



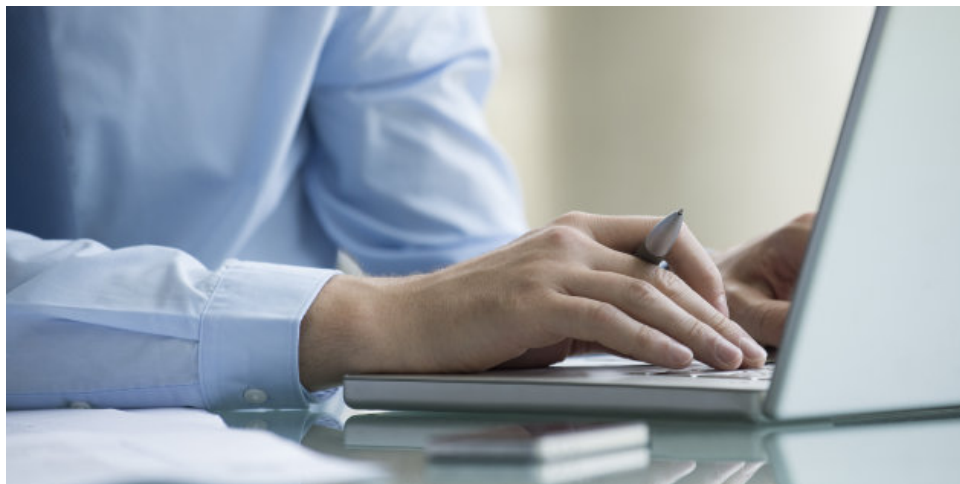
THE BLOG

'Dear Sir Or Madam' Is Not A Smart Way To Apply For Fellowships Or Jobs

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Thinking of applying for postdoctoral fellowships or training opportunities? Please read this.

Like all researchers at major research-intensive universities, I receive hundreds of emails from candidates looking for potential training opportunities. Very few catch my attention,

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Here is my updated list of top 10 things to keep in mind when applying for a postdoc or other training opportunities. They are relevant even for job applications.

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[Mass emails] convey the impression that you are lazy and cannot write highly targeted letters...

1. Do not send generic (copy/paste) emails to several professors at the same time.

Few people bother to read such mass emails (even if they make it past spam filters!). Such communications convey the impression that you are lazy and cannot write highly targeted letters to professors who work in your field. As you will see later, a strong fit with the professor's research program is quite critical, and a mass email is anything but targeted and focused.

2. I hate it and never bother reading emails that begin with "Dear Sir or Madam."

Seriously? Are you so busy that you cannot look me up on the internet and figure out my name and my gender? Your first email must be highly focused and clearly mention the professor by name.

3. Make it clear in your letter that you are aware of the research focus of the professor.

To this end, always investigate the background and research interests of the professor you are planning to contact (most professors will have their own lab websites or resumes posted on their university websites). If you are responding to an advertisement, then make sure you meet all the eligibility criteria. This issue of "fit" is absolutely critical and you want to make a strong impression, early in your email. Trust me, no professor wants to spend time, effort and funding on students that do not work on their area of research focus! This is because we generally fund fellows and students using our research grants, which are invariably focused and time limited.

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researcher.

4. In general, it makes little sense to contact professors who don't share your research interests or have a completely different training background. For example, if your research interest is in cancer, why would I agree to supervise and fund you? If you are interested in laboratory or basic bench science, do not write to researchers who do not do laboratory research. So, if your PhD was in mouse genetics, there is no point in contacting a sociology or public health researcher. If you do decide to write to a researcher whose research focus is very different from yours, then please explain right at the start of your email your reason for contacting them. Perhaps you want to learn a technique or skill that has broader application? Or perhaps you really care about cross-disciplinary research and have some great ideas worth exploring? Explaining this early in your letter is quite critical.

5. Publications (even if you are not the first author) in your area of research are very important. If you have no publications, then you have a low likelihood of being accepted into any postdoc fellowship program. Lack of publications suggests little or no prior research experience. Also, without publications, it is virtually impossible to get external postdoc fellowship awards from funding agencies. All researchers love it when their postdocs get external awards -- they can now hire a new postdoc using the funds they had saved for you! So, if you have publications, attaching them (or at least a few major publications) will have a very positive impact.

6. Always send your latest CV along with your cover letter. Your CV should be well written, with no typographic errors. It should list your educational degrees, your research work, your publications, awards, etc. Your CV should list the names and contact information of at least three referees who know you and your work. There is no need to attach photographs to your CV.

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I always take an applicant seriously if her current supervisor writes me an email or gives me a call.

7. It often helps if someone else makes the initial contact on your behalf. For example, if your mentor or supervisor writes a letter introducing you, this might get more attention, especially if the professor being contacted knows your mentor or his/her research work. I always take an applicant seriously if her current supervisor writes me an email or gives me a call.

8. It is also very helpful if you have funding or fellowships of your own that you can bring with you. If this is the case, clearly explain what the funding source is and how much of your training it might cover. All researchers are happy when you bring your



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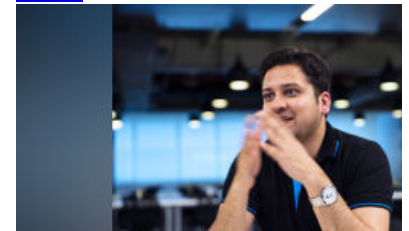
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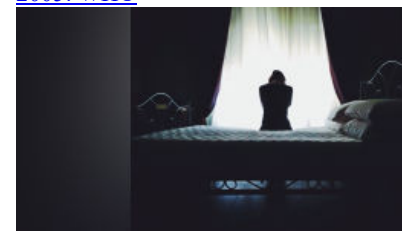
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10. Lastly, if you don't get a response, try again after a while. Sometimes, it helps a lot if you can actually meet the professor (even if it is a brief meeting at a conference) and make a case as to why you are a good candidate. Persistence works. After all, good research is all about perseverance and persistence.

Good luck and best wishes!



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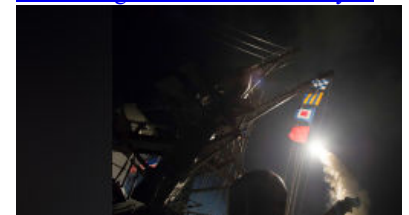
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