

The “Right” Postdoc Mentor

Robert J. Dooling
Department of Psychology &
Neuroscience and Cognitive Science Program
University of Maryland
dooling@psyc.umd.edu

What should a new trainee look for in identifying a Postdoc mentor?

- Active publication in high quality journals
- Extramural funding (in science) and likelihood of continuation
- National recognition and other indications of status
- Rank, tenure status, proximity to retirement
- Prior training record (time to complete degree, number of graduates, placement)
- Lab organization
- Work ethic

What are the expectations a trainee should have for his/her Postdoc mentor?

- Financial aid for stipend & tuition
- Costs of research
- Travel to meetings
- Place to do work
- Intellectual support
- Help in finding postdoc and/or job
- Mentor should be available for discussions and meetings

Types of Postdoc Mentors and Models

- Collaborator type
 - Professionally youthful, Ass't Prof
 - Focus on productivity
- Hands-off type
 - mid-level of career
 - Less demanding in terms of productivity
- Senior scientist advisor
 - many other commitments
 - High-quality attention but hit and miss
- Didactic model
 - “listen to me”
- Apprentice model
 - “follow me”
- Collegial model
 - “be my junior colleague”
- Friendship model
 - “be my friend”

What expectations should a Postdoc mentor have for her/his trainee?

- Active participation in lab activities
- Work ethic
- Focus on getting degree in a reasonable time
- Actively work toward professional skills & independence as an investigator
- Communicate honestly with mentor regarding research progress
- Foster collegial relationship with mentor
- Meet department, graduate school, research deadlines

What things should a Postdoc mentor discuss with a trainee?

- Authorship
- Ownership of data (and patents)
- Expectations for when postdoc will be around
- Participation in other research projects and authorship on those
- Mentors availability
- Potential for funding for stipends, research, travel, etc.

Final Thoughts

A Good Mentor is:

- Advisor
- Critic
- Advocate
- Instructor
- Role model
- Scientific 'parent'

Useful References:

- Macrina, F. L. (2000) *Scientific Integrity: An Introductory Text with Case Studies*, ASM Press, Washington, DC
- NAS (1995) *On Being a Scientist*, 2nd Edition, National Academy Press, Washington, DC
- NAS (1997) *Adviser, Teacher, Role Model, Friend*, National Academy Press, Washington, DC

Mentoring Topics

- Characteristics of a successful mentor-trainee relationship.
- What should a new trainee look for in identifying a potential mentor?
- Trainee expectations for the mentor.
- Mentor expectations for trainee.
- Things mentor should discuss with trainee.
- Types of mentors.

What are the characteristics of a successful mentor-trainee relationship?

- Demonstrate style/methodology of doing research
- Develop and foster an analytical approach to doing research.
- Discuss concepts of any sub-discipline, and evolution of those concepts over time.
- Explore and evaluate literature of the discipline and important broader knowledge
- Discuss ethical basis of scientific research.

What are the characteristics of a successful mentor-trainee relationship, Cont'd

- Demonstrate how to consider, analyze and evaluate the work and conclusions of colleagues.
- Transmit by example and discussion, the skills required for successful scientific writing.
- Evaluate and critique research and teaching.
- Facilitate socialization and access to research community in the discipline.
- Strive for a relationship characterized by mutual trust.
- Foster interpersonal skills needed to become a scientist.