Help with Physics Jobs

- Searching and applying
- Handling an interview
- Looking to the long term

The APS Committee on Careers and Professional Development
(Gordon Thomas, NJIT)
1a. Searching

- **Allow time:**
  A search can take many months, and even involve rejections.

- **Check varied types of jobs where physicists can thrive:**
  92% of undergraduate physics majors end up in good, non-university jobs, often after an advanced degree.

- **Check career resources:** [http://www.aps.org/careers/guidance/upload/professional_development.pdf/](http://www.aps.org/careers/guidance/upload/professional_development.pdf/)
1b. Searching

**Study a book on searching:** ("Bolles" is good.)


**Make a web search of various types of openings where physicists fit:**

- [www.ieee.org](http://www.ieee.org);
- [www.monster.com](http://www.monster.com);
- [www.careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com);
- [www.hotjobs.com](http://www.hotjobs.com)

**Check physics academic (and other) openings:**

- [http://www.aps.org/careers/](http://www.aps.org/careers/) In 2006, this site listed 1249 applicants and 216 jobs (Note the odds.) The site’s listings peak in January, with new ones every month.
1c. Searching for hidden jobs

Search for work related to yours in various types of jobs. Check papers, talks and web sites. For industrial physics info, see http://units.aps.org/units/fiap/

Contact people you have met or whose work matches yours:

• Express your interest in his or her work. Exchange information only and expand your network. Try to leave a good impression. Don’t discuss jobs.
• Later, in a separate contact, you can ask if he or she knows of jobs with any employer in your field of work.
• See “Bolles.”

Ask your friends. Let them know that you’re searching and seek their help. Contact friends of friends. Make new friends at conferences and seminars. Network.

Always be very polite and as brief as possible.

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2. Applying

a. Target a small number of job opportunities.
   - Only target good matches to your interests and skills. Study the company or institution as well.
   - Target different types of jobs. See “Bolles.”

b. Write a special cover letter for each position.
   - Write to someone you know or who is in your field.
   - Express interest in one of his or her projects.
   - Describe how you match for position.
   - Make the letter short and well written.
   - Have a good writer polish it.
2. Applying

c. Write a special Resume for each:

- Near the top, summarize your interest in specific examples of the employer’s work.
- Nearby, list your skills that are relevant to this work.
- Nearby, say specifically how you could help.
- Near the end, annotate your papers and talks briefly to explain relevance to their work.
- Include the usual content of a CV, in 2 to 3 pages.


d. Be scrupulously honest, don’t hesitate to emphasize your talents, and be polite.

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3. Preparing for an Interview

a. Study the recent work of each person you’ll meet. Get their names from your host. Make sure you know what sort of candidate they’re looking for – ask your host.

b. Prepare a special version of your talk or your talking points for each employer. Bring pictures you can show and ideas you can mention at individual or small group interviews. Include in your talk or talking points:
   - The work of your hosts and your interest in it.
   - The skills and training that make you a good match to their work.
   - Your main accomplishment and its relevance to your interviewers.
3. Preparing for an Interview

c. Explain everything simply and without jargon so that an administrator who is from a different field can understand.

d. Keep your comments or your talk brief. For a talk, find out the time allotted and use only 75%, leaving the rest for discussion.

e. Practice your talk or your talking points with an audience that will make suggestions. Take the suggestions.

f. Bring extra copies of your slides and illustrations

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4. Interviewing

a. Repeat your theme:
   - you’re enthusiastic about what each interviewer is doing
   - you have skills to help him or her do it.

b. Accept suggestions; don’t argue. Assume your hosts are trying to be helpful.

c. Say you don’t know, when you don’t, but add what you do know that is relevant.

d. Keep in mind that they want a good colleague, both technically and in terms of personal relations.

e. Be scrupulously honest, and don’t hesitate to put your best foot forward.

f. Get contact information. Be sure you have the names of all those with whom you have spoken.

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5. Following up an interview

a. Write notes of thanks to each person with whom you interviewed.
   • Reiterate your interest in his or her work in particular
   • Reiterate your relevant skills.
   • Get help in polishing your writing.

b. Let the employer know your status promptly
   • if you have another offer
   • if you accept another offer.

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5. Following up an interview

c. Check on the hiring decision

- Find out the schedule for the decision from your host.
- Don’t bother him or her before the expected decision time.
- After that time, politely, ask the status of your application.
- Renew your statement of interest, if true, even if you learn that they’ve made another offer.
- Keep in mind that the selection process is inexact and sometimes the second or third ranked candidate ends up getting the job and is a success.

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6. Long term

Most physicists will change jobs, so plan ahead:

- Set long term goals.
- Polish your basic writing and speaking.
- Make friends in your field at conferences and seminars.
- Apply for internships
- Read career resources, such as at [http://www.aps.org/careers/guidance/upload/professional_development.pdf/](http://www.aps.org/careers/guidance/upload/professional_development.pdf/)

**Summary:** seek out and prepare for each employer individually.

**Send comments** to knowles@aps.org

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