



Course 1: The Strategic Postdoc

Module 1: Positioning Yourself for the Postdoc

Session 1: Acknowledge Your Needs, Preferences, and Values

Activity 1.1: Building Your Compass: Evaluating Your Needs, Preferences, and Values

Understanding your needs, preferences, and values (NPVs) will help guide you, like a compass, at your most critical decision points and will help you find a career that is both professionally and personally fulfilling. For this exercise, you will be reflecting on your NPVs in order to build your compass.

1. Grab a blank piece of paper or create a new document on your computer or device. Taking your career goals into account, **list ALL of the things that you feel are essential (needs) and all those that would be nice to have (preferences) in a potential postdoc. Also add the values (i.e., fundamental beliefs that motivate actions or attitudes) that are important to you** (see some [examples](#)). This list can be as extensive as you want. Don't categorize items into needs, preferences, and values at this point, just write whatever comes to mind. Be as broad as possible.
2. **Take the items you listed in #1 and categorize them into needs, preferences, and values.** Try to categorize as many of the items as possible (some may be hard to put in categories and that's OK). You can categorize things by putting a N, P, or V next to them, reorganizing them in a separate list, or whatever works for you.
3. Take the categorized items from #2 and prioritize or rank them in order of importance to you. Try to be selective and if you have too many items, ranking only your top 10. Choose three (3) things that are **not negotiable** for you. These are items that if you don't have them, you will be unable to do your best work, and/or get the training you need to achieve your career goals. **These are your needs.** As you reflect on these, you may realize that what you thought are needs are really preferences or vice versa. That's OK! Needs and preferences can be hard to distinguish sometimes and these are also very personal.
4. Choose three (3) things that are **nice to have.** These are items that you might be willing to compromise on or negotiate. **These are your preferences.** If you were to find a postdoctoral position that doesn't have these 3 items, **write down alternative items or strategies to get them.** For example, if you identified teaching experience as a preference, but the place where you choose for your postdoc doesn't provide this type of experience, you could search for other institutions or community colleges nearby that could provide teaching opportunities.
5. **Choose three (3) values.** Think about the principles and beliefs that are most important to you.
6. Create a Venn diagram (three circles that overlap between each other), labeling one circle Needs, one Preferences, and another one Values. Write down your top 3 for each inside the corresponding circle (like in the video for [Session 1](#)). **This is your compass.**



7. Reflect on the compass that you built for #6. Are you surprised by the items that you chose as non-negotiables? What about the ones that you are willing to compromise on or negotiate? How hard was it to make these decisions?

Please note that your compass might change over time or that you might want to iterate on this version. You might also need to add things to your list of core needs, preferences, and values. The purpose of this exercise is to get you to think critically about your NPVs to help you inform your search for a postdoc.