



Postdoc Skills

What PIs and line managers need to know

- Postdocs need clarity on what their skills are whatever their desired career trajectory, be it in academia or beyond.
- A skills inventory is a living document containing all a postdocs educational qualifications and professional skills.
- A skills inventory should also capture professional attributes and abilities.
- A skills inventory is intended to be a document that will be invaluable for identifying areas for development, preparing a CV, job applications, creating a LinkedIn profile etc.
- We have created three practical approaches for postdocs to unpack all of their skills; what tasks make up the majority of their working time, unpacking a research output into the skills they used to achieve it and lastly, actively looking out for specific skills.

What PIs and line managers can do

We've broken this into three tiers, increasing in the level of engagement and input you'd give:

(1) Basic

- You can simply sign-post your postdoc/s to encourage them to complete a [skills audit](#) or create [a skills inventory](#).
- If possible, check in occasionally with your postdoc – ask them how they are getting on with it, did they have a go at creating a skills inventory?
- Offer to look at their skills inventory – from your knowledge of working with them are there skills you know that they have that they've missed?

(2) Intermediate

Below is a brief overview of each of the practical approaches should you (or your postdoc) wish to discuss their skills inventory findings:

- **Time** [[Downloadable pdf for postdoc to use](#)]

Brief description: Postdocs consider how they spend their working time to identify the main tasks they perform, then breaking these down to reveal the underlying sub-tasks and skills.

Suggested discussion questions for you as PI/line manager to discuss with your postdoc;

- What tasks and skills do you think you're good at?
- Which do you like using?
- Which would you like to continue using and develop?
- Which ones not so much?





- Are there any skills that keep coming up that you'd not realised you're actually an expert in using?
- Note: If your postdoc wishes to discuss it with you it may be beneficial to explore their perceptions of their skills (the ones they think they are good at) versus your more impartial view. You may also wish to ask which skills do they not feel as confident in, you may rate their aptitude in the skill named higher than they do. Alternatively, you could encourage your postdoc to consider ways in which they could address/grow their confidence in this skill.

- **Research output** [[Downloadable pdf for postdoc to use](#)]

Brief description: Postdoc to consider a specific research output and unpack the skills required to achieve this.

Suggested discussion questions for you as PI/line manager to discuss with your postdoc;

- Encourage your postdoc to think broadly about the skills needed, ask did you have to collaborate with others?
- Did you have to negotiate author position?
- Did you manage the research budget for this part of the project? How did you do this?
- Did you craft a compelling narrative with the data? How did you create a story from the data?
- What audience did you tailor this information for? If you delivered this to a range of different audiences how did you go about this?

- **Real-time skill spotting** [[Downloadable pdf for postdoc to use](#)]

Brief description: Postdoc to consider a specific list of skills (of their choosing) to monitor if they notice they use the skills listed over a period of time (suggested duration a week).

Suggested discussion questions for you as PI/line manager to discuss with your postdoc;

- Highlight skills you see them use if they've overlooked them.
- If your postdoc highlights a specific skill area they wish to develop in think if you could help by sign-posting, or give them tasks in that area which will help them grow and develop their skills.

(3) Advanced

- Building upon tiers (1) and (2) encourage your postdoc to schedule a career conversation (either with you or a mentor) around their findings.
- Encourage them to go further, building on the skills they've identified to set themselves goals, and identify the next steps in their career development.
- If they are showing skills and an interest in an area you know a contact in consider linking them up.