

How to Have a Successful Postdoc Experience

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Science Careers

AAAS

- International nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing science, engineering, and innovation throughout the world
- Membership-based organization
- Publisher of *Science*
- Source for broad range of career advice and resources through *ScienceCareers.org*
- *Science Careers Outreach Program*
- Slides available at sciencecareers.org/outreach



What's the purpose of a postdoc?

Why did you decide to do a postdoc?

What do you need to do to make it a successful experience?

Introduction

- Purpose of a postdoc
- Setting goals and expectations
- Career exploration
- Building your network
- Work/life balance

How to Have a Successful Postdoc Experience

You have three important tasks in your postdoctoral years: You must decide in what area of science to make your name. You must *finish* at least one significant project. And you must establish your identity in the research community sufficiently to land an assistant professorship or a junior position in an industrial or government laboratory.

- Peter Feibelman, *A PhD is Not Enough!*

How to Have a Successful Postdoc Experience

To succeed as a postdoc, you must perform important, innovative, and increasingly independent research. You must develop a broad and critical view of science and learn to solve problems creatively, using a variety of technologies and approaches. However, research skills alone will not take you far. In the twenty-first century, successful scientists will need strong communication skills; they must be able to teach, in the lab and perhaps in the classroom; they must collaborate effectively, often working in large multinational research groups; and they must function well both as leaders and managers.

– Sharon Milgram & Lori Conlan, NIH

National Postdoctoral Association Core Competencies

1. Discipline-specific conceptual knowledge
2. Research skill development
3. Communication skills
4. Professionalism
5. Leadership and management skills
6. Responsible conduct of research

For more info: nationalpostdoc.org/competencies

Setting goals and expectations

- It's never too late!
- Set your goals
- Determine your expectations of your PI
- Talk with your PI

Goals for your training

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- Research
- Transferable skills and professional development
- Career goals

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... think about the NPA Core Competencies

Reasonable expectations of your PI

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- Help achieving goals

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- Help achieving goals
- Available
- Knowledgeable
- Feedback and constructive criticism
- Preparation for the future
- Letters of recommendation

Reasonable expectations of your PI

- Help achieving goals
- Available
- Knowledgeable
- Feedback and constructive criticism
- Preparation for the future
- Letters of recommendation
- And yet... PIs are busy

Talk to your supervisor about...

- Their expectations of you
- Your goals and expectations
- Authorship and collaboration policies

Putting it in writing

- FASEB Individual Development Plan
- GREAT Group Compact Between Postdoctoral Appointees and Their Mentors
- Mentoring contracts/agreements

Periodic Evaluations

- Problem-solve and set short-term goals
- 1-2 times a year
- Talk about:
 - Achievements
 - Goals
 - Changes that need to be made
- Find forms online – FASEB Annual Review

Career Exploration

- There are a variety of careers open to you!
- Self-assessment
- Research your options

What do scientists do outside of research?

What do scientists do outside of research?

- Business development
- Journal editors
- Career development
- Technical writers
- Science writers
- Tech transfer
- Information science/libraries
- Venture capital
- Marketing/sales
- Public relations
- Funding agencies
- Professional associations
- Academic administration
- Program administration
- K-12 teachers
- Community college professors
- Curriculum development
- Educational research
- Museums/science centers/aquariums
- Public policy
- Patent agents and attorneys
- Finance
- Regulatory affairs
- Entrepreneurship
- and more...

What career path is right for you?

The Decision Cycle

1. Awareness
2. Self-Assessment
3. Exploration
4. Integration
5. Commitment
6. Implementation
7. Re-evaluation

(Adapted from Carney & Wells 1995)

Research Your Options

- Ask unbiased sources
- Speak with career counselors
- Read about career paths
 - ScienceCareers.org – articles and forum
 - Put Your Science to Work - Fiske
 - Chicago Guide to Your Career in Science – Bloomfield & El-Fakahany
 - Alternative Careers in Science – Robbins-Roth
- Informational Interviewing

Reflect on Your Preferences

- Take career inventories and self-assessments
- Informally reflect on preferences
 - Journal
 - Pro and con lists
 - Lists of skills and values

Preferences to Consider

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- What do you like to do? What energizes you?
- Where do you want to work?
- How often do you want to change projects?
- Would you like to work independently or as part of a team?
- What sorts of hours do you want to work?
- Are you willing to travel?
- What sort of funding situation do you want to be in?
- What non-science interests or skills do you want to use?
- How important is your income level? job security?
- What sort of stress levels do you want to deal with?
- Who do you know who likes their job?

Build Your Network

- Why will networking help your career?
- Ways to network
- Strategies to make it easier

Places to Network

- Conferences
- Professional societies
- Informational interviews
- Social networking sites

Strategies to Use

- Think of reasons to talk to people
- Ask questions
- Name badges
- Use the buddy system

Meeting People

- Entering and exiting conversations
- Always have a free hand at receptions
- Practice:
 - Your handshake
 - Meeting people
 - Speaking
- Exchange business cards
- “Who else should I talk to?”

Elevator Pitches

- Be prepared to introduce yourself to people
- What to include
- Having different versions

Informational Interviews

- Learn about career options and expand your network
- Ask for a few minutes of the person's time
- Prepare ahead of time
- Briefly introducing yourself and explain your interest
- Ask open-ended questions
- Mind your manners
- Ask for referrals
- Afterwards, write a thank you note

Informational Interview Questions

- What attracted you to this field?
- What do you like most or least about this position or field?
- Describe a typical day or week.
- What steps did you take to break into this field?
- What skills and attributes are most helpful in your job?
- To what professional associations do you belong?
- What advice would you give somebody interested in pursuing your line of work?

Social Networking Websites

- Various websites – LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace, science specific sites, blogging, forums
- Control your online presence
- Meet people
- Stay connected
- Organize contacts

Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and the other activities that are important to people. It's not about saying that work is wrong or bad, but that work shouldn't completely crowd out the other things that matter to people like time with family, participation in community activities, voluntary work, personal development, leisure and recreation.

- New Zealand Department of Labor

Defining Balance

- Finding time for life outside of work
- Tension between demands
- Not just about parents or about women
- Varies over time
- Lack of balance leads to dissatisfaction

Time Management

- Limit time at work
- Organize your time
- Use timers/alarms
- Keep commitments in your personal life

A Successful Postdoc Prepares You for the Next Step – Whatever it May Be.

- Setting goals and expectations
- Career exploration
- Building your network
- Work/life balance

Resources

- Career Forum and 4,000+ articles on ScienceCareers.org
- Webinars at ScienceCareers.org/webinar
 - Job Searches, Career Options, Lab Management
 - April 14 @ 12pm Eastern: Networking
- These slides available at ScienceCareers.org/outreach