**Postdoc Applications: CV and Cover Letter**

PDCO Career Resources

Applications for postdoctoral positions usually consist of a CV, cover letter, and a list of references, which are sent directly to the Principal Investigator via email. While some PIs advertise openings in their labs, others prefer to have interested applicants contact them and propose a research project. More established PIs can receive hundreds of postdoc applications every month, so it is critical to tailor each email and application to fit that lab.

When emailing your postdoc application, include the following in a short message:

* a brief introduction of yourself and your research experience
* your defense timeline
* why you are interested in conducting research in that laboratory
* indicate that you are interest in applying for the postdoctoral position or ask if there is an opening in their lab at this time
* be sure to highlight any major achievements (grants, publications, awards)
* attach your CV and cover letter as PDFs.

If there is no response within 2 weeks, follow up to show your continued interest.

**How to format a CV for postdoc positions**

Your CV outlines your academic and professional accomplishments. The basic areas to include are your contact information, education, research experience, grant funding, teaching experience, mentoring experience, publications, presentations, honors and awards, leadership, service, memberships, clinical certifications and licensures and contact information for your references.

* Unlike a resume, there is no page limit for a CV, but this does not mean you should not pay attention to content. Typically, a doctoral student’s CV is two to three pages and postdoctoral fellow’s CV is three to seven pages in length.
* No single format is ‘the best.’ Craft your CV the way that best represents you and your success. Remember to format the CV in a way that will make it **easy for the PI to read**.
* Pay close attention to how to order your categories and how you present information in each category. Within each section, items should be listed in reverse chronological order. Keep locations and dates of employment/involvement on the right side of the page; the left will hold more important details such as university, degree, job title, job actions, etc.
* If you have a history of research grant funding or high impact publications, place these sections higher in your CV. The key is to include accomplishments that make you stand out from other candidates, like an F award or a high-impact publication.
* Including publications that are not published should be done judiciously. Including too many papers in progress may give the impression you have difficulty completing tasks. We recommend putting papers not published into a separate section that denote their publication stage, e.g., Publication Under Review.
* Include your name in a footer or header for every page of your CV and application materials.
* Utilize a common font, such as Times New Roman or Arial, and use a font size of 11 to 12 point.
* Format your CV in a way that does not distract from your content. We recommend the use of **bold text**, ALL CAPS, *italics*, and white space so you are left with a professional and clean look.
* In the United States, it is not necessary to include your marital status, birth date, or photograph on your CV. Your nationality should also be omitted.
* CV formatting and content can vary drastically between academic disciplines. Ask your advisor or peers for sample CVs from your field.

**How to write a cover letter**

Your cover letter should effectively relate why you are uniquely qualified for the postdoctoral position you are applying for and give concrete examples that show you fit the specific qualifications outlined in the job advertisement. If there is no advertisement, you need to show you are an independent researcher who is capable of designing and completing a postdoctoral project that complements that laboratory’s focus. A cover letter should **NOT** be your CV in a letter format. View the cover letter as an opportunity to showcase your writing abilities and to show enthusiasm for the position, laboratory, and institution.

* Thoroughly research the PI, laboratory, department, and your potential future colleagues. Think about the ways in which your research aligns with the mission of the laboratory.
* Write the letter as an independent researcher, not as a graduate student. Your job application is not a time to be modest; market your strengths and accomplishments without being boastful.
* Tailor your letter to EACH position to which you are applying. No two cover letters should look the same: **Do not** use a generic cover letter template that you send out for multiple positions. **Do not** make generic claims about your “fit” or qualifications for the position.

**General tips for formatting your cover letter:**

* The postdoctoral cover letter should be between 1-2 pages in length (no longer than two pages)

**Paragraph One:**

* Introduce yourself with your current academic status, institution, department and PhD advisor.
* Name the position title and express interest. Briefly state why you are interested in the position and the laboratory.
* If you have a connection with someone in the laboratory or a collaborator that you spoke with about the position, mention this.
* Include a time frame for your defense and intended start of your postdoc
* Briefly describe in 1-2 sentences what makes you an ideal candidate for the position to which you are applying.
  + What key strengths do you want the PI to know about you? You should elaborate on these in the body paragraphs.
    - Mention grant acquisitions, high impact publications, technical skills and field knowledge, or academic pedigree where relevant.

**Body paragraphs:**

* Typically, 2-3 body paragraphs
* Use the first body paragraph to explain your thesis research at a professional academic level. This is your opportunity to convey your expertise in the subject, show off your technical and critical thinking abilities, and demonstrate your writing skills.
* In the second and third paragraphs, talk about how your expertise and proposed research project fit with the needs of the laboratory. Include stories covering your soft skills, including mentorship, leadership, and collaboration. Use the following prompts:
  + What are your areas of expertise? Does the lab use similar techniques or will you be bringing this knowledge to the lab?
  + In what other ways will you contribute to the laboratory? What have you done that demonstrates you can do this?
  + How can you demonstrate fundability of your proposed research project?
  + How can you demonstrate leadership in the field?
  + How well do you fit the needs of the laboratory in terms of research focus?
  + How will the training you receive in this lab support your career goals?

**Final Paragraph:**

* Summarize the strengths you bring to the laboratory and position.
* Describe what you are including in your application portfolio and your intended method of follow up
* Thank the PI for their consideration of your application and sign your letter.

**Additional Resources:**

* [Harvard University Office of Career Services CVs and Cover Letters](http://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/ocs/files/gsas-cvs-and-cover-letters.pdf)
* [National Institutes of Health Guide Office of Intramural Training and Education Guide to Resumes and Curriculum Vitae](https://www.training.nih.gov/assets/Guide_to_Resumes_&_Curricula_Vitae.pdf)
* [ASBMB, “How to write a killer cover letter for a postdoc”](http://www.asbmb.org/asbmbtoday/asbmbtoday_article.aspx?id=48927)
* [Sample life sciences postdoc cover letter, UPenn Career Services](https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/files/Cover_Letter__LifeScipostdoc2010_1345150303.pdf)