



CAASTRO
ARC CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE
FOR ALL-SKY ASTROPHYSICS

Dress for Success

Advice on
Career Decisions & Job Applications

- **Working in Academia:**

- > An academic career...

- >> comes in different “shapes & sizes” (research, teaching, outreach, support)

- >> typically >50% of PhD students go on to postdoc jobs but only <10% stay

- > **Knowing how the system works will help you better plan your applications & career.**

An Academic career?



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- > Postdoc positions:

- >> fixed-term 2-3 year research positions, working on particular project

- >> astronomy job season (~75% of jobs) advertised September – January

- >> some independent research “fellowships” (2-5 years) offered by organisations

- >> also funding opportunity through Australian Research Council prize schemes (e.g. DECRA or Future Fellowship) and overseas equivalents

- >> “open”, non-institute specific fellowships (e.g. Hubble/US, Humboldt/Germany)

- >> all jobs and grants very competitive, might require moving (city, country...)

- > **Consider: where are you at now (project schedule, track record) and when is a good time to apply (to give you best chances)?**

- > **Job/grant application writing is a skill in itself, will improve with practice! Be prepared to write many (~20-50?) applications.**



Dress for Success

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 - > Asking yourself '*Why?*'
 - >> Bad sign if answer is: "It's what comes next." or "I don't know what else to do."
 - >> Good sign if answer is: "I love doing research and have some really exciting plans!" or "I really enjoy teaching and supervising students!"
 - > **Only if you feel keen – otherwise, find a job you enjoy and that pays better!**



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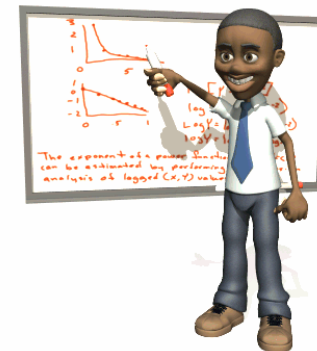
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- > Asking yourself *'What?'*

- >> Different types of academic jobs: research and/or teaching/outreach/support, research plus maybe functional duties (e.g. observatory support at CSIRO, AAO)

- > **Ask people doing these sort of jobs for their experience, match with your interests.**



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- > Asking yourself '*Where?*'

- >> smaller/less prestigious institution? 'Big fish in a small pond'

- >> bigger/more prestigious institution? CV and resources (grants, students)

- > **Plus many other factors!** Work with particular person? Access to particular facilities?

- Willing to live overseas (potentially long-term)? What about family commitments?



Dress for Success

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- >> Too early in career: not enough experience, contacts/networks, publications...

- >> Too late in your career: lose market value while waiting for the perfect job

- > **Goldilocks moment** = Strong track record, plenty of potential, high-impact achievement(s), good position to be in and grow from. **Ask supervisors/mentors!**



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- > Asking yourself '*How?*'

- >> Basic requirement: strong research track record, good fit to expectations

- >> Other qualities: teaching experience (lecturing, supervision), functional skills (e.g. project management, communication), successes (grants, awards), networks, cross-disciplinary expertise, media experience...

- > **A pro-active attitude is key!** Use networks to find (or even create) a job instead of responding to ads; trust your qualification for a job; be open-minded about options.

- > **Present yourself in the best (truthful) light:** keep CV updated, include everything relevant; develop a research plan (and get feedback from peers); choose referees well (genuinely knowledgeable and enthusiastic better than eminent); prepare for interview!

- **Applying for Academic Jobs:**

- > *DO:*

- >> Start preparing your application early: online processes can take time; factor in time zone differences; remember to spell check!
 - >> Choose referees well (see later slide).
 - >> Find out about the employer: values, strengths, facilities, partnerships, grant programs; departmental and reporting structure; teaching and supervision.
 - >> Write a powerful cover letter (even if not asked for): Why do you want the job and why should they want you? Anything buried in your CV that needs emphasis?
 - >> Answer selection criteria: 1-2 paragraph responses for every criterion; offer positive view even if not really met (“keen to learn more”); have responses on topics such as OH&S and EEO (standard response OK, examples better).
 - >> Include publication list: reverse chronological order, full reference, your name highlighted; “submitted” OK (if true), maximum of 1-2 papers “in prep” (only if important, you lead); separate lists for referees / conference / abstracts for talks.
 - >> Tailor research / teaching statements: highlights so far, new plans (time and resources permitting); make links to existing programs (theirs and others).

- **Applying for Academic Jobs:**

- > *DON'T:*

- >> Expect part-time jobs to be advertised; don't mention wish to work part-time until being offered the job, then negotiate (they want you, might also be able to offer second position).

- >> Mention personal reasons: family matters (location, jobs), health or disability issues; date of birth or marital status optional in AUS, taboo in USA.

- >> Disrespect the process by ignoring questions or sending generic responses; these applications go straight to the bottom of the pile.

- >> Go overboard with enquiries (too often or too soon); asking HR department for confirmation of receipt OK; contact the Academics involved in selection only if crucial (e.g. reference missing, important awards or high impact paper accepted).

- >> Count on feedback if unsuccessful; (sadly) very common not to hear back.

- >> Assume flexibility in interview dates / times: be prepared to cancel other things; offer phone / video interview option if travel not possible.

- >> Contact members of the interview panel beforehand, even if you know them; puts them in awkward position.

- **Good References are your Friend:**

- > Nominating referees

- >> Jobs typically ask for 3 referees, either at time of application or shortlisting
- >> Pick people who are more senior than you (not fellow postdocs!), e.g. supervisor and national/international collaborators from different organisations
- >> If asking someone for the first time or unsure about their support, ask accordingly (“I need a very positive reference, would you be comfortable?”)

- > **Balance familiarity (with you, your work) with prominence (name recognition)!**



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 - > Good etiquette
 - >> Let them know far in advance (2-4 weeks); their letters take time, and they might have to write references for several people
 - >> Reference letters are confidential; don’t tell them what to write, ask to see their letter or offer to include in your application
 - >> Be clear what is needed (e.g. different aspects of your work), how (e.g. online upload or letter to email address) and when (with application or when contacted)
 - > **Prepare & communicate: list jobs (with links and your application docs) on website or Google doc, gently remind referees ahead of deadline, update them on progress.**

- **The Importance of the Interview:**

- > Things to keep in mind, for both sides:

- >> Always good to make a good impression. You might not get *this* job but it is a small world.
 - >> Hiring decisions are important to get right. A poor hiring decision can be disruptive to the group/department and even worse for the employee.
 - >> Shortlist rankings have point beyond which employers don't proceed. Better to re-advertise than fill the role.
 - >> Hirers are building teams, have grants to fulfil. Research has boundaries.
 - >> Appearance *does* matter. Dress and style (comb hair, shave) appropriately.



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- > Some logistics before the interview:

- >> *PHONE*: give main and backup number; remove potential distractions.
- >> *VIDEO*: test connection beforehand; check what they see in the background.
- >> *IN PERSON*: ask for glass of water beforehand; have tissues in your pocket.
- > **Ask who the panel are (google them) and how long the interview is likely to go for.**
- > **Re-read your application! Practise as much as you can with others!**

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- > This is it!

- >> OK to have notes or blank paper and pen but don't start rummaging for them.

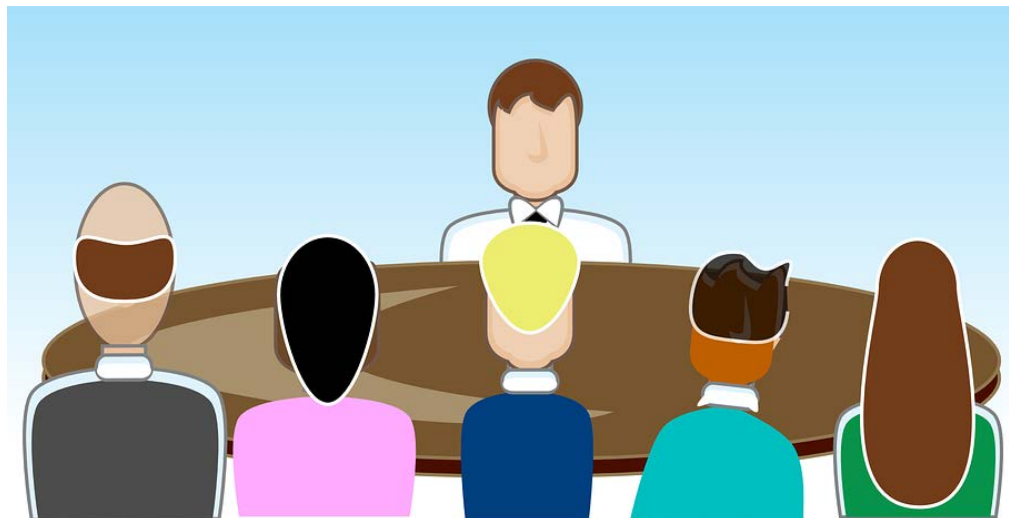
- >> Make eye contact; speak calmly and clearly; think about your body language.

- >> Listen to questions, ask them to repeat if necessary – don't ramble or go astray.

- >> Be positive (without embellishing the truth) and enthusiastic (even if nervous).

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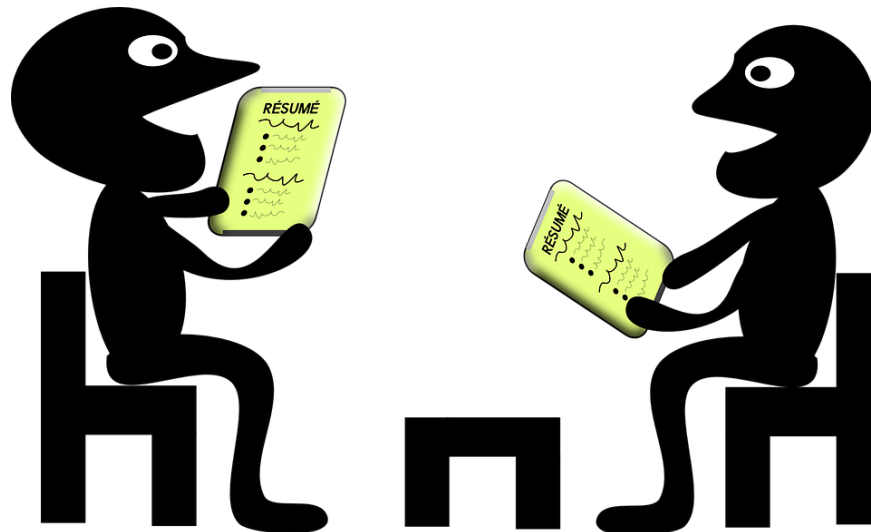
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- > Be ready:

- >> Typical questions: expect some usual suspects (see next slides).
- >> Questions to the panel: have at least one insightful question (specific to job or organisation) to ask them when offered, several better if other(s) already answered; OK to ask when you are likely to hear back but not first/only question.
- >> Inappropriate questions: (unfortunately) sometimes the case, about age, marital status, children, health... Recommended to deflect politely ("Happy to discuss this further in the hopeful event that you are able to make me an offer.")

- **Typical Interview Questions (style, wording and order varies):**
 - > About the job:
 - >> What interests you about this position and this institute?
 - >> What makes you stand out from other applicants?
 - >> What do you know about the institute or the projects you would work on?
 - >> When do you think you are able to start?
 - > **Be informed, not surprised!**



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 - > **Be informed, not surprised!**
 - > About your science:
 - >> Can you talk articulately about what you have done and are doing now?
 - >> Have you been part of a larger (international) collaboration?
 - >> How does your work translate to the new group?
 - >> Can you summarise your research highlights? (structure into 3 bullet points, then go back through in more detail; emphasise projects leads, innovative things)
 - >> Are you willing to explore new research areas? (avoid appearing not to let go of previous work; highlight positive aspect of bringing wider expertise to group)
 - > **Probes your (immediate) productivity, potential and suitability.**
 - > **Know how you cope with specific v independent research, ask for their expectation!**

- **Typical Interview Questions (style, wording and order varies):**
 - > About your attitude:
 - >> How are you going to bring in money/external funding?
 - >> Do you have a near-term and long-term career plan? (happy Academic?)
 - >> What is the best / most challenging aspect about working in a team?
 - >> How have you handled (or would handle) an underperforming team member?
 - >> What is your greatest strength?
 - >> What is your greatest weakness? (example with proof that you are improving)
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 - > **Show vision, self-awareness and leadership!**
 - > Famous last words (or tips):
 - >> OK to ask about funding for research/travel support but not about salary or other candidates (e.g. how many being interviewed)
 - >> Questions about family-related issues (e.g. childcare or parental leave) can have effect on panel; only ask once job is offered to you.
 - > **If the interview ends with a bad vibe, it is probably worth considering if you would take the job if offered. Withdraw from pending jobs that you would not take.**

- **Receiving an Offer:**
 - > Playing your cards right on the home stretch:
 - >> Reply immediately to thank them but give it careful consideration.
 - >> Ask when they need you to respond by, request extension if too soon.
 - >> Tell them if you have competing offers; talk about any aspect that bothers you.
 - >> Arrange another phone call or (ideally) visit; you will look at things differently.
 - >> OK to introduce personal issues at this stage such as leave entitlements, jobs for partners, childcare or schools, part-time work...
 - >> Strongest position to negotiate almost anything (e.g. salary, start date, travel funds, office equipment, visas, parking, start-up package, initial teaching relief).
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 - > **Inflexible or reluctant responses can indicate that your interests are not a priority!**
 - > Negotiating, from both sides:
 - >> Some things might be impossible to offer. Is meeting halfway an option?
 - >> If it is not in writing, it is worth nothing. Promises might not eventuate.
 - >> Good reasons needed to defer start date. More than 12 months not likely.
 - > **OK to decline an offer but seek conversation first and explain your point of view.**

- **More Career Advice:**

- > Resources for Academics:

- >> Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) “*Career support for researchers: Understanding needs and developing a best practice approach*”

- <http://www.tossgascoigne.com.au/docs/CareerSupportForResearchers.pdf>

- >> AAS career profiles <https://aas.org/jobs/career-profiles>

- >> Blogs, e.g. (non-astro specific) <http://www.smartsiencecareer.com/> or (astro-specific) <http://womeninastronomy.blogspot.com.au/search/label/career>

- >> ECR workshops, e.g. <http://physics.uq.edu.au/ap/ecrmentoring/index.html>

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- > **Feedback welcome to outreach@caastro.org (general), csc@caastro.org (students) or cpdc@caastro.org (postdocs)**