

To Pursue a Career or a Postdoc?

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After completing my Ph.D., I had a difficult choice to make: A career in academia or in the industry? I was also looking at a postdoc as an option. So, I was a bit indecisive at a time when I needed to set some clear goals.

This decision forced me to think deeply about what I wanted in life. After all, this choice set the foundation for how I would spend my adult life. I knew I needed to do some extensive research on my priorities and my options.

The Evolution of a Postdoc

Initially, I saw a postdoc as an extension of a Ph.D. program. After researching postdocs, I found I was wrong. First, the length of time for a postdoc has decreased.

This is primarily due to funding. Universities have begun to place a cap on the length of a postdoc to save money and to spread out funding opportunities.

Competition is a significant factor in this evolution. In some fields, postdocs are no longer a necessity. Also, in the past postdocs almost guaranteed a good job. Today that is not the case. After doing a postdoc, a Ph.D. might find himself struggling to find a career.

I also found that most postdocs hired are in the sciences. As recently as 2013, [75 percent of postdocs](#) found positions at universities. For other career options, postdocs are not always necessary. However, as Cathi Grus, a deputy executive director for the APA, says “A postdoc is a great opportunity to get advanced training.” For example, for the [14 APA-approved specialties](#) a postdoc is almost always required

A Postdoc Helps to Secure a Tenure-track Position

A study finds that postdoc training was required or preferred for [70 percent of researchers](#) currently in a tenure-track position. This reflects the statistics that show the number of Ph.D. graduates in the sciences grew by nearly [40% between 1998 and 2008](#). So, for a career in academia, I need every possible advantage.

I focused on three aspects. First, a postdoc gives me additional time to expand my research through funding. Secondly, it offers more time to publish your work. Lastly, it offers more opportunities for networking and collaboration. All are vital in securing a tenure-track position.

The Decision-Making Process

A postdoc is not an end goal. It is a training period to refine essential skills. Michelle Madore, a Ph.D. in neuropsychology, offers some valuable advice: “In grad school, you get pulled a lot of different ways. In the end, you have to decide what you want your life to look like. Choose a postdoc that’s going to help keep you on that trajectory.”

This was not an easy decision. So, I talked to people in my field, including professors and mentors. They have been in my place before and had to make their own decisions. I knew that they had the knowledge to help me with my decision.

Then, I looked at my priorities. I thought about everything a postdoc includes: publishing, teaching, research, traveling to conferences, networking, and more. Does this fit my interests? Does this fit who I am as an individual? I concluded that it does. I enjoy the research. I enjoy teaching. I enjoy working independently and collaboratively. So, ultimately, a postdoc gave me the opportunity to continue to do all these things.

Also, there is the financial aspect. Am I more concerned with the work I would do or with the amount of money I would make? Honestly, the financial aspect is important. I know that [industry careers pay more](#) than academic careers. However, I love academia. I love the flexibility of my schedule and the life it lets me have.

Jobs Outside of Academia

There was a [150% increase](#) in the number of postdocs between 2000 and 2012. This contrasts to the decline in the number of available tenure-track faculty positions. If you want a [career outside of academia](#), there are many paths to take.

With this knowledge, my friend with a Ph.D. in biology took an alternate career path. She found many different types of careers that she could pursue, including government jobs, nonprofits, corporations, and healthcare. So, she ultimately made the decision to forego a postdoc in favor of joining a biomedical company as a clinical researcher.

Are you in a dilemma, whether to choose a postdoc or an industry position? How did you decide? Please share your thoughts with us in the comments below.

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