# So, you want to do a predoc?

A predoc, or a predoctoral research fellowship in economics, is a job where you will work closely with economists on their research. If you want to do a PhD in economics, this tends to be a good stepping stone between Swarthmore and PhD and is nearly de facto mandatory to get admitted into a top 5 econ PhD program.

There are good resources explaining more about these positions that I will link below. These resources also provide advice on how to best prepare for these positions. This guide focuses on pragmatic considerations for the predoc application process for seniors.

The main five takeaways are as follows:

1. What do you need to apply to these positions?
2. Start early!
3. Set aside specific time for applications.
4. Pace yourself — apply in ~waves~
5. Do this with friends and don’t be afraid to reach out!

## Lessons Learned

1. What do you need to apply to these positions?
   1. One page cover letter
      1. Highlight interests, relevant coursework, research experience, and coding experience.
      2. A few templates should suffice, for example:
         1. A template for academic predocs
         2. A template for Federal Reserve/government RA jobs
         3. A template for think tanks
      3. For positions you *really* want, it’s worth spending more time on those cover letters.
   2. Resume
   3. Transcript
   4. Writing sample
      1. Economics research paper, ideally from metrics or a seminar (better yet, the metrics seminar!!)
      2. Some places have no length limit; others have a ~ 5-6 page. Check carefully for each list
      3. Some places do not explicitly ask for writing samples — I tend to submit them anyways, esp. after I got feedback from the NY Fed after my internship application about how most successful applicants submit writing samples.
   5. Coding sample(s)
      1. The main sample should ideally be code that can replicate the output/results in your writing sample.
      2. If you have time, have them in every language you can code in with high competency.
      3. Comment! Comment! Comment! What they look for is understandable, well-formatted, and clean code.
   6. List of references, generally three
      1. Name, title, relationship to you, phone, email, address
      2. Some places (rarely) ask for two letters of recommendation
   7. Create a folder with these files to share with others, particularly your letter writers and recommenders
   8. Have all these files in PDF form
2. Start early!
   1. Many places will be evaluated “rolling until DEADLINE.” In practice, this means submit ASAP (or as soon as you are comfortable - ASAYAC) because it is rolling.
   2. This is an exhausting process, so it will be easier if you begin earlier.
   3. Ideally, you would begin in late August-early September to prepare your materials
   4. The fall application cycle is early and may be moving earlier.
      1. In Fall 2023: very few were due before October, but most are due mid-October to November
      2. Places will interview and/or even extend offers before the official deadline
   5. If you start early, you can apply more broadly
      1. The marginal cost of one more application after you’ve prepared your materials is minimal. Plug and chug in the template!
      2. Have a broad range of topics you are open to applying to. My personal philosophy was “If it’s not a hell no, it’s a yes!” but I’m relatively agnostic to most topics.
3. Set aside specific time for applications
   1. This is a time-consuming, draining process. It’s good to allocate a regular time to prepare and submit things just as you do for homework.
   2. When you begin to have data tasks, it’ll be helpful to have a pre-allocated time in the week to do them.
4. Pace yourself — apply in ~waves~.
   1. Most of these applications have data tasks which are not particularly difficult but take lots of time and energy. If you send too many at once, you’ll get too many data tasks.
   2. This may help you prioritize, as some places extend offers much faster than others.
      1. Competing offers can be used as leverage to get some places to evaluate you faster
   3. If you can, apply to positions you want *less* earlier, so you can get data task and interview practice for the positions you want more.
5. Do this with friends and don’t be afraid to reach out!
   1. Misery loves company… Seriously, this process is exhausting and can be demoralizing. Having friends to process with is really helpful and important.
   2. Meet for a working lunch/dinner, talk things through, vent, ask for feedback on materials, etc.
   3. Work closely with your professors and references — they’re so excited you want to do research!
      1. Send them your application materials, ask for feedback, etc.
      2. Keep them updated
      3. Clearly indicate deadlines and follow up if you need letters

## Helpful Resources

General resources that provide helpful and detailed information on predocs

* [RA Guide](https://raguide.github.io/)
* [Predoc.org](https://predoc.org/)

## Places that regularly hire and other listings

Consolidated centers (i.e., multiple economists hire from one posting)

* Princeton Industrial Relations Section
* Princeton Program in Public Economics
* Princeton International Economics Section
* Julis-Rabinowitz Center for Public Policy and Finance at Princeton
* Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR)
* Stanford Graduate School of Business (GSB) Research Fellowship
* Stanford Law School Empirical Research Fellowship
* Blueprint Labs
* Yale Tobin Center
* Federal Reserve System (Board and regional banks)

Individual listings (each professor/team has their own application)

* Becker Friedman at UChicago
* MIT Sloan
* Harvard Business School
* Columbia Business School

Listing Repositories (most listings above are covered in these links)

* [Predoc.org opportunities list (can request a weekly email newsletter)](https://predoc.org/opportunities)
* [RA positions at NBER](https://www.nber.org/career-resources/research-assistant-positions-nber)
* [RA positions not at NBER](https://www.nber.org/career-resources/research-assistant-positions-not-nber)
* [@econ\_ra twitter](https://twitter.com/econ_ra)

## Once you have an offer, now what?

Congrats! I would speak to as many alums of this predoc program as you can and try to discern your fit with this position and this economist you’re working for. As a predoc, you’re unfortunately very vulnerable, and there *are* places that have negative reputations for good reason. Think about what is important to you, but also remember there are common negative aspects to all predocs (lower pay 🙁, volatile work hours, research can be a slog).

## Final Thoughts

As far as I know, every Swattie who has wanted a predoc has gotten one. Even though these positions are extremely competitive, most, if not all, people from this school will be okay. I repeat: everything will be ok. It’s a difficult and time-consuming process, but it is extremely unlikely you will not get a position. Swat professors and alums (myself included!) are all thrilled you want to pursue research and are rooting for you. Many alums (myself included) will be open to speaking and helping you along the way. Best of luck!

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