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MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR POSTDOC POSITION

Considerations and questions to ask potential supervisors

A postdoctoral fellowship is an exciting opportunity to further develop your research skills, expand your professional network, and prepare for the next stage of your career. However, becoming a postdoc involves some important changes from your time as a doctoral student. As a postdoc, you may be expected to work more independently compared to your time as a PhD student. While you will still have a supervisor or mentor, you will have greater autonomy in designing and conducting your research projects.

Postdocs also often take on additional responsibilities, such as mentoring graduate and undergraduate students, teaching, managing research projects, writing grant proposals, presenting research findings at conferences, and publishing those findings. These responsibilities are essential for developing leadership and project management skills. Continuing to develop strong writing skills for both publications and grant applications is also crucial during this stage.

As a postdoc, you can expand your professional network by collaborating with other researchers within and outside your institution. Building collaborations can lead to new research opportunities and exposure to different research methodologies and perspectives.

Think ahead

While in a postdoc position, it's important to start thinking about your long-term career goals and developing skills that will be valuable on your chosen career path, whether it's in academia, industry, government, or another sector. Seek out professional development opportunities, such as workshops, seminars, and networking events, to enhance your skills and broaden your career prospects.

Since postdoc positions are temporary, you should plan for your next career move well in advance. This may involve applying for faculty positions, industry jobs, or other opportunities. Start networking early, tailor your CV and cover letter to the positions you're interested in and seek feedback from mentors and colleagues on your job application materials.

Ask questions

Choosing a supervisor and project for your postdoc is an important choice that can impact your future career. You may want to consider:

- How does this opportunity help me get to the next step in my career?
- Does this opportunity help make me a more attractive candidate at the next level? (For example, if you are lacking teaching experience, will this opportunity help to fill that hole?)

It's also important to try to get a sense of whether the opportunity is a good fit for you. Some questions you may want to ask your potential supervisor:

- How many students do you currently supervise? How many postdocs?
- What is your philosophy of advising? How do you give feedback and how often?
- How will the joint mentorship/supervision work?
- What skills or characteristics are important for success in your group? What are your postdocs' responsibilities?
- How many hours per week do you expect your students and postdocs to work? Do you ask people to stay late or come in on weekends?
- What are your former advisees doing now? Do you still serve as a mentor to some of them?

Other considerations

Moving to another institution/group from the one in which you did your doctoral work may benefit your development to a greater degree and broaden your network of collaborators. It also demonstrates that you have the ability to be successful in different settings and with different teams.