This manual is designed to help students and staff access the PostAc® product and use its features. This manual complements our live, online PostAc® training sessions.

Please ask your university for details about how to access the live training sessions. If you have any questions about this manual, purchasing the product or problems with access, please email postac@anu.edu.au.

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What is PostAc® and how does it work?

Perhaps you’ve done the hard yards, sailed the murky waters of a PhD or MPhil, and are now ready to step out into a non-academic career.

Or perhaps you’re early in your postgraduate journey, and want to know what your career options might be outside academia.

Either way, PostAc® is here to help.

Searching for a research job outside the university sector can be a bit like searching for a needle in a haystack.

There are a relatively small number of research oriented jobs in the first place - and 80% of employers who are looking for a researcher don’t use the term ‘PhD’ in their job ads. Many others don’t even use the word ‘researcher’!

Quite simply, the research job that’s right for you might lie hidden amongst many others.

In fact, there is a significant, but largely hidden, job market for research degree graduates.

PostAc® makes this hidden job market visible.

To do this we’ve used machine learning and natural language processing (ML-NLP) to build an algorithm that can search through millions of job advertisements to find jobs looking for skilled researchers, rank them on a ‘Nerdiness Index’ from one to ten, and show jobs relevant to you.

PostAc® is a bespoke job search engine that includes jobs you can apply for right now and an archive of jobs you can use for educational/training purposes.

How to Access PostAc®

You can see and search the research intensive jobs our PostAc® algorithm has found by logging in to postac.com.au with your university email address (the one with a @*.edu.au suffix).

You will be asked to enter a password, click Create User, and verify your email address. You will also be required to accept the Privacy Policy and End-User License Agreement (EULA). Click on the link in the email we’ll send you, and you’re ready to log in to start searching. Type anything in the search bar and select from the jobs available right now or past jobs in our archive.

Once you have verified your email, you can access all the product features and create a profile. Read on to find out more about how to get the most out of PostAc®.
As most universities have lots of email security measures, this verification email may take up to an hour to arrive. If it doesn’t arrive within an hour, check your spam and quarantine folders. If you think the email has failed to arrive, please email us at postac@anu.edu.au.

**Searching for a job on PostAc®**

We’ve made searching very simple: just type whatever you like into the search box and click Current Jobs to see jobs that have been advertised this week and Archived Jobs to see every related job posted in the last couple of years.

You could use terms related to your thesis topic (‘Environmental Advocacy’, ‘Narrative Structure in Game of Thrones Novels’), particular skills you’ve developed, or interests and values you might like to see in a job. **PostAc® will show you a list of jobs to explore, along with their Nerdiness Index score.** see Figure 1.

Click on the job title for more information about the position, including the job ad text. You’ll see a list of skills that have been extracted from the job ad text at the top.

Click More jobs like this and PostAc® will analyse the text of the selected job and show you a list of similar jobs for you to consider. You can adjust parameters like salary, location, and Nerdiness Index rating on the right hand menu.

If you are searching current jobs, clicking Apply will take you to the website the job ad is sourced from. PostAc® will show you jobs that were available in the last week only. From there you’re on your own - follow the application directions and good luck!

**Finding the perfect job for you**

If you are working in an area that has a professional equivalent like ‘chemist’, ‘nurse’, or ‘architect’, go ahead and use those words. PostAc® will show you positions where research skills and specialties are listed as essential or desirable.

Some academic disciplines might not have a non-academic equivalent, like ‘philosopher’, ‘historian’, or ‘anthropologist’. PostAc® can’t find jobs that don’t exist, but don’t despair!
Try searching by your research topic, or skills you gained by studying that field. For example, a search for ‘linguist’ will get few, if any, hits, but a search for ‘linguistic analysis’ may show thousands.

If you’re struggling to think of search terms, have a look at our handy table of ‘non academic’ search terms by discipline.

Our search engine is enabled by ML-NLP, so it can deal with really weird searches. Try words and phrases like ‘empathy’, ‘telling stories’, or ‘writing to persuade’. Add these terms to your research skills to see jobs in your area for which you might be uniquely qualified.

**PostAc® is a new kind of job search site, powered by ML-NLP.** Treat it like Google - longer, more specific search terms work better. Try making a list of key terms you can use together in combination. We recommend you generate the following:

- Words and phrases related your thesis topic (ie: ‘housing equity’),
- Words related to your discipline (ie: ‘social science’),
- Words related to your strengths as a researcher (ie: ‘writing’), and
- Words related to your interests (ie: ‘indigenous housing’).

Typing these words or combinations of them into PostAc® will get you closer to the job where you can employ your specific skills and interests.

Another search strategy is to write your ‘dream job’ and then use the text you generate to make your search terms:

- You will be a ... thinker who is comfortable with the following challenges... (list the kinds of problems you would love to solve).
- You will take a core role in ... (list the kind of day-to-day activities you think you would like doing).
- This role that will play to your key strengths in... (list your key strengths as a researcher, ie: strategic thinking, problem solving, deep analysis etc).
- This person will be successful in using data to... (list what kinds of insights you can generate from data: ‘solve analytical problems’, ‘tell complex data driven stories’ etc).
- This person can prepare presentations and reports on... (list the kind of outputs you would like to craft in this job).

The more specific your search string, the better the results. You can use Save This Search to save combinations of terms that give you the best results. Visit each week to see if there are any new jobs to explore.
Once you’ve used these questions to build fragments of an imaginary ad for a job you would love to do, extract the text you made to fill the blanks and enter it in the search engine at the top of the page.

Remember, the search engine in PostAc® is sophisticated. It uses more than keywords and will instead search for text similarity. Use the jobs you unearth with this method as a starting point for new searches. Remember the More Jobs Like This button on the right hand side will help you see other, similar opportunities.

Regardless of this sophistication, searching is also simple. Unlike when searching for papers or books from your library’s collection, you do not have to include Boolean operators or parentheses to help PostAc® understand you. Simply list your terms - like ‘indigenous housing equity social science writing’, as noted above. Instead of trying to make your initial search perfect, try and refine. When you have found something you really like, press More Jobs Like This and let PostAc® do the heavy lifting in searching for you.

**Using PostAc® to research your career options**

At PostAc®, we believe knowledge is power! Once you have found a job you would like to do, you can use the job text and list of skills to think about how to make yourself more attractive as a potential hire.

We know your skills and interests might be narrow - and we celebrate that. It may take a while to find the kind of job that is going to be fulfilling. That’s why we maintain an archive of old jobs. Our archive shows you what jobs tend to come up in your field.

PostAc® ranks each job out of 10 on our **Nerdiness Index**. Jobs closer to 10 have more research skills than jobs ranked around 7 or 8. As a rough guide, jobs ranked around 7 might require the skills seen in a Masters degree, towards 9 and 10 might be at a PostDoc level. To help you use the job ad in your professional development plans, we extract a list of key skills out of the job and display them at the top, see Figure 7.

We encourage people to use this archive while they are studying. Early knowledge of what you need to do to make yourself more employable is critical. While you are still writing your thesis you can access learning opportunities to help you fill the gaps.
Information in the jobs archive can also help you start networking with appropriate people and companies. Once you have compiled a list of jobs, make a note of the names of companies where these jobs are advertised. Look up the company on the web to see more about them and see if there are any positions available at the moment.

You can also use the company names and job titles to search LinkedIn and locate people who have those jobs and ask for an informational interview.

**Filling in your user profile**

We know employers are looking for researchers - and we also know they find it hard to locate good people. Why? Because they call us! The PostAc® team are well known as experts on post PhD employability. The recruiters and employers who contact us are looking for people with unique and special skill sets.

We are working on ways to directly link you with these potential employers.

Go to Edit Profile in the top right corner of your screen then select User Details on the menu bar to see the profile page. By filling in your profile, you agree to share some information with us we can share with employers. At first we plan to use this database to put a potential employer who contacts us in touch with you. We’re working on some automated tools to help employers find you themselves - so only put information in your profile you are willing to share, and none of the information (other than your email address) is compulsory.

You’ll notice you can access your Account Details from the same menu. This is where you can reset your password.

**What do you really want to do?**

The tricky thing about applying for jobs when you are a highly qualified person is that there are *lots* of jobs you could do… but that doesn’t mean you necessarily *want* to do them.

In this section, we’ll walk you through how you can use PostAc® to read between the lines on job ads, and work out if a given job will really suit your skills and, perhaps more importantly, your values.

The internet abounds in posts telling you to write a wishlist for your dream job (like [this Forbes article](#), for example). But the fact is, there are probably many things you would be very good at, a somewhat smaller list of things you wouldn’t mind doing nested within that, and only one or two things that you really, really want to do – that’s usually why people pursue a Masters or PhD: so they can get really, *really* specific.
Instead, we recommend starting your PostAc® journey with a ‘Won’t List.’

What do you really hate doing, so much so that it wouldn’t be worth the money if you had to do it? It might be that you really, really hate having to fake-smile at people. Or maybe you can’t stand spreadsheets. Or perhaps event planning gives you the serious heebie jeebies.

Try not to be too picky though – if your Won’t List includes ‘working with others’, for example, chances are you’re going to find it tough to find any jobs to apply for.

So if you don’t like working with others, be really specific about what it is you actually despise, versus what you just find vaguely annoying, so you don’t rule out all your possible job options. Is it about relying on others to make progress? Is it about having to write a lot of emails? Is it about sitting in a noisy office environment?

Write down the specific things you simply can’t tolerate and put this list somewhere where you can easily see it during your job search.

Now make a second list: what would you prefer not to do if possible? This is your ‘Ick List’.

You can think of the items on your Ick List as being similar to having to clean the toilet, or pay taxes. These are things you’d perhaps prefer not to do, but you can tolerate them because you understand they are necessary. It can help to make notes, for your own peace of mind, about how you might minimise these issues if it turns out they are necessary components of a job you think you would otherwise enjoy.

Keep your Won’t List and your Ick List with you while you search PostAc®.

**Which job should I apply for?**

It’s becoming more and more common for employers to post ads that look like they are searching for a ‘Unicorn’: someone who has all the incredible, amazing, wonderful traits and experience sets that anyone could ever hope to have. As you’re searching PostAc®, maybe you’re looking at these job ads and thinking, “But I’m not a unicorn, so these jobs wouldn’t be for me”.

Think again.

You’re on the way to getting an advanced degree, so chances are, you don’t actually believe that unicorns exist. In the same way, you also shouldn’t believe in the myth of the perfect candidate. Not even recruiters really believe in this myth.

There are two common reasons for posting a unicorn job ad:

1) They’re not quite sure what they want yet – great news for you, because they’re essentially waiting for you to come along and convince them that they are looking for YOU, or

2) They are fishing, hoping for the best, trying to get the best possible candidate.
So don’t count yourself out if you’re missing a criteria or two, as this is no guarantee that you’ll be knocked out of the race, especially considering you don’t know how many people will apply. It’s not necessarily like in academia, where 75 bajillion people apply for every research position!

On the other hand, do try to work out what the core thing they are after: if THAT is the criteria you’re missing, you’re probably wasting your time applying. But how do you see past the unicorn dust to work out what their core objective is?

**Rebuilding your career confidence after the PhD**

Our research shows that, despite being super educated and multi-talented, PhD graduates can feel less confident than other job seekers about their worth outside academia. We’re not sure why, but perhaps you are used to being questioned about the accuracy of your research and working alongside lots of brilliant people.

We want to encourage you to do some positive self-reflection through a Strengths Audit. Whether you’ve never put a moment’s thought into what you’re good at, or you’re so reflective about your skills that you’re practically a mirror, everyone can benefit from doing a Strengths Audit when they are undertaking a job hunt.

A Strengths Audit involves objectively assessing your innate talents, passions, and acquired skills – the three pillars that constitute your strengths – in order to work out what you really want to do with your time that will also have market value.

This last point is unfortunately important – unless you have a trust fund or similar, chances are you are going to need to make money out of your occupation!

This section of the manual is designed to help you work out what you want to do and what you’re good at so that you can find keywords to use in your PostAc® searches. As you go through the first 3 of these activities, answer as quickly as you can, trying to capture your instinctual answers rather than highly analysed thoughts at this point. The analysis will come in Step five.

**Step one: what are your gifts?**

What comes naturally to you? What were the things you were praised for by teachers or family members when you were a kid? These are your gifts, or innate talents. Start off by writing down a list of these, by asking yourself questions like:

- What comes easily to me?
- What are the things I do that others say ‘I wish I could do that as well as you do.’?
- What kinds of things have I won awards for? (your answer to this may be ‘um, participation…?’. If so, great, write that down – you join things, you get involved!)
• What are the things I do that make me feel competent, or that I don’t have to work hard at to produce adequate results?
Some of these things may sound like occupations in themselves – ‘creative writing’, for example, or ‘statistical analysis’.
Others may be personality traits, such as ‘being kind’ or ‘good sense of humour’, and that may not feel as helpful in finding a job. That’s okay at this point. All this information will become useful.

Step two: discover your passions
You’ve probably heard variations of the saying – ‘follow your passion and the money will come’.
Well, sometimes that may be true for some people, but even when it looks to be true, it’s only one piece in the puzzle – you’ve also got to know what you’re good at, and whether anyone will pay you to do that thing, too. On the other hand, it’s still important to know what it is you love doing in a professional context, if only so that you don’t end up in a job you hate!
Organisational psychologist Adam Grant points out in his podcast on the perils of following your career passion that most people don’t actually know what they love to do – they’ve never really thought about it, or perhaps never had the luxury of thinking about it. Alternatively, they hit on a ‘passion profession’ in childhood (Astronaut? Ballerina anyone?) then never reassess whether they really know enough about that job to even want to do that anymore – they just assume they’ve settled for less than doing what they love.
You don’t want to leave enjoyment to chance. So, to work out what your professional passions are, again make a written list (the writing will become important later) by asking yourself some important questions:
• What would you do with your time if money wasn’t an issue?
• What part of your current work do you enjoy the most?
• What are your hobbies (assuming you enjoy these!) and what aspects of these might be applicable in a workplace?
• What activities absorb all your attention, so that you don’t even notice time passing?

Step three: unearth your skills
You are highly educated and that this has brought you the opportunity to hone a lot of skills. But skills aren’t only the things you’ve learned during formal education.
In this section, write down a list of the things you have been trained to do well across all the areas of your life:
• What skills did your family pass on to you?
• What skills have you acquired through hobbies, or part-time jobs that you took for money or fun, rather than as a strategic career move?
• What areas did you focus on in your education? Are all your degrees in the same area? If not, is there a common thread between them?
- What are the skills currently listed in your resume and/or CV?
- What additional training or professional development have you received or pursued?

After you’ve done this, take a moment to look back over your three lists. Are you starting to see any patterns? At the very least, are you starting to feel like perhaps you’re a competent human that someone ought to employ?

**Step four: phone a friend (or 10)!**

The next step is the part people usually skip, but it’s actually incredibly important.

Having done your assessment of your gifts, passions, and skills, you might think you’ve got a clear picture of what your strengths are. But extensive research (like this article, for example) has shown that humans rarely see themselves the way others see them – and that they distort both their strengths and their weaknesses, so that the bias is almost impossible to self-correct.

To get around these biases, now is the time to call in the cavalry. A great way to do this is to use the Reflected Best Self assessment tool. This article takes you through the exercise in detail, but essentially, it involves you choosing 11 people from both your past and your present who know you well enough to be honest and reflective about your strengths.

Choose from family, friends, past and present colleagues, your supervisory panel, your PhD peers, and perhaps even your students if you have any that you feel it would be appropriate to ask. The more diverse your cohort of feedback-givers, the broader understanding you will get of how you are perceived by others.

Once you have your list of feedback-givers, email them, asking if they would be willing to help you in your job hunt by identifying a few of (what they believe to be) your key strengths and providing specific examples of times when they have seen you exhibit those strengths.

**Step five: synthesise!**

As the replies to the ‘phone a friend strategy’ we outlined above start coming in, put your analytical hat on and start synthesising.

Look for the patterns amongst what you wrote about your talents, passions, and skills, and what your feedback-givers have said about you. Seek out the specifics in the examples they have provided, and think about synonyms for the words you and they have used.

Then, start creating themed categories – perhaps there is a theme about being a strong leader. Perhaps there’s something there about being a good listener. Perhaps you are valued for your compassion, or your strategic thinking, or your accuracy with numbers. As you categorise, seek out ways to collapse your themes into broader categories, until you have a maximum of 2 or 3 categories of strengths.

Now gut-check that analysis – does this resonate? Have you accurately identified your top 2 or 3 strengths? It may be that you’ve just confirmed what you already felt to be true. It may be that you’ve...
learned totally new information about how you are perceived by others. Or it may be that you had a vague notion, but now understand the specificity to how others value your skills and abilities.

If it’s none of these, perhaps the categories haven’t quite been named correctly, somewhere along the way. Go back and keep tweaking until you feel that you’ve nailed it. You need to be able to believe these things about yourself, in order for this information to be useful to you in your job hunt.

Next steps

Once you’ve got 2 or 3 key strengths identified, you’ll be in a much stronger position to use PostAc® effectively. Try typing some of those strengths in as additional search terms to your skill sets. Surprising results can be found by using ‘empathy’ in addition to words like ‘biochemist’. Our search engine is more intelligent than most!

Remember, PostAc® is a training and assessment tool to prepare you to look for a job outside of academia – so the more you know about yourself, about what you want, and about how others perceive you, the better placed you’ll be to embark on that journey. In data we trust, and therefore, we brought PostAc® searches of both current jobs and archived jobs to you so you can learn from these ads relevant to your gifts, passions, and skills. Here’s a few other resources for you to explore:

- Dave Crenshaw’s LinkedIn Learning course “Discover Your Strengths” (paid)
- Gallup’s StrengthsFinder (paid)
- Reflected Best Self assessment tool (free)

Writing a great job application

It can be difficult to ‘read between the lines’ of job ads to see if a company will be the right fit for you, but there are a number of tips and tricks to finding your way to the important information quickly. Here are our top tips for reading a potential employer’s mind.

Check out the “About Us” section at the beginning of each ad. You don’t have to drink the KoolAid and believe everything this section says: it will be the company line rather than a realistic job preview. However, this text is still useful to see how the company wants to be viewed, as this will give you a clue about their values, and whether or not their values align with yours.

Consider two jobs we drew out of our database:

One is a company called ‘Lexis Nexis’ looking for ‘Brand Managers’. The company describes itself as a ‘Research digital product manager’ and has a tag line ‘advice in a tweet or a legal guide in a click, you are the next generation Rule of Law’. Further down in the About Us section we read ‘Today, with our cutting-edge, high-speed and easily accessible information solutions, you can be the difference that will uphold the law across borders as the world and technology evolves’. This About Us
section tells us that Lexis Nexis values individual pursuits, technology, digital disruption and being cutting edge.

By contrast, Fenton Communications describes itself as ‘… a leading Australian strategic communications agency with an integrated approach’ who have expertise over a wide range of areas like strategic planning, public relations and visual design. Further down they state: ‘We believe the best reputation are owned by organisations that do what they say they do’ and talk about ‘building valuable relationships’ with clients. Fenton Communication’s About Us section focuses on interdisciplinarity, teamwork and relationships with clients.

You’ll probably know by looking at these two examples which one YOU would prefer working for, based on your personality, interests, and values.

If you can’t decipher all the criteria, and there is a contact person listed, ring or write and ask – it will show you’re interested and that you ask intelligent questions. A hiring manager would usually much rather have people call and check, then write their application accordingly, than have them guess and guess wrong, wasting everyone’s time.

Don’t just rely on the job ad – if it lists the employer in the ad, use sites like Glassdoor or Rate my Employer on indeed to find information not available in the ad or on the employer website.

Go to LinkedIn and read the profiles of some of the other people holding the job title you are applying for (or at a similar level) and see what their experience and qualifications are.

Try to line up an informational interview, here’s some tips for conducting one:

1. Ask good questions by researching the person before you talk.
2. Listen more than you talk (and take notes).
3. NEVER ask for a job: you are there just to find out information and add a contact to your network.
4. DO ask if they recommend anyone else you can talk to.
5. If they ask about your research, have a one or two sentence description handy in ‘non-academic’ language.

Two key resources on informational interviewing:

➡ Leaving Academia: A practical guide by Chris Caterine
➡ Navigating the pathway to industry by MR Nelson

Most companies have criteria in their job ads that have been mandated by HR and don’t have much to do with the job itself – consider criteria like ‘Committed to Workplace Health and Safety’ as a case in point. You can interpret these as they are probably intended – as something the hiring manager had no choice but to include and doesn’t necessarily care about. BUT you can still choose to use these as an opportunity to highlight something about yourself that could make you stand out.

Have you done First Aid? A CPR course? An online course in ergonomic office arrangement? These are a good start, but why did you do them,
and what did you learn? And most importantly of all, what does it say about you, and why will that make them want to hire you? It may seem over the top, but hey, you’ve got to write something in there, may as well make it good!

Further reading

- ‘How to interpret a job posting’, Higher Ed Jobs
- ‘How to decode a job advertisement’, The Balance Careers
- ‘Learn to read between the lines of a job ad’, Science magazine
- ‘How to evaluate a job ad’, Recruiter