The COVER LETTER (CL)

- Research CL:
 - Discuss research experience and areas training that will help you become an independent researcher
 - Describe some specific research plans (not just general area of interest).
 - Show that you can fill a gap in the current program OR how it could enable you to be a strong colleague to others doing related work
- Clinical CL:
 - Discuss clinical experience, diversity of case load, theoretical framework, and what ways the training can round-out your clinical expertise.
 - Discuss commitment to the kind of clinical work needed at the site/position
 - Be specific and grounded



The interview

Putting your decisions into action

- **Practice your talk with mentor, lab mates and colleagues outside your lab or field**
- **Read papers from the lab you are visiting**
- **Find out about what resources and policies the institution has regarding postdocs**
 - ▶ If there is a Postdoc Office (PDO)? you may want to include the office in your visit
 - ▶ Find out what benefits are offered
 - ▶ Is housing offered (esp. in major metropolitan areas that are expensive)
 - ▶ What professional resources does the school/PDO provide?

The interview

Preparing for the Interviewing

Practice Before the Interview:

- Read position announcement carefully so you understand the program, expectations, training opportunities (clinical and/or research).
- Review your professional experience – highlight the relevance to postdoc duties and interests.
- Practice describing your experiences/past research and how they reflect your current interests.
 - Relate to both postdoc fellowship and career plans/goals.
- Practice describing how you'd expect the program would help you reach your career goals and path.
- **BE SPECIFIC and CONCISE!!!**

The interview

Preparing for the Interviewing

Clinical Interview Questions

- How do you manage complex or challenging cases?
 - Be ready to present a case or respond to a vignette
- Interest in working with/addressing needs of specific patient populations?
- Interpersonal challenges & team functioning?
 - Discuss specific situations
- Supervision knowledge and experience?
 - Prepare to discuss your style

Research Interview Questions

- What is the next step in your research path?
 - Be ready to describe what research questions you'd like to ask
- How do you view working with specific researchers?
- How does your work fit with current research projects?
- How can you contribute to projects and overall work?
- Ability to collaborate with colleagues?
- Organizational skills and setting priorities?

The interview

Preparing for the Interviewing

General Interview Suggestions:

- Indicate FIT with specific position
- Be specific about your past experiences and future goals and plans
 - Including what you want to get from postdoc experience
- Demonstrate how you can be a good junior colleague
- No rules about expressing your preferences, ranking, or "first choice."
- Find out as much as you can about the program – especially from current or past postdoc fellows.
- Dress professionally – This is a job interview

The interview

Interviewing tips

- **Be proactive: make sure you ask some probing questions not just about research.**
 - ▶ People will not volunteer negative information but are generally honest if you ask them directly.
- **Ask questions about the PI's support for your career goals and training.**

Resource:
[Going In With Your Eyes Open: Questions to Ask About Postdoctoral Appointments](http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/)
<http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/> (under Graduate Students menu)
- **Ask when you may hear an answer and send a thank you note or e-mail.**

The interview

Putting your decisions into action

How to get on the short list:

- Concise
- Clear
- Sincere
- Enthusiastic
- Relevant
- Organized
- Elegant
- Compelling
- Memorable
- Free of typos and grammatical errors
- Tailored to position

Follow the conventions of your field

Making the decision

- Hopefully you will have to decide among offers
- If having difficulty in deciding may help to set up a comparison table based on 'decision factors'
- If truly undecided after carefully considering positions, go with gut feeling and have no regrets.

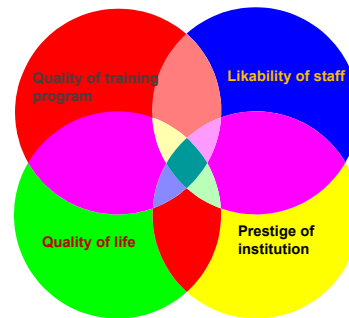
Making the decision

- Things you can ask about after an offer has been made:
 - How long can this offer be held?
 - What role can you have in crafting your postdoc experience
 - What is the annual salary/stipend? (NIH \$37K, VA 40-50K)
 - Benefits? Vacation time?
 - Support facilities available?
 - Supervision structure and will it satisfy state licensure?
 - Flexibility in start dates?
 - What do fellows do following postdoc?
 - Likelihood you could stay on as junior faculty?

Making the decision

- Professionally appropriate behavior after an offer is made:
 - You can inform postdoc fellowship programs of your preferences
 - No restrictions like Internship match
 - You cannot accept and offer then withdraw
 - unless major life crises you could not have foreseen
 - Don't burn bridges
 - If you are upset with something about the site or offer, don't become overtly critical in ways that could come back to haunt you
 - If you decline a postdoc slot and later reconsider, you can re-contact the site to see if the slot has been filled.
 - Practice how you will frame this with a good consultant.
 - If you have an offer and have not heard from another site you prefer, it is OK to contact the second site inform them of the situation
 - Ask if they can provide information to help with you dilemma.

Figuring out what you want Evaluating the difference between your training needs and desires



Finding your perfect postdoc

The big points

- Consider your career after your postdoc
- Consider personal values and interests in addition to career/professional goals
- Give yourself enough time to make a considered choice
- Develop your potential in terms of productivity and recognition
- Use available resources to help develop career essentials: speaking, letter writing, CV/resume writing, etc.
- The interview is for both you and the potential mentor – become an effective questioner and active listener

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