

**Post-Doctoral Assembly and
Career Resources and Development Committee
Symposium Summary**

**Life After Your Post-Doc: Advice on Finding
and Landing a Job
Society of Toxicology 2006 Annual Meeting**

Session Chairpersons

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Panelists

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Question #1 – How many years of post-doc training are necessary to be considered for positions in academia, industry or government?

- **General**
 - This is a tough question to answer and will vary based on background and needs of the position

- **Academia**
 - Important to consider that you may be competing with a large group, including junior faculty from other institutions.
 - 3 years may be enough to prepare you both in your scientific and organizational abilities.
 - Need time to show productivity and also develop your own research project.

- **Industry**
 - 2 years may be enough. A more important consideration is productivity (i.e., publications, presentations, etc.). You must show that you can take an experiment from the beginning to the end (i.e., development through presentation of results).
 - Too many years as a post-doc may indicate a lack of productivity and send up a red flag.

- **Government**
 - 3 years may be optimal.

- Some jobs may not require any postdoctoral experience others may require extensive training.

Question #2 – If my post-doc training is in basic research, what is the likelihood of obtaining a position in government or industry?

- **Industry**
 - Performing original research is most important. The quality of research and your abilities generally will outweigh the need for specific skills.
 - Too many years as a post-doc may indicate a lack of productivity and send up a red flag.
- **Government**
 - This will depend on whether you are in office or laboratory based position.

Question #3 – For tenure track, assistant professor positions, what is the likelihood that a candidate will be considered without current funding?

- **Academia**
 - The post-doctoral training environment is the most important indicator of future success.
 - Most junior level faculty do not have funding when they are hired. However, it is important to get grant writing experience and show that you can apply for funding.

Question #4 – Most jobs in industry require someone with at least 3-5 years of experience. How do I get my foot in the door with only post-doc experience?

- **Industry**
 - Problem solving and productivity are important factors.
 - Some positions will be filled by people right after completion of their post-doc others will require some additional experience.
- **Government**
 - Some folks will gain experience in government and then move to industry (i.e., 5 years at the FDA before moving to the pharmaceutical industry).
- **General**
 - Total number of publications vs. content and quality... Challenge mentor early to help establish a project that will yield significant publications.

Question #5 – Other than advertisements in journals, newsletters or the SOT job bank etc., are there other mechanisms used to find out about open positions? How do most candidates find jobs?

- **General**
 - Outside of the usual sources (i.e., websites, meetings, etc.) networking is the most important tool. Use your advisor and other key faculty to start building your network.

Question #6 – How do you differentiate yourself from other applicants to obtain an interview?

- **Academia**
 - Not differentiating yourself but marketing yourself is key. Employers will consider what you've done and how you present yourself.
 - Important to point out where you fit in and how you would strengthen a department. Consider and emphasize all possible collaborations within the group.

Question #7 – How often do “soft money” positions lead to tenure track positions?

- **Academia**
 - Since you are really doing the same research as someone else in the group most soft money positions will not turn into tenure track positions.

Question #8 – If there is interest, what are the typical steps for a hiring manager in selecting a candidate?

- **Industry**
 - Candidates are screened for the minimum requirements.
 - Between 3-12 are selected for phone interviews, a smaller number will be invited for onsite interview.
 - Be honest during the interview. It will benefit the candidate as well as the institution.
 - Expect to have dinner with several folks the night before the interview.
 - Interview will include a seminar and meeting with key people.
- **Academia**
 - Similar to industry. However, you can expect to give 2 seminars. One will be on your research, and the second will be your future plans and how you will get funding.
- **Government**
 - The process is slow and you must apply through the government bureaucracy. It will be helpful to speak to the hiring manager ahead of time.
 - Depending on the branch you interview with, you may or may not be required to give a seminar.

- You may need to pay for your own trip.

Question #9 – Do most hiring managers conduct initial telephone interviews to determine a good fit?

- **Industry**
 - Maybe
- **Academia**
 - Rare
- **Government**
 - Depends on how many people are on the list.

Question #10 – What should I do to prepare for an interview? What questions should I be prepared for? What questions should I ask?

- **Industry**
 - Ask for a list of people with whom you will interview. Try and learn about them so you will have something to discuss.
 - Examples of questions you may be asked:
 - Why do you want this job?
 - What can you bring to this job?
 - Tell us about yourself.
 - Where do you hope to be in 5 years?
 - Example of a question you may ask:
 - What opportunities will be available to me in 5 years?
 - To whom will I report?
 - What happens in a typical day?
- **Academia**
 - Know where you will fit in and how you can help each individual (i.e., collaborate).
 - Find out the interview format.
 - Know the background of the audience.
 - Read manuscripts about the labs of interest for information
 - Examples of questions you should ask:
 - What is the teaching load vs. research load?
 - What is the tenure process?
 - Who pays my salary while I do not have funding?
 - How much start-up funding is available?
- **Government**

- Do your homework. Know about the organization, the people, the job, and where you fit in.
 - Make a sketch of the organization/people from resources at hand (e.g., internet, PubMed, etc).
- Make sure to interview your interviewers.
- H's – Homework and Honesty.
- Jobs are advertised at a specific grade (GS rating, etc).

Question #11 – How important is my seminar in the selection process?

- **Industry**
 - This is extremely important.
- **Industry**
 - It will give you an opportunity to demonstrate that you are knowledgeable, poised, and can answer questions. This may be your only chance to do so.
- **Academia**
 - This will show you can communicate.
 - Practice at every opportunity (i.e., departmental seminars, etc.).
- **Government**
 - Make sure your slides are easy to read.
 - Be considerate of the audience
 - Stick to the time limit
 - Don't insult the audience (e.g., don't refer to questions as dumb)
 - Prepare and practice by giving seminar to colleagues.
 - Don't be afraid to say you don't know!

Question #12 – Should I discuss salaries and benefits during my telephone or face-to-face interviews?

- **Industry**
 - Not really proper to bring up with interviewers.
 - HR can answer questions on this topic. You should have the opportunity to meet with them during your interview.
- **Academia**
 - Don't discuss during 1st interview.
 - Consider that there may be others on the short list of candidates so it will be competitive.
- **Government**

- You may go through several stages of interviews so it best to wait. Make them really want you before discussing.

Question #13 – What should I do after the interview?

- **Industry**
 - At the end of the interview, find out what the timeline line is for making a decision. Contact the interviewer only after that time has expired.
 - Send thank you notes and stress your interest in the position.
- **Academia**
 - Make sure to send notes to folks that could be potential collaborators.
- **General**
 - Send follow up e-mail or follow up letters

Question #14 – What are the usual goals of second interviews and what are the expectations of the candidate and the hiring manager / company?

- **Academia**
 - Talk in more depth about details of the position.
 - You can use this time to ask more questions of the faculty and tour the core facilities.
 - Spouses may also be invited.
 - In most cases, a second interview is given to the top choice for a position.
- **Industry**
 - You may meet with members of upper management with whom you did not meet during the first interview.
 - This is a good time to discuss factors that will impact your decision (e.g., family considerations, etc.)
 - An offer may occur during the second interview

Question #15 – What do I do if I have an offer but would like to wait until I hear about other positions?

- **Industry**
 - This will depend on the company. Some give time-stamped offers that will expire, while others will give consideration if you have other interviews.
- **Government**
 - The interviewer may be disappointed but it is best to be honest about other possibilities.

Question #16 – How often should I inquire into the status of the position?

- **General**
 - Wait until the end of the time period that the interviewer mentions at the end of your interview.
 - Don't be overly aggressive.
 - Use common sense.

Question #17 – How do I determine if the salary offer is fair?

- **Academia**
 - Check websites to see what current salaries look like.
 - Use your network to find out what others are getting.
 - In addition to your salary it is also important to consider the startup package.
 - Retention is important to the institution so they should be making a competitive offer.
- **Industry**
 - Salary offers are not arbitrary. They are benchmarked against other companies and should be competitive.
 - Also consider other benefits (e.g., pension plan, 401K, insurance, etc.)
 - Consider using a recruiter.

Question #18 – In addition to salary and benefits, what else should I consider during negotiations (e.g., start up money, lab space, technical support, moving costs)?

- **General**
 - This is acceptable as long as you are considerate.
 - Ask for constructive criticism.

Audience Questions

1. How can I keep myself marketable (e.g., researching “hot topics”)?

- **Industry**
 - It's important to remember that you probably won't be working in the same research area in which you were trained.
- **Government**
 - You are trained to think and not necessarily to do the same experiments you did in grad school and as a post-doc.

2. Are first author publications important?

- **General**
 - Collaborative publications are important but first author publications are most important.

3. What is the best way to answer questions about long term plans?

- **General**
 - If you don't have an answer prepared, ask the interviewer what opportunities will exist in the future.
 - Try to have a 2-year plan and a 5-year plan