



INTERVIEWING FOR A POSTDOCTORAL POSITION

Interviewing for your first postdoctoral position may be nerve-racking. It doesn't help that there appears to be no set formula; the interviews can vary from institution to institution and may take place face-to-face or over the phone or via Skype. However, there are some standard questions that regularly come up that you can prepare for. In this issue, we list a number of common questions and tips on how to put your best foot forward; with a bit of practice you may be able to shine at your next postdoctoral interview.

Common Questions

Practice answers to the following questions:

- Tell me about yourself
- Tell me about your project
- Where do you see yourself in five years
- What particular areas of our research interest you most and why?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What is your best quality/worst quality?
- Describe a situation where your input made a difference

Giving a Presentation

Most likely you will be asked to give a presentation on your work. You may be presenting to a varied audience, including the PI, other postdoctoral researchers and students. Try to include sufficient background on your work and if possible, do not be too technical – you want the audience to see the bigger picture. During questions, answer your questions to the best of your ability. Do not take the hard questions personally, this probably means that they have been paying attention! The person who asks the hardest questions may turn out to be your strongest supporter.

Research!

Read the publications from the laboratory. This will help you ask informed questions during the interview. If you are lucky enough to know beforehand who will be on your interview panel, do a quick Google search to read about their research backgrounds.

Behavioural Interviewing

Behavioural questions are generally used by PIs to gauge how well you fit within their team based on anecdotal evidence. These questions generally start with "Tell me about a time when", "Give me an example of..." or "Describe a time when...". Answers for behavioural questions employ **STAR: Situation or Task** (find an example of a task or situation that you experienced), **Action** (what did you do) and **Result** (if possible, report on positive outcomes and accomplishments). Some examples of behavioural questions are listed:

- How do you handle conflict? Describe a situation where you had to resolve conflict and what the outcome was.
- There are many jobs that require creative or innovative thinking. Give an example of when you had such a job and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a time when you worked in a group to accomplish a task.

The Phone Interview

The phone interview is sometimes used as an initial screening tool; however, for job seekers who are looking for overseas work, this may be down to logistics. For phone interviews, have a pen and paper ready. Try to lay out your resume in front of you so you can quickly refer to it. Find a nice quiet spot without distractions and make sure that you have a clear phone connection/fast internet. If possible, download images of the interview panel so that you can visualise talking to them in person. Try to smile while you are on the phone – believe it or not, they can hear this in your voice!

Presenting yourself

Here are some no brainers: arrive on time, generally 15–30 minutes early is best. Look the part by dressing appropriately: business attire is generally considered the norm. Be enthusiastic and bring a copy of your resume along. Most importantly, turn your phone on silent!

Any Further Questions?

Try to think of you interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you. See if they meet your needs. Ask to meet other lab members in private to talk freely about the lab and the mentor. Here are some sample questions:

- Can I take courses or learn new technologies to advance myself?
- Are there funds for attending scientific meetings?
- How is authorship handled? How often and where does the lab publish?

After the Interview

Follow up with a thank you email. Restate why you are interested in this position. Try to reiterate what you have discussed and clarify any missing information.

Further Reading

Here is a list of some of our favourite websites to help you:

- Nature Jobs has some interesting articles on job seeking: www.nature.com/naturejobs/science/career_toolkit
- Tips for job seekers on Postdocjobs.com: www.postdocjobs.com/resources
- Science Magazine: sciencecareers.sciencemag.org/career_magazine

This is the last issue of SDS Page to be coordinated by Casina Kan and Mugdha Bhati. Thanks to Casina and Mugdha for their outstanding work. The incoming SDS Page coordinators are Aaron McGrath, Catherine Palmer and Ivan Ng.