

Questions to consider at a postdoc interview or at the beginning of a postdoc

These questions are suggestions to consider asking a principal investigator (PI) during a postdoc interview or during the first weeks of your postdoc. Every field will require a different set of questions and some of these will not apply to your postdoc situation. However, it is advisable to discuss these questions, or at least the most important ones, early on with your potential postdoc mentor. Especially since young mentors may not have information as detailed and as many former fellows/students, as established mentors have. It is important to continuously work on achieving the postdoc's career development goals together with your mentor. This list was prepared by postdocs who performed research for some years in this position. Some of the questions are likely to become more important towards the end of your postdoc.

#	Suggested question	Average from former postdocs	Myself
<i>Expected specific outputs from the postdoc</i>			
1.	How many manuscripts am I supposed to/minimally expected to prepare as 1 st author - by end of the 1 st year? - by end of the 2 nd year?		
2.	How many manuscripts am I supposed to contribute to as non-1 st author - by end of the 1 st year? - by end of the 2 nd year?		
3.	Who prepares the first draft of a manuscript about the postdoc's (lab) work?		
4.	Will the postdoc be able to contribute to other projects/publications in the lab?		
5.	Will there be opportunities to do projects for companies and build relationships with industry? Are industry projects encouraged?		
6.	Will the postdoc be able to/have to contribute to reviews of scientific papers for journals?		
7.	Is there any other specific output the postdoc needs to do to contribute to the mentor's lab?		
8.	Would it be possible for a postdoc candidate to speak to 2-3 students or postdocs in the lab during the interview day? VERY IMPORTANT		
<i>Teaching and training other lab members</i>			
9.	Will the postdoc have to be "responsible" for supervision of students working in the lab?		

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10.	How many hours per week (on average) is a postdoc supposed to help/teach graduate students (e.g., in the lab)?		
11.	How will the time a postdoc helps other students be considered in the postdoc's own workload?		
12.	How many hours of lectures is a postdoc supposed to give per semester?		
13.	Are there any additional teaching opportunities for the postdoc, if desired?		
14.	Is the postdoc supposed to be responsible for specific instruments in the mentor's lab?		
15.	Who orders material in the mentor's lab?		
<i>Set of skills to bring to the mentor's lab and to learn</i>			
16.	Which skills will the postdoc expected to bring to the mentor's lab?		
17.	Which specific skills will the postdoc learn from the mentor's lab?		
18.	Are there opportunities to learn specific techniques or skills from other labs at the own department, other departments or other schools?		
<i>Attending courses</i>			
19.	Will the postdoc be able to audit courses or take courses for credit?		
20.	Will the postdoc have to pay anything for registering/attending these courses?		
21.	How many hours of courses/lectures will the postdoc be allowed to take/audit per semester (on average)?		
22.	How many conferences will a postdoc be allowed to/supposed to attend per year?		
<i>Prior mentoring experience of the mentor</i>			
23.	How many postdocs and graduate students did the mentor train to date?		
24.	Where did the mentor's previous postdocs go to?		
<i>Presentation skills</i>			
25.	Will there be an opportunity to participate in and present at journal clubs?		
26.	How often does the mentor hold a lab discussion group about the lab members' research results? Do postdocs present there?		
27.	Will there be opportunities to improve on oral presentation skills (e.g., at national meetings)?		
28.	Will there be opportunities to prepare and defend work as posters at meetings?		

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Career development activities and skills			
29.	Are there formal/informal evaluations of postdoc's achievements and career goals?		
30.	Is there an Individual Development Plan (IDP) for the postdoc and is this evaluated together by the mentor and postdoc (e.g., annually)?		
31.	What are the short-term, intermediate-term, long-term career objectives from the postdoc's and mentor's perspective?		
32.	Are there other faculty members who might serve as committee members for postdocs?		
33.	Will there be specific career development workshops/seminars for postdocs (e.g., from a postdoctoral association/organization)? Potential topics: Scientific writing (e.g., papers), grant writing, how to find a job and do the interview, which career path to take, how to succeed in academia/industry, social life/work balance, how to prevent and solve issues with your colleagues/mentor etc.		
34.	Are there other training opportunities like formal advanced statistical training, computer skills, data mining, or teaching/evaluating/training students?		
35.	Is there formal/certified training in responsible conduct of research and research ethics? (This is often a requirement to work on research grants!)		
Starting a research plan for future positions			
36.	Which ideas will the postdoc be allowed to take with him/her to start a research career in his/her own lab? VERY IMPORTANT		
37.	Will the postdoc have an opportunity to learn grant writing skills by contributing to the mentor's grant(s)?		
38.	When might the postdoc be ready to start writing his/her own fellowship grants or career development grants (e.g., K-awards at NIH) under the mentor's guidance?		
39.	Is there another postdoc who submitted a grant whom to ask about junior grant applications?		
Important technical questions			
40.	*Maybe do not ask this question during the interview day, but ask it in written (!) form before signing the offer letter: What is the salary for me as a postdoc with NN years of experience? Will this salary increase by how many percent each year? Does this salary meet the NIH guidelines?		

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41.	Does the University and the PI sponsor a visa application? How much time is the visa going to take? Who is the immigration lawyer to contact in case of any specific visa questions?		
42.	Will there be an opportunity to extend my initial visa, switch to a different visa category, and maybe apply for permanent residency?		
43.	What are the benefits (e.g., healthcare, dental, optometry, childcare, retirement) for postdocs and family members?		
44.	Will the postdoc have to pay taxes? This question is probably best asked via email to a person from the International Students and Scholar Services (ISSS) department? It is likely that the answer depends on the visa status and home country of the postdoc.		
45.	Will the postdoc get an own computer from the lab, have an own desk, access to copier/printer/fax, etc.?		
46.	Does the postdoc get access to employee parking lots?		
47.	How often and for how long does the PI usually meet with his/her postdocs?		
48.	What is the mentor's primary and preferred way of communication (e.g., email, personal meetings, phone)?		
49.	How many other students and postdocs are currently in the mentor's lab?		
50.	How much ahead of time do I have to/should I inform my mentor, if I plan to leave e.g. for a job offer?		
51.	How much ahead of time does the mentor have to/should inform the postdoc, if the postdoc has to leave the lab?		