

TALKING TO YOUR RESEARCH SUPERVISOR ABOUT CAREER PLANNING

In an ideal world:

- You've had an open, supportive relationship with your supervisor from Day One
- Your supervisor asked about your career plans from Day One and has helped you plan your time in graduate school accordingly
- You feel comfortable sharing your career plans, concerns, and insecurities with your supervisor without fear of retaliation

More realistically:

- Neither you nor your supervisor have initiated a discussion about your career plans
- Your advisor has made assumptions about what career you will pursue
- You have made assumptions about what your advisor wants you to do
- You want to talk to your supervisor about career planning because you need advice or contacts but you have reservations about doing so

Communicating About Career Plans

Tips prior to the conversation:

- Earn your supervisor's respect by spending time in the department/lab, working hard, acting/dressing professionally, being prepared for meetings, asking thoughtful questions, etc.
- Talk to other students/post-docs/alumni about how your supervisor might respond to this type of conversation
- Consider talking to your graduate program staff advisor, mentor from your undergraduate work, career counselor, or other individual who might respond to this type of conversation
- Try not to make too many assumptions about your supervisor's potential reaction
- Develop a clear understanding of your strengths and interests, and practice articulating them clearly
- Spend time exploring career paths and have a few in mind that align with your strengths and interests

Tips for having the conversation:

- Schedule an hour-long appointment and be honest about the point of the meeting
- Come prepared with a clear agenda (in your head or on paper)
- As appropriate, state:
 - o Appreciation for your supervisor's time/support
 - o A continued interest in the field
 - o A desire to get the most of your time in the program
 - o Your commitment to finishing your degree
- Confidently frame the conversation around your desire to find a way to utilize your strengths and apply your training in the workforce
- Share the concerns you have about your initial intended career path – try to be calm and objective, and to show you've collected solid information on the topic.
- Be open to your supervisor's feedback because they might offer a perspective that makes your initial intended career path more appealing than you thought
- Share what careers you think would be a good fit for you – and present solid reasons, data
- Ask specific questions that show you value your supervisor's feedback on your plans and want to strategically use your time in school to help you reach your goals

Things to Avoid

- Don't say I don't want to do "XYZ" without an explanation that is based on your own priorities and factual information
- Don't use just one piece of evidence (especially a single anecdote) to prove your point
- Don't be negative; Don't expect your supervisor to do career counseling
- Don't have vague, undefined expectations of your supervisor