

Postdoctoral Trainee Selection Process Applicant Frequently Asked Questions

Difference Between Internship and Postdoc Selection

1. Is there a match for Postdocs?
 - There is no match. For PDs, there are the APPIC Selection Guidelines but they are not mandated. More on the Guidelines later.
2. Is there an imbalance between postdoc positions and applicants?
 - There is an imbalance favoring postdoctoral applicants but nobody know how large since the universe of postdoctoral programs is not known.
3. Is the postdoc application and selection process standardized like the internship process?
 - Internship has a standardized application process for all APPIC member programs using the APPIC DOL, the AAPI, and the Match. For postdocs, we are trying to organize application and selection processes but there is no standardization. We are trying to accomplish this through the UPPD, APPA CAS and the Selection Guidelines. Postdoctoral programs are still free to handle the application and selection process however they wish. However, last year, approximately 95% of the programs listed in the UPPD agreed to follow the Selection Guidelines and the Uniform Notification Date.
4. Is the process for securing a postdoc in Neuropsychology different?
 - In Neuropsychology, there is a national match system; however, not all programs participate. Many of the programs that do not participate may make offers earlier than the match date. For neuropsychology programs you are considering, make sure you understand whether or not the program participates in the match, and if not, what their timeline is regarding interviews and offers.
5. Is there an equivalent to the couples' match?
 - No. For couples who are applying to postdocs and trying to coordinate, we recommend clear and open communication to the programs you are considering during the application and selection process.

Purpose and Type of Postdocs

1. Do I need to do a postdoctoral fellowship?
 - Postdocs are for advanced or specialized training as opposed to the broad and general training received on internship. Applying to a postdoc typically would not be in lieu of a job or just for supervised hours for licensure. Specialized postdoctoral training may be required to market yourself for a particular type of position or specialty practice.

2. What are some career paths or specialties that might necessitate a postdoctoral fellowship vs. ones that don't?
 - Practicing in recognized specialty areas (e.g., neuropsychology, health psychology, and rehabilitation psychology) often require formal postdoctoral training. It is recommended that applicants become familiar with the formal Education and Training Guidelines for the specialty <http://cospp.org/guidelines>, as well as the requirements to become board certified (ABPP) in that area <http://www.abpp.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3286>
 - Trainees who are interested in launching a research career typically do complete a postdoctoral fellowship for more focused experience in manuscript development and grant writing. Fellowships typically make you more competitive for academic positions, as they provide more focused time for developing a line of independent research.
 - a. How much does your postdoctoral fellowship set the direction of your career path?
 - Postdoctoral programs, ideally, provide specialized or advanced training in recognized specialties. Such advanced or specialized training may help you secure jobs in those areas. With the exception of recognized specialty areas (see the question above), completing a postdoc may be an advantage but is not absolutely critical for certain career paths. It is highly recommended that you seek guidance and mentorship from individuals in career paths of potential interest.

3. Do I need to attend an APA-accredited postdoctoral fellowship or an APPIC-member postdoctoral fellowship?
 - It is important to consider the quality of a program and its focus on training. Accredited postdocs undergo a rigorous review process and APPIC has clear membership criteria. There are good non-accredited and non-APPIC member postdocs but one would be advised to consider other markers for the quality of the program such as reputation and talking to your internship TD or to past postdocs. Postdoctoral training should occur within a program with a clear curriculum and training plan.
 - Quality is important for all positions, but APA accreditation or APPIC membership programs is not as important for research focused programs. Quality research fellowships typically have an organized training model, including didactics, training in grant writing, and mentorship from an established investigator.

4. Do you have to complete your postdoc in the state in which you want to become licensed?
- No. Each state has different licensure requirements. Some require accrual of postdoctoral hours and some do not. States can differ significantly on what type of hours qualify for licensure. It is recommended that postdoc applicants become familiar with the licensure requirements in states of interest to make sure all potential postdoctoral programs meet those requirements. No states or Canadian Provinces require a formal postdoctoral training program.
 - Contact information for state and Canadian Province boards can be found on the ASPPB website: <http://www.asppb.net/?page=BdContactNewPG>
 - Is APA accreditation necessary for licensure? Is APPIC membership? Will licensure be more complicated without one of these endorsements?
 - No, neither APA accredited nor APPIC member postdoc fellowships are required for licensure. However, in many jurisdictions, the licensure application process can be faster and easier if one has completed an APA accredited and/or APPIC member internship and postdoc programs.
5. What do the terms “specialty training”, “emphases”, and “focus” mean? How are they different?
1. The term specialty refers to recognized specialties or recognized by the Council of Specialties (e.g., Forensic Psychology or Clinical Neuropsychology). There are clear Education and Training Guidelines for recognized specialties. Emphasis can resemble areas of specialization but may include other areas of concentration or focus in an area that is not a recognized specialty. The taxonomy has levels of opportunity for the training provided in recognized specialty areas: Exposure, Experience, Emphasis, and lastly Major Area of Study. The term “focus: is a new term that synonymous with and intended to replace the term “emphasis.”
6. What are the risks of arranging your own supervised experience as a “postdoc?”
- Such experiences are not part of a formalized training experience. Some providers are just doing it for financial reasons and may not be very committed to training. There are no real assurances on the quality of overall training and supervision. Some licensure boards (e.g., CA) make it much more difficult to get licensed without a formal postdoc sometimes resulting in longer supervised clinical experiences, etc.
7. I am interested in several research postdocs, but clinical hours are often not a part of these positions (T32s, individual labs). What are some options I could consider/negotiate for trying to arrange these hours, in order to still get licensed?
- T32 fellowships in behavioral science that interview individuals from clinical psychology are used to this question. As long as you make it clear that your main interest is in research training, it is permissible to ask if/how others who completed the program obtained hours for licensure. This is a very common question.

8. Especially for research-oriented post-docs, would you recommend emailing prospective supervisors before applying to introduce yourself, confirm that there is an available post-doc position, and inquire about whether your interests and experiences would be a good fit for the postdoc?
 - Yes. Research mentors are used to receiving emails querying the availability of postdoctoral training under their mentorship. They may have information about pending grants that have not been posted yet. It is appropriate to email them to inquire about availability and fit.
9. What makes you competitive for research postdocs?
 - Having clear research interests, and a CV that reflects some publications in that particular area, are important. Although not necessary, it is impressive if you have been able to obtain any funding for yourself (e.g., small pilot project, small foundation grant, travel award to conferences). Fit between your research interests and that of the prospective mentor is the most important factor.
10. If you're applying to a research postdoc, does that mean you should have extensive research experience beforehand?
 - Not necessarily. Many people find their passion, or preferred career trajectory, on internship and this can happen with research too. Be aware that you may be competing with other applicants who have more focused research experience, so you will have to clearly define why this path is important to you.
11. How do benefits, like family leave, work in postdoctoral programs?
 - Benefits, including those such as family leave, vary widely across training programs. It is best to ask the programs you are considering what benefits they offer especially related to family leave.
12. How negotiable are components of a postdoc position (e.g., start date, salary, reducing a 2-year program to a 1-year program)?
 - Typically, there is not much room (or any) for negotiation with regard to salary and length of program. Some programs may be flexible regarding the start date (especially in a case where your internship end date falls after the start date for the postdoc). However, it is best to ask about these details in advance because some programs may not have any flexibility.

Universal Psychology Postdoctoral Directory (UPPD)

1. What is the UPPD?

- Different from the APPIC DOL which you are familiar with based on application for internship. APPIC postdoc members are listed in the APPIC DOL.
- The UPPD is a universal psychology postdoctoral directory. It was a recommendation borne out of the 2016 postdoctoral training Summit to have one place for applicants to search for all programs. There are advantages over the old APPIC directory (DOL) in that there are nearly 3 times as many programs listed (currently 927+) and the search functions are more specifically geared towards postdoctoral training using specialty and emphasis areas as well as research foci.

2. Will all postdocs be listed in the UPPD?

- The full universe of postdoctoral programs is not known. We made great progress this year and would hope that the vast majority of programs choose to be listed in the UPPD. We are working hard to recruit all programs to list themselves in the directory to provide more centralized search information. A concerted effort is being placed on getting all research focused programs listed in the UPPD.
- It is likely that heavily research-focused programs and small private practice programs may choose not to list themselves in the directory. Some but not all neuropsych programs have listed their information in the UPPD.

3. How do I access the UPPD?

Via the APPIC Website. There are links off the APPIC Postdoc training page:

<http://www.appic.org/About-APPIC/Universal-Psychology-Postdoctoral-Directory>

4. When is the UPPD complete...how will I know when all available listings are there?

- The UPPD is a work in progress and will likely not contain the actual full universe of programs since that is unknown. However, we believe it will have the majority of programs particularly clinically focused programs. Opportunities continue to emerge as the year progresses. There is a feature to search by recently added programs.

5. Are all UPPD listings accredited in some way (e.g., APA or APPIC member)? I am planning to get licensed in CA, so if I find a post-doc on the UPPD website will it be more difficult to get licensed?

- No, the UPPD postings are not vetted in any manner. There is a way to see what UPPD listings are accredited or have APPIC membership, both are markers of quality. It may have implications for licensure (depending on the jurisdiction) to complete a postdoc at a program that is neither accredited nor an APPIC member.

6. Are private practices allowed to post on the UPPD?

- Yes. The UPPD is open for all type of postdoctoral training. There is no formal criteria or review process for a program to list themselves in the UPPD. For this reasons, applicants should not assume that programs listed in the UPPD have been vetted or meet a particular standard or level of quality.

International Postdoc Sites or Trainees

1. Are there opportunities for international students for postdoc?
 - Yes. These may be limited though. It is best to read the program materials carefully and check with the TD.
2. Are there clinical postdocs in UK or Canada? Are there directories for international programs?
 - There are some postdoctoral experiences in the UK and Canada but none are currently listed in the UPPD. This could change as programs are added all the time. We are not aware of any directories of international postdoctoral programs in psychology.

Application Process

1. Should you try to get a postdoc where you want to work or settle down after the postdoc?
 - Many people take this approach and may choose to limit their postdoctoral search to geographic regions. It is also true that postdoc alums are often quite competitive for future jobs in the setting/institution/organization where they completed their postdoc.
2. If I have not defended my dissertation, should I even apply to a postdoc?
 - Yes. As long as you are certain you will successfully defend prior to the start of the postdoc program (as many clinical *and* research programs have no flexibility in terms of being able to allow an ABD student to begin a postdoc).
3. To how many programs should I apply?
 - There is no magic number. Although we don't have data on how many applications will maximize the likelihood of obtaining a postdoc, we know that the modal application number is around eight. This can vary based on type of postdoc program and geographical area.
4. What is the timeline for this process? When is program information available? When are applications due? When are interviews?
 - Since there is no formal structure to postdoctoral selection this varies by program. However, for most programs that have a clinical training component to them, it is recommended that applicants start searching in early fall. Deadlines for applications tend to fall between December and January. Interviews typically occur in late January and February. Although not all programs will adhere to the APPIC suggested guidelines, the date programs are asked to make offers is 2/26/18. This can be variable for research positions depending on the source of funding.
5. How will this process work if I'm applying to both research and clinical postdocs?
 - No magic answer and there may be some conflicts as predominantly research focused programs may not be aware of or follow the notification date of 2/26. We recommend being frank with programs about the time frame for other programs you are interested in as you go through the application process.
6. How does one handle applying for jobs and postdocs? What is the best way to communicate to both sites without missing out on an opportunity?
 - Clear and transparent communication with all parties involved throughout the process is your best bet.
 - Be aware of issues and consequences of applying to an internal position.
7. Does it hurt to apply to more than one track/specialty at the same site (such as a VA)?

- Not necessarily. However, it will be important to make a strong case for why you are a good fit for each track of interest. You should also be prepared to discuss how you might rank the various tracks at each site.
8. Do you have any suggestions for people applying for positions in different settings than their internship (e.g., an emphasis area in a VAMC with no VA experience)?
- Highlight the relevant experience that you do have (e.g., working in a large, busy, complex hospital) and illustrate how the new setting fits with your longer-term career goals.
9. What should I be aware of if I am applying to a postdoc program at the same site as my internship?
- Ideally, your internship or the postdoc training director will talk about this with you, so that you can find out if there is preference given to internal applicants, how consideration of internal candidates may affect time frames. Be aware that you may be competing with your classmates, who are also likely your internship support network. You should also be aware that, as an internal applicant, you may not be selected and that you may be faced with completing six more months of internship following the “rejection”.
10. How does it work if I am applying to both 2-year neuropsychology and non-neuropsychology clinical postdocs?
- Some may question the clarity of your career path, if you want to be a neuropsychologist.
 - Be aware that timelines for interviews and offers are likely to differ. Non-match and Neuropsychology programs may make offers early. Many neuropsych programs participate in a formal match, and entering into the match is binding. The match typically occurs in mid-February, which is before the 2/26/2018 uniform notification data for non-neuropsychology clinical programs.
11. What kinds of application materials do postdoc programs request?
- Programs differ but most require a CV, transcripts, a letter of interest demonstrating interest and fit, and letters of recommendation. Some will require work samples. Some TDs have started asking for applicants to submit a copy of their AAPI (internship application). Check the program website or with the TD.
12. Do you have any tips on preparing a good cover letter/letter of interest? How does it look different from the internship cover letter?
- There will be similarities in that you want to address fit for both internship and postdoc. For a postdoc cover letter, you are striking a balance between describing both what you want to learn (something that is often strongly emphasized in internship cover letters) and also what you will bring/contribute.

13. If you are not doing a research related postdoc, does it make sense to limit how much research experience is described on your CV?
- Not necessarily. You might drop long narrative descriptions of research experience but it would still make sense to keep any publications, presentations, grants, and/or research related awards.
14. Is there a standardized reference letter for postdoc (like there was for internship)?
- No. Given the heterogeneity of postdoctoral program, programs often request different types of letters.
15. What kinds of letters of recommendation should I have and who should they be from?
- Read the program materials. The application instructions should specify if certain letters are needed (e.g., letter from internship TD verifying you are on track to successfully complete, letter for dissertation chair verifying defense or strong likelihood of defense). You should have at least one letter from an internship supervisor.
16. How relevant will supervisory/training experience be when applying? How heavily should it be referenced in an application?
- This will vary widely by training program. Read the program materials and consider asking the TD.
17. When do I need to use APPA-CAS (The centralized postdoctoral application)?
- Not all programs use this application process. Check the UPPD and the programs' webpage for instructions on how to apply. If they are using APPA CAS they should indicate this in their instructions. You can also check through the APPA CAS portal and see if that program is listed. Note: the base application needs to be completed in order to see what programs are listed. APPA CAS is very different and not as detailed as the AAPI. Separate letters are required for each individual program.
18. How much does APPA CAS cost per application?
- \$25 for first application and \$15 for each application after that.
19. How do I request a phone/skype interview? (if I'm worried about money and/or time away from internship.)
- Some programs will indicate if they offer these types of interviews and their application materials. If they do not provide any information about this it is very appropriate to ask.

APPIC Postdoc Selection Guidelines

1. How do I know if a program is following the APPIC postdoc selection guidelines?
 - This will be indicated in the UPPD listing. It should also be listed on the program's website or other public materials. If it is not listed you can contact the training director and ask.
2. What do I do if a program doesn't know about the selection guidelines, or says they aren't following them?
 - Programs are free to choose whether they follow the guidelines. There is not an official rule requiring compliance. If their notification date is earlier than the guidelines, you could ask how long they might allow applicants to hold offers. VA has agreed that all of its programs will follow the guidelines, and APA Division 54 has publicized a list of programs that have indicated intention to follow the guidelines.
3. How do I handle it if some of the programs I apply to are following the selection guidelines and others aren't?
 - There is no easy answer to this. For programs that are making offers before the suggested UND, you could ask them how long they will allow applicants to hold offers. It will be helpful to have a clear ranking of programs so that you know your preferences as you are made offers. It is best to be prepared well before 2/26/18 if possible. It is important to get mentorship through the process as you get offers and advice about how to respond.
4. In terms of being selected for a postdoc, how do programs usually contact you to offer a position? Phone call, email?
 - This varies by program. It is best to ask. It is also a good idea to make sure you have preferred contact information for all of the programs you are considering so you know how to get in touch with them as well. It is recommended that you work with your training director **to be available** during the time period offers are being made on 2/26/18.
5. How long can I ask to hold an offer?
 - The guidelines suggest that programs offer at least 4 hours but you can certainly ask for longer. It may be best to ask the program how long the offer may be held. Be warned that programs can say no. It may be useful to explain why you need to hold an offer. Know that holding offers, particularly after the recommended notification deadline, places a burden on the program as they may lose other applicants.
6. If I don't accept an offer right away, will the postdoc program view me negatively if I wind up at that site?
 - The answer would be, hopefully no but it depends. It is best to be transparent with programs and behave in a professional manner.

7. When could or should I request a reciprocal offer? (If I get an offer from one program, but there's another program I prefer, what do I do?) And especially if this happens before February 26, 18, or if the selection guidelines aren't being followed?
 - Not all programs will use the guidelines and adhere to the 2/26/18 notification date. Such programs may make you an offer at any time. If that program is not your top ranked program, you can contact your top ranked program that is adhering to the guidelines and request a reciprocal offer. The idea behind the reciprocal offer is so that programs will not lose their top ranked applicant; similarly, this prevents applicants from losing out on the opportunity to get their top ranked postdoc site, if they are also top ranked by the program.
 - If you get a legitimate offer from a less-preferred program and they will not allow you to hold the offer until 2/26/18, you should only contact your top-ranked program and ask them for a reciprocal offer. This would be appropriate regardless of whether your top program indicates they are following the guidelines or not. If they are not able to respond to your request with an offer, it is permissible to ask where you stand in their rankings and their time frame for decision-making to help inform your decision about the current offer from your less preferred program.
8. What if I request a reciprocal offer from my top ranked program and the program does offer me the position?
 - See above - You should take it! You should not request a reciprocal offer unless you are planning to take it if offered. Do not request a reciprocal offer just to see what your options are. Programs may expedite or alter their processes to respond to your request and will expect an acceptance in response.
9. If I request a reciprocal offer, what kind of proof do I need to show that I have a "valid offer?"
 - If you request a reciprocal offer, the program may request documentation that you have a valid offer, but this may or may not occur. There are no official criteria for what programs may request to verify a valid offer. Many programs will take your word for it. Some will request an email. If you're made an offer and you expect to request a reciprocal offer from another program, it may be best to ask for verification of the offer by email just in case it is needed.
10. What do I do if I accept a postdoc position?
 - Notify all programs to which you applied. This will be very helpful in informing those program's selection decisions and facilitating swifter offers to their alternative candidates.
 - For all filled postdoctoral positions (before, during and following the UND) applicants should receive an email with an official confirmation of the agreement within 48 hours.

11. What do I do if I do not have an offer on February 26th.

- Don't panic. There are significantly more postdoctoral positions than applicants, so there will be many good positions still available. The time frame for advertising/posting postdoc positions is much more variable than with internships, and new positions also arise. The UPPD allows programs to indicate unfilled positions following 2/26/18. The UPPD allows applicants to then search for open positions. Many positions get filled after 2/26/18.

12. What if I do not have a position on the 26th and have not heard from all the programs I applied to?

- It is very appropriate to ask the program(s) where you stand. It is possible they have an offer that is being held and you are still under consideration.

13. Are offers binding?

- The postdoc selection process results in what is considered a professionally binding agreement between the training program and the applicant. It would be unusual and considered unprofessional to renege on an offer for a "better offer" after an agreement was reached with the program/applicant. The exception would be grave personal circumstances where both the program and the applicant agree it is best to set aside the agreement. There are no formal consequences of renegeing on an offer. Both program directors and applicants need to understand this is the same as a job offer and acceptance, it is a verbal contract.