

How to get your next academic job: experiences and skills required

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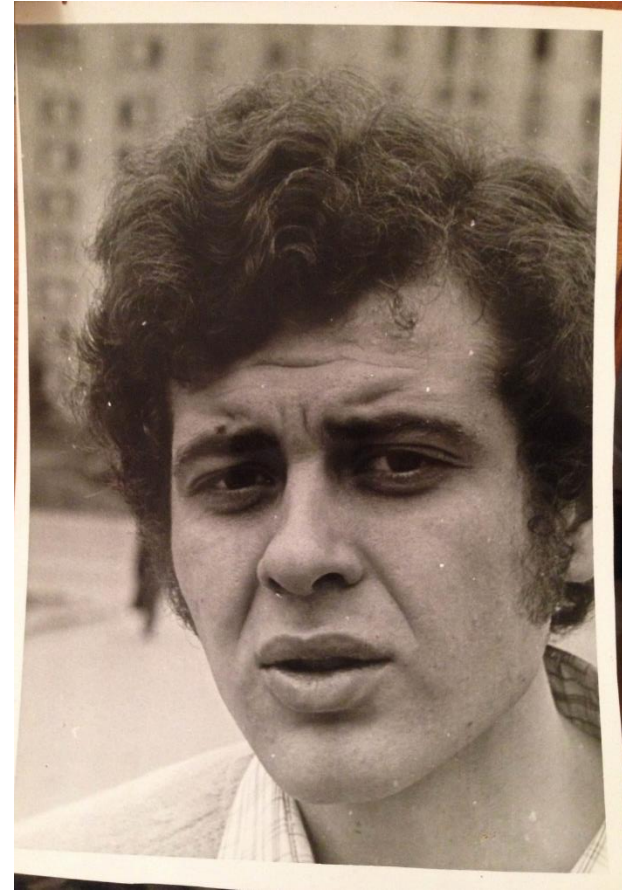
How to develop yourself as a personality to achieve success?

Subjective views on attitudes and behaviours that help, based on:

- (i) personal experience as a PhD student, postdoc and researcher,
- (ii) experience of my work on appointment panels,
- (iii) self-reflection and self-doubt (lots of each).

Do not expect revelations

**Do not expect definite, final answers:
only you can find them for yourself,
but other people can help**



What do you need to find those answers?

1. Discover yourself, understand yourself
2. Formulate your goals
3. Work hard, be resilient

1. Discover yourself, understand yourself - I

❑ Observe yourself, analyse your own behaviour

- What parts of your work make you feel satisfied and rewarded?
- What weakens and irritates you and how can this be avoided?
- What aspects of your daily routine facilitate your work and what distracts you?
- Be prepared to change your daily habits but do it systematically, in a sustained manner, **not** as a forced campaign.

❑ Be aware of the natural tendency of a critical mind to underestimate itself.

- Compare yourself with people around you but from your own perspective:
e.g., if many/most people around me seem to be clever and more talented than I am, this only means that I'll have to work harder to achieve as much as them – or, as my own experience amply demonstrates – rather more than them.

1. Discover yourself, understand yourself - II

❑ Read serious literature: it helps to understand yourself and people around you.

... .. Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Lewis Carroll, William Faulkner, Somerset Maugham, Evelyn Waugh, George Orwell, J. D. Salinger, Julio Cortázar, Gabriel García Márquez, Graham Greene, Ray Bradbury, Kurt Vonnegut, Harold Pinter, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn,
...

❑ Use questionnaires/psychometric tests to explore your interests, strengths, personality and abilities

➤ <https://pcwww.liv.ac.uk/~pgro/CareerResources/self-awareness-resources.html#personal-values>

➤ <https://pcwww.liv.ac.uk/~pgro/Online%20Resources.htm> and many more.

Strengths

- What advantages do you have that others don't have (e.g., skills, certifications, education, or connections)?
- What do you do better than anyone else?
- What personal resources can you access?
- What do other people (and your boss, in particular) see as your strengths?
- Which of your achievements are you most proud of?
- What values do you believe in that others fail to exhibit?
- Are you part of a network that no one else is involved in? If so, what connections do you have with influential people?

Consider this from your own perspective, and from the point of view of the people around you. And don't be modest or shy – be as objective as you can. Knowing and using your strengths can make you happier and more fulfilled at work.

Be aware of your values

- Altruism, helping people or society
- Pursuit of knowledge
- Prestige, recognition
- Responsibility
- Adventure, excitement
- Independence, autonomy
- Working in a team
- Challenge, pressure
- Competition
- Opportunities for creativity
- Accomplishment, mastery
- Precision and accuracy
- Variety, diversity
- Stability, predictable tasks
- Security
- Power, authority, influence
- Money, wealth
- Integrity, honesty
- Artistic expression, aesthetics
- Work-life balance for leisure or family responsibilities

And there are many others.

A particular strength that many would find important is the passion for and ability to learn – not only now but throughout your life:

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80.

Anyone who keeps learning stays young.

The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.”

Henry Ford



Weaknesses

- What tasks do you usually avoid because you don't feel confident doing them?
- What will the people around you see as your weaknesses?
- Are you completely confident in your education and skills training? If not, where are you weakest?
- What are your negative work habits (for example, are you often late, are you disorganized, do you have a short temper, or are you poor at handling stress)?
- Do you have personality traits that hold you back in your field? For instance, if you have to conduct meetings on a regular basis, a fear of public speaking would be a major weakness.

Again, consider this from a personal/internal perspective and an external perspective. Do other people see weaknesses that you don't see? Do co-workers consistently outperform you in key areas? Be realistic – it's best to face any unpleasant truths as soon as possible.

Then, decide what should you do with your weaknesses – some are unavoidable, the others can be mitigated.

2. Formulate your goals -- I

Where do you want to be in future?

In academia? bank? computing company? self-employed? playing golf most of the time?

What demands will you meet in each occupation? Are you ready to meet them?

Each occupation has its advantages and disadvantages, think of those that would make your **life full** and yourself feel **happy** and **satisfied**.

Be prepared to reconsider as life changes and you change.

When deciding for what jobs to apply, do that not only for the jobs that you like (there may be very few of them) but also for those that you do not hate.

Be prepared to learn new things in a new job – embrace this opportunity, it will enrich you.

Be realistic and yet ambitious

➤ Resist self-deprecation, fight inferiority complexes.

➤ Make a list of your strengths and achievements.

➤ Be aware of your weaknesses.

➤ Aim slightly higher than where you want to be.

2. Formulate your goals -- II

❑ Useful goals are realistic and achievable

- Very often, they refer to a foreseeable future, the future that you can imagine how you could control.
- Such goals as “I want to become an FRS” or “I want to become a professor”, when set too early, may be hypothetical and therefore not allowing one to identify and mobilise the resources required to achieve them (even if eventually one does become an FRS or a professor).

❑ Useful goals might be

- “I want to become a PhD student” for an undergraduate student,
- “I want to submit two papers this year” or “I want to stay in academia after my PhD/postdoc position” for a PhD student or a postdoc,
- “I want to find my own niche” or “I want to work in financial sector”.

3. Work hard, be resilient -- I

□ Develop a stable daily routine

- Work regularly, normally 5.5 days a week (1/2 day on Saturday).
- Do not sacrifice relaxation and social life.
- Have good annual and seasonal holidays.
- Take care of you health.

□ Learn how to learn

- Do not wait for somebody to tell you what you need to know.
- Learn a broader context, not only the narrow subject area of your work.
- At what point can you be satisfied that you have understood the subject?
- Learn by doing, not just by reading textbooks.

□ Develop a unique combination of knowledge, skills and experience

Find you niche. Then other people will seek your help and value your collaboration.

3. Work hard, be resilient -- II

- ❑ Learn to admit your mistakes and ignorance. Be prepared to admit them openly and publicly.

- ❑ Be resilient
 - Failures are unavoidable. Admit them, then learn lessons from them.
 - Be honest with yourself, avoid illusions.
 - Adjust your behaviour accordingly.
 - Forbid yourself thoughts like “Why me? Why everybody else is so happy and successful while I am so miserable and useless?” They only make you weaker and drain your energy and determination.
 - Then failures will be making you stronger.

- ❑ Useful experience is based on lessons learned from both success and failure.

A couple of pragmatic suggestions for interviews and proposals

❑ **At an interview**

- Control the unavoidable nervousness and perhaps even panic. An efficient way to do that could be reading an important and interesting research paper while waiting for the interview – this will switch your mind into a healthy scientific mode rather than a debilitating examination mode.
- The best you can do is to be yourself – be natural, behave normally (you'll be able to do that if you've suppressed the nervousness).
- Use your social skills and communicate with the panel – treat an interview not as an examination but rather as a discussion with colleagues aimed at identifying your strengths and – unavoidably – weaknesses.

❑ **Both at an interview and in your proposal**

- If you see any weakness in your experience or knowledge, be the first to mention it. But then try to turn it into a strength. For example, if you feel that you have not published enough, try to find a [true] reason for that and explain it, e.g., “I have been learning diverse subject areas to expand my work [provide evidence for that!], and this has affected my publication rate. But now my effort is paying back and this year I've submitted more papers than ever before”.
- Only strong people can openly admit their weaknesses. There is little harm in overdoing this: if other people will not consider what you say to be a real weakness, they might think: “I do not see any problem with what they say; if this person thinks it IS a weakness, they are applying high standards to themselves!”

Some links that you may find useful

Top 5 Academic Interview Questions and Answers

<https://www.jobs.ac.uk/careers-advice/interview-tips/1276/top-5-academic-interview-questions-and-answers>

Commonly asked questions in academic interviews

<https://www.vitae.ac.uk/researcher-careers/pursuing-an-academic-career/applying-for-academic-jobs/commonly-asked-questions-in-academic-interviews>

Most common job test types and how companies are using them

<https://hbr.org/2015/07/ace-the-assessment>

Finding a job: : Writing an effective CV, Researching the organisation

<http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/using-the-library/students/training-and-skills-support/my-learning-essentials/online-resources/?level=3&level1Link=2&level2Links=my%20future>

Learning styles quiz

<http://www.emtrain.eu/learning-styles/>