

How to Choose a Postdoctoral Position

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Post Url

<https://www.enago.com/academy/choose-postdoc-position/>



You are 6-12 months from defending your PhD research dissertation. Now, you must decide among your options. Do you want to continue in research? If yes and an academic career is your goal, then a postdoc is the next step. Choosing a postdoctoral position is easier if you have an idea on what kind research motivates you and what specific projects you may want to do. But, with whom and where should you do it? Obviously, it helps you to start planning your postdoctoral sooner than later and doing it properly. Here are some tips to make this key career decision.

Do What Motivates You

You certainly did not sweat and toil in your PhD for the money. No, it was the thrill of doing the original research with other motivated researchers. Most postdoctoral positions do not pay as well as they should. Therefore, it will be the science that motivates you. If you end up choosing a topic or study system that is not of your interest, you will feel trapped and not doing your best work after a few months.

Whether obscure or mainstream, get a feel for the research field *you see yourself doing*. At this point, read literature reviews to learn more about the knowledge gaps,

unresolved questions, and potential mentors. Correspond openly with one or more proposed mentors about your project ideas. Remember, you will do that work for 1-5 years. It should motivate you more than your postdoctoral mentor does.

Postdoctoral Mentor & Lab

This is the most important consideration, for anyone seeking a postdoctoral position. Where and with whom you work will have the greatest impact on your academic career.

The mentor's reputation is increasingly important nowadays. A reference letter from a "heavyweight" can give you an edge, whether fair or not. In addition, reputation may be linked to grant-writing and better funding opportunities for your research project. A bigger lab will likely have more students; this could lead to valuable experience in teaching and mentoring.

Also, consider the mentor's skills and expertise. Your postdoctoral research project should differ, so you can grow. Is the mentor a newly minted principal investigator (PI) or well established (a professor)? However, latter may not give you as much time as the former. Moreover, learn about their training records: where are the former postdocs now? Are they employed? Did they publish their work in reputable journals?

Ask yourself, is the lab and management style a good fit? Of course, visiting the lab would be ideal in that case. Think about the lab members, the workspace (will you have an office, privacy, or does this does not matter?), the degree of supervision (minimal vs. Orwellian), and the level of independence (team-centered vs. individualistic?) Also, consider the university network and services (help with stress management, settling in, language training, etc.). If you can, talk to former graduates and postdocs from the lab under consideration.

In summary, for any postdoctoral [position](#), be honest with yourself. Get to know the mentor's personality. Phone or Skype calls can help you do this. Know your own personality, preferences, and aims and then decide whether you two are a good match.

Salary & Living Costs

You may likely have accrued debt as a graduate research student even when living on a limited budget. How much money will you need to repay your debts? This will matter more if you have a family. While salaries are higher for industry postdocs, they can vary in academia, especially outside North America. It is important to know how much suffice for you. You do not want to be stressed with bills while doing a postdoc!

Being near friends and family may be important factors in your decision. This might limit your options for a postdoc position. For others, geography does not matter, while for others the chance to travel (for historical, cultural, or adventure) may further influence their decision about a postdoctoral location (e.g., Europe vs. Canada).

Funding & Networking

There should be adequate funding ready for your research project at your lab that is consistent for the next several years. Additionally, consider about funds to attend conferences and to do other postdoctoral training (courses or workshops). Increasingly, collaborations outside of the lab group have become important and easier. Exploring these opportunities can hone your teamwork skills and increase your publication output to advance your career.

As mentioned above, it is vital to talk to the mentor and peers in the lab (old and new). Use your own existing [PhD network](#) for information and perspectives, and those available online (e.g., [ResearchGate](#)). Your future postdoctoral position should let you network to advance your career. You can also check whether you will be allowed to serve on campus committees.

Postdoc Links

A Google search gives many links for postdoctoral positions. Several websites [advertise postdoctoral openings](#) across universities worldwide. However, remember that not all postdoctoral positions may get advertised. [Nature](#) and [Science](#) job portals are great starting points; so are many jobs websites specific to your field.

Other websites posting postdoctoral positions include the following:

- Based in Europe, <https://www.eurosciencejobs.com>
- For biomedical research, http://academicjobs.wikia.com/wiki/Biomedical_Sciences_2016-2017 and more

Do not limit yourself to advertised postdoc positions. Visit the webpages of promising mentors that interest you, and write to them directly.

Write A Mini-Proposal!

A postdoctoral position could be a hit or miss. So have a backup plan. One key way to stand out is to write your own 2-3-page proposal for your research project. Append this to your cover letter tailored to prospective postdoc mentors. (Of course, always read the lab group's papers first to put your experiments in context.) This will set you apart from many applicants because it shows your research interests and thinking process.

Other Considerations

To land that dream postdoctoral position you must be patient, flexible, and prepared. Safe to say, you will likely have to move to a new place to do your postdoctoral research. A lab that is developing new skills is a good bet, so is having a publication record from your PhD research before the postdoc positions begin. Ensure to prepare a list of tailored questions (experiments, funding, logistics, salary, etc.) before talking to

postdoc mentors. In the interview, remember to discuss whether you will get the first authorship on your work to avoid trouble later.

What has been your experience when applying for a postdoc? What tips have worked for you? Let us know your thoughts by sharing in the comments section below.

Cite this article

Enago Academy, How to Choose a Postdoctoral Position. Enago Academy. 2017/10/12. <https://www.enago.com/academy/choose-postdoc-position/>