

THE STEP-by-STEP, DO-IT-YOURSELF

JOB SEARCH WORKBOOK

FOR STUDENTS IN THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

This manual provides generalized instructions for students or recent graduates seeking short-term positions (e.g. winter break or summer) or longer term jobs (a semester, year, or longer). The methods described have been used successfully. The important ingredients are organization, focus, perseverance and gumption!

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Do-it-Yourself
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I. Constraints

Although students are often told “Expand your horizons!”, in this case, focusing your search means defining some **constraints**. Try to identify and rank the factors of importance to you. Consider the following criteria:

- A. Specific type of job desired
- B. Geographic preferences (urban, rural, specific cities, states)
- C. Financial requirements (paid, volunteer, room/board, part time). What are acceptable possibilities?
- D. Housing (availability, roommate connections, expense)
- E. Transportation (public, if needed, car ownership, possible biking)
- F. Limitations posed by your academic background/practical skills
- G. Other reasons (personal, family, mate, etc.)

II. Scenarios

Once you have settled on some constraints and ranked them in importance, you will need a list of **prospective employers** that may be contacted either by phone, in person or by mail. (For more on this, see section on “Methods of making Contact”, Section III.) What follows are a series of situations, one of which (or a permutation thereof) is likely to match yours.

Example 1 (Hospital):

You wish to work in a hospital and get first hand exposure to the daily clinical experiences physicians have. Your goal is to get an

idea about whether medicine would be a good career choice for you. In addition, you want to be in a particular city. You should begin by specifying several medical specialties of potential interest to you. (Consider **why** you've chosen any of these, in case you are asked.) Now you can generate hospital contacts in these fields using:

- A. Yellow Pages (Telephone Directory) for your chosen location (Listings under "Physicians"; also listings by specialty)
- B. Hospital directories (Listings by specialty; go to the hospital to find)
- C. Medical school clinical faculty lists (request these from medical schools in the area)

Remember, hospitals affiliated with medical programs are your best bet for locating physician-researchers.

- D. Referrals from physicians with whom you are acquainted
- E. You can access a great deal of the above information by surfing the INTERNET.

You may contact department chiefs, or individual staff members. Ask whether there is an opening or "clinical assistantship" for a student with your background interests. Indicate that you are willing to help out with research or any suitable tasks, just so that you will have the opportunity to do a little job shadowing. If the answer is "no", ask if they would suggest anyone else who might. Be sure to identify yourself as a brown student and mention your interests.

Example 2 (Hospital):

You wish to work in a hospital in any capacity, for pay. Identify teaching or city hospitals in your chosen location. Contact the hospital personnel office, or if you are there, find the employment bulletin board. Once you make a personal contact, convince them of your commitment and willingness to do just about anything. You may be suitable for positions that require a bit of training (e.g. phlebotomist), as these institutions are often shorthanded. Jobs like this give you the change to be part of the hospital system and test yourself out in this environment. You would also make contacts that could lead to more interesting positions later on.

Example 3 (Hospital):

Volunteer! Many hospitals have well-organized volunteer programs that offer

worthwhile clinical opportunities. Sometimes you can't have everything (experience and \$), so if an opportunity appears valuable, it may be worth the experience even as a volunteer. Try to arrange your hours so you can get a part-time paying job (restaurant?) that will allow you this beneficial experience.

Example 4 (Research or Fieldwork):

You would like to do laboratory research or fieldwork, preferably for pay, in a university. Choose suitable locations. Identify which general areas of biology are of interest to you. Knowing which general field you are after (e.g. biochemistry, neurobiology, ecology, etc.), use **Peterson's Guide to Graduate Programs in the Biological Sciences**, which is available in the Biology Undergraduate Affairs Office. If a university has a graduate program in your interest area, they may well have the faculty you are looking for. Full program descriptions in Peterson's Guide list departmental faculty with a brief sentence about their individual research. In addition, essentially all of the foregoing information is available at university or research institute web sites. Thus, you may use this information to generate a list of contacts. You may write to these individuals or to their departments; you may call them; you may use email. If feasible, you may go directly to the school and knock at the laboratory door. As you proceed, be sure that you do your homework. Prepare a resume and cover letter for mailing out. Be as knowledgeable as you can about your prospective sponsor's research activities. Be realistic about services you can offer as a research assistant.

Another useful way to make university contacts is through your professors here at Brown. Ask your instructors to suggest colleagues you might contact; proceed as described above, mentioning that you were referred by a mutual acquaintance, Prof. so and so.

Example 5 (Research at Brown):

If there is a faculty member with whom you would like to work over a summer, work together to generate a project and prepare an application for an UTRA (Undergraduate Teaching and Research Assistantship). These awards provide funding for projects to be carried out at Brown for a ten week period during the summer, and sometimes for an academic semester. Applications (which require specific research proposals prepared with faculty mentors are available in December. They are due in early February, and awards are announced in March. Information on faculty research is available on the office's Research Projects Collection on the web.

Summer job and internship positions (on-campus and hospital-based) are listed on the web beginning in early spring.

Example 6 (Research in Industry):

Generate a list of companies with research opportunities (see References, Section VIII of this manual for a list of directories; USE the INTERNET!). Pay attention to firms in your home town. (They often prefer area residents.) Prepare a resume and cover letter. Begin your mail campaign, addressing inquiries to specific persons or to Director (or Vice President), Research and Development. Send out many inquiries, you may follow up with phone calls. See Section V for help with the resume and cover letter.

Example 7 (Research Abroad):

This is a long shot, but your best bet is looking up U.S. companies that have offices abroad. Write to the Research and Development officer at these offices (as in example 6 above). You may also find foreign addresses in Medical Research Centers, a 2-volume international compendium that includes institutions from Albania to Zimbabwe (see References). Again cruise the internet for these sites.

III. CONTACTS

Never underestimate the usefulness of family or friends for establishing contacts. They can be invaluable for all categories of jobs. Don't be embarrassed! After all, you will still have to land the job on your own! So contact a relative, a friend's relative, a neighbor, even your family doctor – anyone with a reasonable connection to the field of your interest.

METHODS OF MAKING CONTACT: The following techniques work if carried out in a thoughtful, organized fashion.

1. **By Telephone** – telephoning is quick, but there's great potential for being blocked. Your message may never be relayed. Do not assume that your calls will be returned. Be tenacious about ascertaining a time when you can call back and talk to your prospective employer. When you do reach your contact, introduce yourself. Give your name, your major, and year at Brown. Always mention Brown! State your purpose. For instance, explain that you desire a position as a clinical research assistant, a lab technician or a lab research assistant, and why you decided to call (this particular individual). For example, you may be interested in

their specialty, or in their research (make sure you acquaint yourself with this research!) Try to arrange a time for a personal meeting. If this is impossible (because of distance), try to establish a dialogue by mail or email. Describe your background and your goals. If the contact proves negative, ask if there is someone else you might call.

2. **By Mail** – Remember that a key to success may be volume. Prepare a formal resume and cover letter, and send out many of them (see “Resume Self-Workshop,” Section V). This may mean 10, 20, 50 or more! In your letter, you can suggest a personal meeting. Give your readers a few weeks to respond; you can then follow up with a telephone call.

3. **In Person** – This method is for the bold. It may sound presumptuous, but some have had success with the technique, even in the hallowed halls of university laboratories. Remember that if you do decide to make initial contact in person that you must do your homework and remember your personal appearance. This stuff counts, even for geniuses. It is important especially for clinical or business situations. Remember that you may be asked to go on rounds and see patients, or clients.

4. **By Email** – Very popular days, but can be overdone. Because mailboxes overflow with spa and unsolicited messages, one from an unknown person may get deleted or ignored. Therefore, *follow up unanswered email messages with a phone call.*

IV. PAY

As you make your initial contact, don't mention money right away. If your prospective employer seems interested in you, you can then mention your financial requirements.

Indicate whether:

- (1) You require paid, full time employment in order to subsist and/or save money.
 - (2) You need enough for subsistence living (a break-even situation).
 - (3) You can volunteer, as long as the position is part-time and you can get another (paying) job on the side.
 - (4) You can volunteer full-time, just for the experience.
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VI. ADVICE about Interactions with a prospective employer:

Submitted by Professor Anne Fausto-Sterling

1. Don't address your prospective employer (who may be old enough to be your grandmother) by his/her first name. He/she will let you know when the more familiar address becomes appropriate.
2. Do attach a resume at first contact. This is a sign of respect for the prospective employer who does not then have to write you back asking for same. And it saves a step and speeds up the process. (Only 2 of the 20 during the initial contact offered any information about their qualifications.)
3. Don't, during the initial contact, ask about the job specifics in a tone that suggests that you are evaluating the prospective employer for his/her suitability. You of course need to decide if the job is one you want or can handle, but do so discreetly and at the right moment (i.e. if you succeed in getting an interview). (Many of the emails wanted me to take a lot of time to describe the job without offering me any info about themselves. If I had done this for every initial inquiry, I would have had no time to prepare classes or do other work!).
4. Don't get so enthusiastic in touting your candidacy that it looks like you think you know more than the prospective employer about who is best suited for the position. (I got statements such as "I am certain that I am the best person for this job" from students who actually were not particularly qualified. I know it was youthful enthusiasm, but it is my role to decide who is the best person to suit my needs, not the applicant's).
5. Do read the information about the job very carefully. (Most of the students who contacted me read selectively about the "lab" part of the job, but not about the library and office assistant part. Many of our biomed undergrads are qualified for the former, but not the latter).
6. Remember that prospective employers have posted a job opening because they need assistance. Even if they are faculty members, as employers, their primary role is not to teach novices, but to hire people who can help them get their work done. Their role as teachers gets fulfilled in the classroom, in counseling sessions and in a variety of informal spaces.

VI. RESUME WORKSHOP

The format that follows is one of many possible styles. It works well for students in the sciences.

Aim for a standard, one-page resume. Names and addresses of your references can be attached on a separate sheet. If you have a computer or word processor handy and can use a laser printer, the finished product will be comparable to expensive typeset versions, especially when photocopied onto good quality paper. Bold face print, italics and emphasis dots can be used judiciously. Refer to the resume worksheet with accompanying notes and sample version.

RESUME WORKSHEET (please use in conjunction with NOTES that follow)

Your name

Home address
Phone number

School address
Phone number

Objective (optional) To obtain a position as a_____

Education

20xx-xx Brown University (AB) or(ScB) Biology (or other) "with Honors", (if applicable), degree expected, May 20xx

Employment

20xx **POSITION TITLE** (e.g., Research Assistant), Name of firm, department, institution. Location
Duties (Use active words where possible):
-developed, trained, performed assays, conducted, collected, assisted, consulted, assessed, organized, compiled, maintained....

Honors and Awards

Examples might include:

Associate member Sigma Xi, Scientific Research Honor Society, Elected spring 20xx

Received A's with distinction in organic chemistry and histology

Awarded National Merit Scholarship

Service and Activities

20xx-xx Senior (or Honors) research, Dept. of XXX, Brown University
Sponsor: Prof.
Project:.....

20xx-xx Student advisor
-Provided academic and personal counseling for freshman students
-Organized.....

20xx Member, Brown University (band, orchestra, crew, soccer team, etc.)

20xx Volunteer, High Hopes Hospital, Optimism, NY (list duties)
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Skills

Computer: Proficiency in Word, Excel, Photoshop, etc.
Fluent in Spanish, reading knowledge of Tibetan
Laboratory techniques: List any you have carried out, including those learned from labs in courses such as chemistry.

Hobbies (if you wish) Guitar, tennis, oil painting, wood working, needlework, etc.

NOTES ON THE RESUME WORKSHEET

1. Objectives – If this category is too limiting or stilted, leave it out. You can describe your goal in your cover letter.

2. Education – High school may be expendable, especially if you are an upper-level student or if there is other more interesting material.

3. Employment – List paid positions in chronological order, with the most recent ones first. Embellish those that are relevant to the position you are now seeking. Do this by using one or more emphasis dots (*) drawing the reader's attention to specific responsibilities, skills or accomplishments, achieved

on that job. Here is where you become your own editor. If you have too many positions, choose the most recent substantial ones. If you have very few positions, think of the important responsibilities or qualities that could be extended to almost any job and emphasize those. For example, you may have had to deal with agitated customers, teaching or training others, scheduling or organizing anything, writing summaries, etc. These are skills applicable to many endeavors.

4. Honors or awards – If you don't have any, delete this category. Appropriate examples include college courses in which you have received "A" with distinction, academic scholarships (including National Merit), membership in Sigma Xi, Phi Beta Kappa, fellowships awarded, Honors earned (or expected) in concentration programs.

5. Service and activities – Use a format very similar to the positions described under Employment. Give your position title, institution or organization, sponsor (if any) and list relevant duties in the "dot emphasis" format. Be a judicious editor here. More dots mean more emphasis on an activity. Remember that some positions won't need any "dot" descriptions.

6. Skills – This can be a useful summary or color category. If you want to list lab techniques acquired in courses or jobs, here's your opportunity. Every gizmo you conquered in chem. or bio. Lab counts. Examples: spectrophotometry, chromatography, microscopy, histological sectioning, staining,

7. Hobbies – This category will give the reader an idea of you. If the information is not included in Skills and you have room, this is an acceptable category. But remember: tempt the reader, but don't spill all the beans on the resume. Save something for the interview.

8. References – State that a separate sheet is attached or that references are available on request. When you attach your special sheet, use three or four references, listing their name and title, institution, address and phone number. Remember that you ought to contact your references, asking permission to use their names. Usually, letters will not be requested by an employer but you should make sure that if called, these referees will be aware of your use of their names. 9. Publications – If you have publications, you can use a separate sheet for these also, using a standard format for listing publication titles. If you have submitted a paper, and it has not yet been published, you can use the words "manuscript submitted" or "in press".

As you work up your resume, put down maximum information on the first draft. You can edit later on, honing your final version to a page. Remember, if you have a variety of prospective contacts, you may have more than one version of a resume, emphasizing appropriate qualities.

Sample Student

Street
City, State, Zip
Email Address

EDUCATION

AB Human Biology: Brain and Behavior; expected May 20xx
Brown University
*Program featured advanced coursework in biology, neuroscience
and psychology

EMPLOYMENT

Summer 20xx
Research Assistant, Rockefeller University, NY
Sponsor: Prof. xx xxx, Department of Molecular Genetics
*Conducted literature-based research on HIV-related proteins

Summer 20xx
Assistant Program Director, xx Sports Academy

SERVICE AND ACTIVITIES

20xx-present
Senior Research, Department of xxx-ology
Sponsor: Prof. xx xxx
Project: “_____”

News Editor, Alternative Medicine Journal
*Contributed two articles per bi-monthly issue, translating recent
scientific findings into lay language
*Supervised and edited articles submitted to News section

20xx-present
Class Representative, Biology Curriculum Committee
Responsibilities:
*Biology curriculum oversight and planning
*Course reviews and policymaking

20xx-present
Biology Affinity Group Coordinator and Senior mentor, WISE
(Women in Science and Engineering)
*Provided a support system for undergraduate women science
students
*Coordinated large-scale formal events for all of WISE members on
topics of career planning

20xx-20xx
Tutor, XX XX Community Center
*Assisted local public school youths with homework assignments

20xx-20xx
Assistant teacher, Fox Point Day care Center
*Facilitated activities such as reading, writing practice,
math/spelling lessons, free play

HONORS AND AWARDS

Sigma Xi Scientific Research Honor Society, elected associate member, 200X

Photography Honorable Mention, awarded by the Brown Visual Art Department
Displayed work in two on-campus exhibitions

XX XX Award for academic excellence and extracurricular achievement, 200x

Youth-in-Action Award for outstanding community volunteerism, 200x

HOBBIES

Creative writing, art (drawing, painting, photography, travel, biking)

VII. THE COVER LETTER

1. Use standard business format. Type neatly on good stock, possibly Brown divisional letterhead.
2. Be brief. Introduce yourself. State your purpose. Then make brief reference to especially relevant qualities described in your resume. (Consider using titles such as Research Assistant, Clinical Assistant, Marketing or Management Intern, etc.) Finally, suggest the possibility of a meeting or interview and request a timely response. Close with “Yours truly” or “Sincerely”.
3. Check your spelling and grammar. No typos!
4. A sample follows, below and on adjacent page.

FORMAT:

Your (return address)

Addressee's Address

Date

Salutation

Paragraph 1: Why I'm Writing

Paragraph 2: Who I am, what I want

Paragraph 3: Explanation

Paragraph 4: Request

Paragraph 5: Closing

Sign Off

THE ALL PURPOSE SAMPLE COVER LETTER

Choose the phrase appropriate for you, from areas in parentheses; or, make up your own.

Box____
Brown University
Providence, RI 02912
(401) 863-XXXX
your email address

(Address of prospective employer)

(Date_

Dear (Dr.____; Prof____; Mr. or Ms.____; vice President, Research & Development; etc.),

I am writing in regard to finding employment with your (organization; firm; company; laboratory; practice; institute; etc.) for the (summer of 20xx; winter recess;Dec. xx-Jan. xx; coming year,etc.).

Currently a (senior; junior; sophomore; freshman) at Brown University, I am completing a program in (Biology;Biochemistry; etc.) with a special focus in xxxx. I am seeking an opportunity as a (research assistant; as a clinical assistant; in administration; in management; as a fieldwork assistant, etc.).

{I have academic and practical experience in (biochemistry, physiology; molecular biology; organic chemistry; business; computer science, etc.) and hope to offer at least as much as I learn.}

Or,

{since I plan to go on to medical school, I would appreciate the chance to work in a clinical environment, and hope I can be of some service.}

Or,

{I have looked into your research in _____, and would appreciate the chance to help out with a project in this area.}

Or,

{compose your own!}

{Please communicate a convenient time and date for an interview or discussion.) or,
{Please let me know if you anticipate a suitable position.}

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

(Your name)