

## Finding the “Perfect Postdoc” For You

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Since finding a good postdoctoral position (postdoc) is vital for your career aspirations, you should approach the postdoc search professionally. I would like to share with you what I have learned, defining 12-steps that I used to find my perfect postdoc position.

**Step 1- Decide WHY you want to do a postdoc.** Not all post-PhD careers require a postdoc. If you are not sure what you would like to do, be sure to choose a postdoc that will provide you with many opportunities to explore many things. What you would like to do after the postdoc, (for example teach), will dictate what type of position you are looking for (one that allows you to get teaching experience).

**Step 2- Determine the field in which you would like to study.** There are at least three philosophies on choosing a field. First, you should go into the same field as your thesis work. This may result in a lot of papers quickly, but will not broaden your skill set and expose you to additional training. Second, you should change fields entirely. Third, you should changing organisms/system *or* field. This will allow you to “hit the ground running” when you start your postdoc because you are familiar with part of the proposed project. You will have to decide which is best for your career goals.

**Step 3- Talk with your advisor and others to identify laboratories.** Once you have chosen a field and made a list of prospective labs, take advantage of your advisor and other faculty to help shorten this list. Also, talk with postdocs in your department to get their opinions.

**Step 4- Investigate the labs/Pis.** Check out the lab’s most recent publications. Also, if the lab has a website, look at it. Find out the record of past postdocs in the lab.

**Step 5- Finish papers/experiments. Publish! Write/update CV.** You should make your CV strong, before you send out letters to prospective labs.

**Step 6- Ask your advisor and three other faculty members for letters of recommendation.** If you ask before you send out letters, they will be expecting these requests. Also, this gives them time to craft a useful letter.

**Step 7- Prepare for the interview: seminar and questions for the lab.** Practice your seminar in front of anyone who will listen. Comprise a list of general and specific questions to ask on the interview. To get ideas for questions, ask others who have interviewed.

**Step 8- Send out CVs and arrange meetings with prospective labs.** If you do not get a reply within a month, follow up with an email. One way to meet potential lab advisors is to ask to meet at a national meeting (schedule this ahead).

**Step 9- Read more papers from labs that you are visiting. Learn about benefits at institution.** Gather all of the information that you can about the laboratory and institution *before* the interview. Salary, healthcare and dental coverage are becoming more important since many postdocs are married and have families.

**Step 10- Practice, practice, practice your presentation.**

**Step 11- Go on the interview(s). Ask lots of questions.** Do not be afraid to ask lab members, “Would you recommend this lab to a friend applying for a postdoc?” They will not *volunteer* negative information about working conditions. However, if you ask directly, most people will answer honestly. Also, ask the lab director questions about support for your career and opportunities for further training. Ideally, you would like an advisor that supports *your* career goals. Follow up with a thank you email.

**Step 12- Decide which offer to take.** If you have done your homework, this step may be the easiest and most exciting of all! Remember, by doing a lot of homework before accepting the position, you should thrive at this postdoc. However, if things do not work out as planned, there are lots of other “perfect” postdocs out there.

Happy hunting!

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