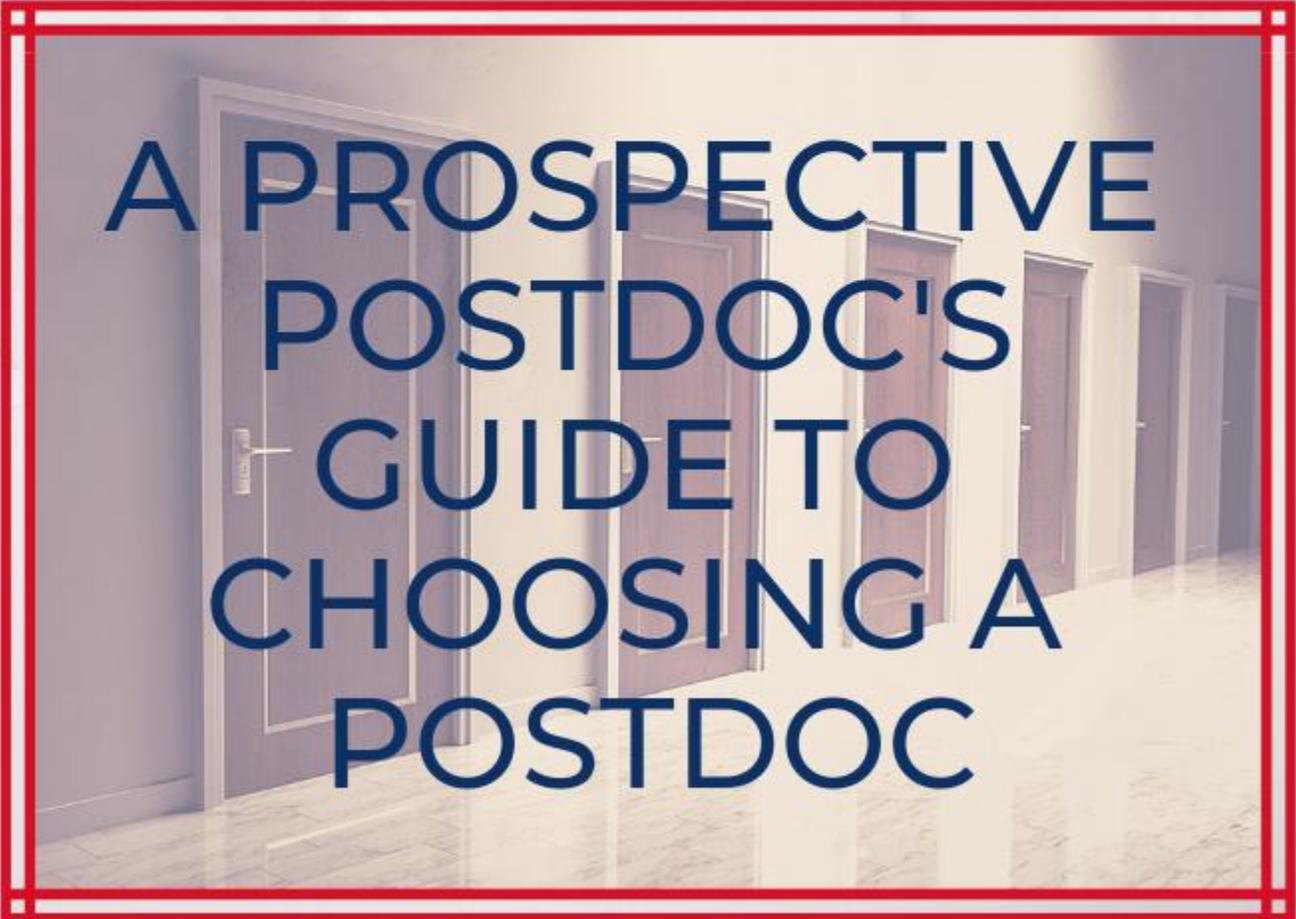




— NATIONAL —
POSTDOCTORAL
— ASSOCIATION —

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A PROSPECTIVE POSTDOC'S GUIDE TO CHOOSING A POSTDOC

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Introduction

Many doctoral recipients do a postdoc by default or as a delay tactic to figuring out what to do next in their career. The training you need will not automatically fall into your lap...you need to be proactive! However, potential postdocs should invest some time and thought into the questions of:

- Do I need to do a postdoc?
- Do you want to pursue a career as an independent investigator? Yes
- How to decide?

The National Postdoctoral Association (NPA) has developed “***A Prospective Postdoc’s Guide to Choosing a Postdoc***” to assist graduate students in their decision to do a postdoc, and once they decide that a postdoc is the right choice for them, helping to land their postdoc appointments or positions.

Why Do a Postdoc?

Resources to decide if a postdoc is right for you

1. Use ***self-assessment tools***, such as [myIDP](#) or [ImaginePhD](#) to identify careers of interest to you.
2. Educate yourself about ***career paths and options*** for PhD's.
 - Gain insights into career paths and advice for getting there by viewing [summaries](#) of past career symposia from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Training and Intramural Education (OITE)
 - Some excellent resources include: [Alternative Careers in Science: Leaving the Ivory Tower](#), edited by Cynthia Robbins-Roth; [Career Opportunities in Biotechnology and Drug Development](#), by Toby Freedman; [“So What Are You Going to Do with That?”: Finding Careers Outside Academia](#), by Susan Basalla and Maggie Debellus; [Guide to Non-Traditional Careers in Science: A Resource Guide for Pursuing a Non-Traditional Path](#), by Karen Kreeger; [Careers Beyond the Bench](#), by Laura Bonetta.
3. Try an ***internship*** and gain invaluable experience in the type of career you think you'd like to have (or not).
4. Use ***informational interviews*** and ***professional networking*** to learn more about careers you are interested in.
 - Grow your professional network. Talk to people in the career you are interested in and ask them if they did a postdoc or if they believe a postdoc will benefit you.
 - Get comfortable with conducting informational interviews within and beyond your professional network. To learn more about informational interviews read: [Informational Interviewing: Getting Information You Can Use](#) and [Conducting Informational Interviews](#)
 - Use LinkedIn effectively for your job search. Please view the [LinkedIn Tips Sheet](#) from STEM Career Services (end of this document).

For more general information, you can view the NPA's "[A Postdoc's Guide to Career Development](#)." This concepts in this guide can be applied to wherever you are in your career path.

Choosing the Right Postdoc

- Define what kind of postdoc you need to reach your career goals and identify research areas/labs that excite you and will help you develop your career
- Read PLOS Biology article on [Ten Simple Rules for Selecting a Postdoctoral Position](#)
- Read NPA's [Going in with Your Eyes Open: What to ask before you accept a U.S. Postdoc Position](#)
- Read NPA's [Finding the "Perfect Postdoc" For You](#) by Carol L Manahan, Ph.D.
- Read the Addgene blog post "[Choosing a Good Mentor for Scientists](#)" by Joanne Kamens
- Industry: If your career objective is to go into industry, consider a postdoc in industry itself or in a region with biotech/pharm companies. [Industrial Postdocs: The Road Less Travelled](#) at ScienceCareers
- Advice on what to do when you're in a bad postdoc:
 - Read [Recovering From Postdoc Mistakes](#) by ScienceCareers for tips on taking charge of your career with your postdoc
 - Read [Lessons from a Recovering Postdoc](#), a humorous prospective on leaving a postdoc position by benchfly.com

Creating Your Own Niche as a Postdoc How Do You Develop Independence While Working for Someone Else?

Create your own research niche/obtain a postdoc in a lab with research interests and skill sets outside your current lab to allow you to learn new skills and develop your own expertise or organize an external collaboration that teaches you new skills and allows you to publish outside your current research group. You want to gain skills that are required for your particular career goal (teaching experience, writing/grantsmanship skills, public speaking, job hunting, lab management training, mentoring)

Develop an independent identity outside of your research group/get involved in wider department, university or professional association groups so that people know you independently from your supervisor or research group. Take all opportunities to increase your visibility (attend conferences, meet with visiting scientists, interact with other grad students/postdocs/faculty, develop relationships with PIS other than your advisor). Seek multiple mentors that can help you hone your personal identity without relying exclusively upon the mentorship of your PI.

Hone the skills needed for independent research, for example: develop a research program that meets deadlines and produces results, designing projects for and supervising students, managing administrative duties, grant writing. How do you gain these skills?

- Ask your supervisor to involve you in these aspects of the lab: selection of new lab members (student and postdocs), student supervision from project design to manuscript preparation, administrative duties within the lab (such as purchasing, budget, and grant administration)
- Talk to senior researchers about how they design and manage research programs
- Ask to get involved with reviewing papers or grants on selection committees
- Become familiar with administrative requirements in your area of research
- Take any available classes on mentoring offered at your university
- NPA [Core Competencies](#)
- [Write grants](#) to obtain independent funding (postdoctoral fellowships and transition awards)

How to Apply for a Postdoc

Ways to Find a Position

- Reach out to a lab/PI of interest either by email or by speaking to them at a scientific conference
- Ask your current PI about open postdoctoral positions in their professional network
- Job Boards (Public Access)

[NPA Career Center](#)

[NeuroJobs](#)

[H Net Postdoc Jobs](#)

[Nature Careers](#)

[ASBMB Careers](#)

[Berkeley Postdoc
Fellowships in the](#)

[Science Careers](#)

[Scripps Jobs](#)

[Humanities](#)

- Many professional societies have job postings (postdoc, faculty) in their members-only section (example: Society for Behavioral Neuroendocrinology)
- Most postdoctoral positions are advertised on the university's Human Resources website

What to Send in Your Postdoc Application/Letter

1. Who you are
2. Lab you did your graduate work in
3. How you know the person (if you have previously met at a conference or through a networking contact)
4. When you will/did finish your doctorate degree
5. Brief description of your work to date (graduate student, first postdoc)
6. Highlight major publications
7. Why you are interested in the lab (Be specific!! Show that you have researched the lab and the type of work they do)
8. What you can bring to the lab (Again, be specific! Suggest projects you might be able to contribute to, skills you have that could be of use to the lab, etc.)
9. Attach CV and PDF's of (major) publications ([Writing an Effective Academic CV](#))

Acing Your Postdoc Interview

What to expect?

- Talk about your graduate research (job talk-generally an hour with the PI's lab as well as other labs in the department)
- Meet with potential postdoc advisor
- Meet with other faculty in the department/university
- Meet with graduate students and postdocs currently in the lab
- Tour the university, local area and lab

Preparing for the interview

- Practice, practice, practice giving your job talk ([Job Talk Tips](#))
- Become familiar with current and past work/papers from the lab you are interviewing at--look at Pubmed or lab's website
- Think about the type of project you want to work on, what you can bring to the lab, and your expectations from your postdoc
- Think of questions to ask the PI and lab members
- Dress to impress! This is a job interview and business attire *is* expected

Questions to ask at the interview

- For the PI:
 - How will we decide what project I work on?
 - Will I be able to take my research project with me to start my own lab?
 - Will I interact with my PI directly or will they be more hands off?
 - How is the research funding atmosphere for the lab?
 - Will my position be dependent on my finding my own research support?
- For the lab:
 - How big is the lab?
 - What is the environment like in the lab (collaborative, independent)?

- What have postdocs from the lab gone on to do?
- How long do postdocs generally stay in the lab?

- What is the publishing atmosphere like?

- Is all the equipment and personnel I would need for the kind of work I want to do currently available in the lab?

- For the Institution:
 - What are the benefits like for postdocs?

 - What is the environment like for postdocs (postdoc office/association, professional development opportunities, training opportunities, teaching opportunities)?

 - What is life like at the city/university?

Follow up after the interview with a thank you e-mail (within 24 hours of the interview)

- Thank the PI for their time. Remember, often they have paid to have you come out to their lab, so even if you aren't interested in the position, a thank you letter is appropriate. Never burn a bridge with a potential employer or collaborator

- [Ten Tips for Winning Thank-You Letters](#)

Leveraging LinkedIn

>100 million
active monthly users



70% of US workforce
on LinkedIn

Tool of choice
for recruiters



94%
recruiters use
LinkedIn to vet
candidates

>30%
jobs filled
using LinkedIn

Building a strong LinkedIn profile is critical for grabbing recruiters' attention, impressing hiring managers, and building your professional network.

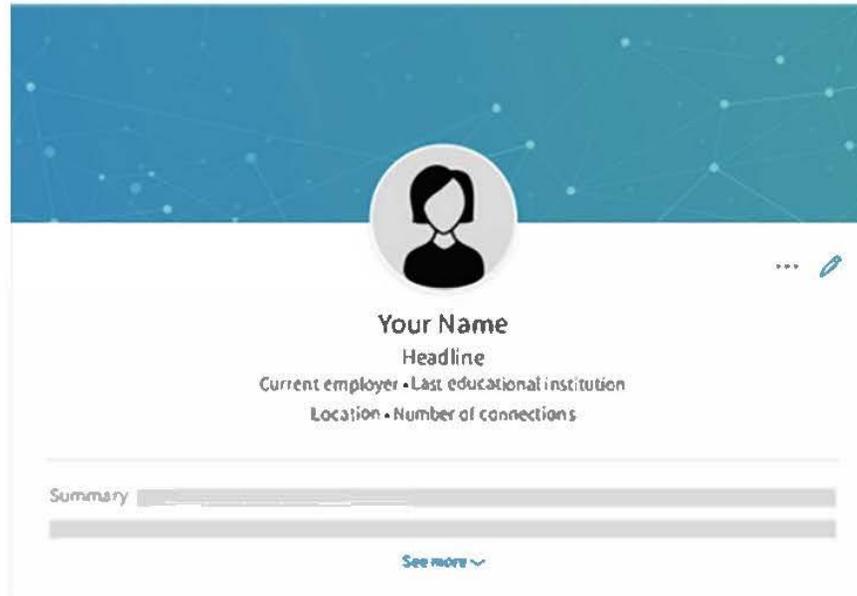


Contact STEM Career Services to learn how we can help.
www.stemcareerservices.com

Insider Secrets for the Ultimate Profile

A powerful LinkedIn profile introduction is key for capturing attention. The content affects your profile rank in LinkedIn searches. It's your elevator pitch to a recruiter—your goal is to keep them reading.

Go to your LinkedIn profile & click the pencil icon  to start editing!



Photo



Use a recent headshot with a professional look.

Pay attention to surroundings, lighting, what you're wearing. Dress for the job you want.

Ideal size: 400 x 400 pixels

Profiles with
photos get
14x
more views

Your Name

Use the name people know you by. Include your degree.

Has your name changed? Fill in the *Former Name* field. Your current and former names will both appear in your intro and will be easily found by LinkedIn search.

Join At Least 6 Groups

Join at least 6 Groups that align with your professional interests.

Members of a common Group are considered 2nd degree connections. Therefore, you can directly contact them for free.

Try to join Groups that are "active" and contribute to the community of users, which will build your LinkedIn "street cred".

Headline

With the headline, you get to choose your title. Describe who you are, not just what you do. Draw readers in. Make them want to learn more about you.

Recruiters can search this field on LinkedIn, so consider what keywords matter for the work you're interested in.

Text limit: 120 characters

Current Employer & Educational Institution

This information autofills from your full profile data. Include at least 2 jobs and add your educational history when setting up your LinkedIn profile.



Location



Recruiters often limit LinkedIn searches to geographical regions. Think about where you want to work, and set a zip code and region based on that location.

Industry

Although this isn't displayed on your page, it does affect which searches will find you. As with location, choose the industry you want to work in, not what you currently do.



Summary

Entice the reader by telling a story about who you are and what you're looking for while highlighting your core expertise and big passion. Make a reader want to engage with you.

Bullets make for easier reading. Like the headline, this field is searchable by recruiters, so use relevant keywords.

Text limit: 2000 characters