

Writing Applications to Laboratories (Summer Internships and Post-Graduate Opportunities)

Working in a laboratory is great way to work first-hand with seasoned researchers while also earning course credit or money! However, it can be competitive to apply for limited spots for these positions. Here are some things to bear in mind when applying to laboratories.

Laboratory Applications

STRONG APPLICATIONS...

- Included a cover letter and CV/resume
- Are concise and clear: try not to exceed 1-2 pages for a cover letter.
- Indicate that you have researched the lab and know about some of its recent publications and findings. It is fine to use a cover letter template you have developed, but always be sure to put in specific examples and information that shows you understand the lab position you are applying to. Try visiting the lab's website to see which projects they are currently working on.
- Are addressed to the laboratory manager, which also shows that you done research about the lab.
- Address all bullet points on the job description and highlight relevant experiences *and* skills! For example, even if you have never worked in a laboratory setting, point to experiences where you had to work independently, exercise safety, and projects where you acted as a leader and collaborator.
- Show why you are the best applicant for the position. What assets will you bring to this position? Lab managers are not only looking for competent researchers, but people who are collaborative, cooperative, and hard working.
- Are submitted as soon as possible! Many applications and interviews are considered on a rolling basis, so time is of the essence!

WEAK APPLICATIONS...

- Are generic. Do not use the same cover letter for every position—hundreds of students are applying for these positions, and you need to stand out.
- Did not follow explicit instructions on the lab website or job posting. The point of an application is not only to demonstrate your relevant skills and experiences, but to also see if you can follow directions.
- Indicate that you do not understand the position. For example, if the lab is researching on adolescent brain development, and you only indicate your interest in treating addiction, supervisors will be confused as to why you are applying to this laboratory.

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When/Where to Look for Lab Job Postings

- **Year-Round Opportunities**

Laboratories are searching for employees year-round. Jobs posted between January and March are usually looking for someone to start a position in the summer, and jobs posted between September and December are usually looking for someone with availability to begin work in the winter. Many jobs are contingent on grant-funding (which can become available at any time of the year) so be sure to start your job search early and to look regularly for new postings.

- **Email Digests and Chains**

Many professors are on various digests and email chains from other institutions and journals from their respective fields. These digests often have job postings (you may have seen some emails from Dr. Lewis or Dr. Bollard containing some of these forwarded opportunities)! Ask some of your faculty members if they can add you to these digests/threads, or if they can pass along any emails with job postings. For example, check out this webpage from the American Psychological Association:

<https://www.apa.org/apags/resources/listservs/>

- **Internet Job Boards/Website**

Sites like Indeed.com, Monster.com, and many others aggregate job postings. Be sure to search with relevant keywords: just putting in “laboratory” can yield hundreds of irrelevant results. Try phrases like “artificial intelligence study” or “animal cognition” instead.

- **University Websites**

Most universities have their own Careers/Human Resources page, so find some universities that produce research that aligns with your own interests, and then check out their website! For example, University of Michigan’s job board is

<https://careers.umich.edu/>.

Things to Consider Before Applying

- Is the start time flexible (no start date is indicated, and you request start after graduating/your prior commitments have ended) or inflexible (the posting has wording such as “With a start date no later than [date]”)?
- Do you meet all of the requirements? Be sure to read both the required and preferred requirements. If you don’t meet every single required skills, be sure to address how you acquire said skill and/or highlight similar relevant skills that would help you to learn.
- How does this position fit into your long-term career goals? Most employers will ask you about this at a job interview, so spend some time thinking about what this position will help you to accomplish (ex, publications, prep for graduate school, etc)