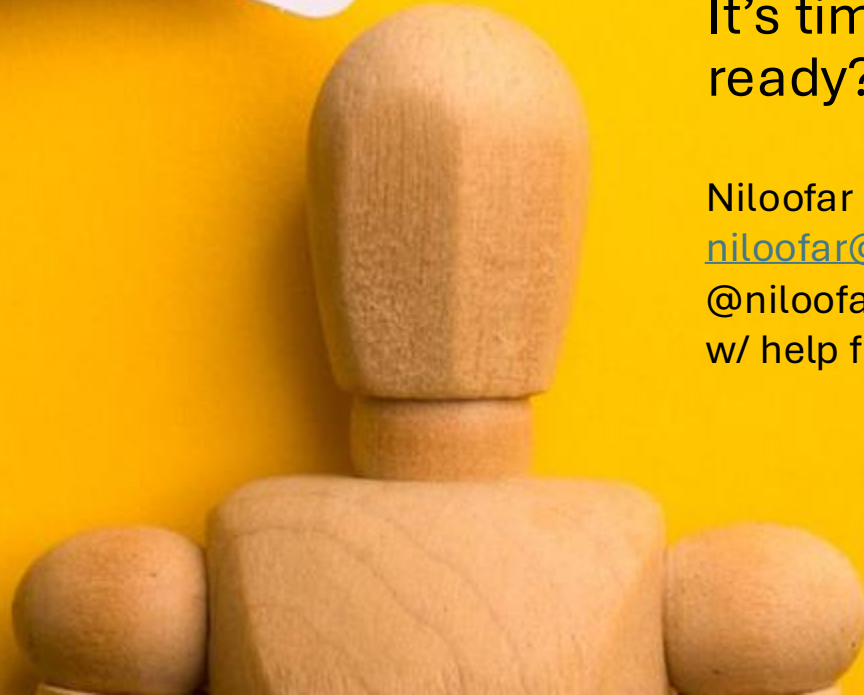




Should I do a Postdoc?

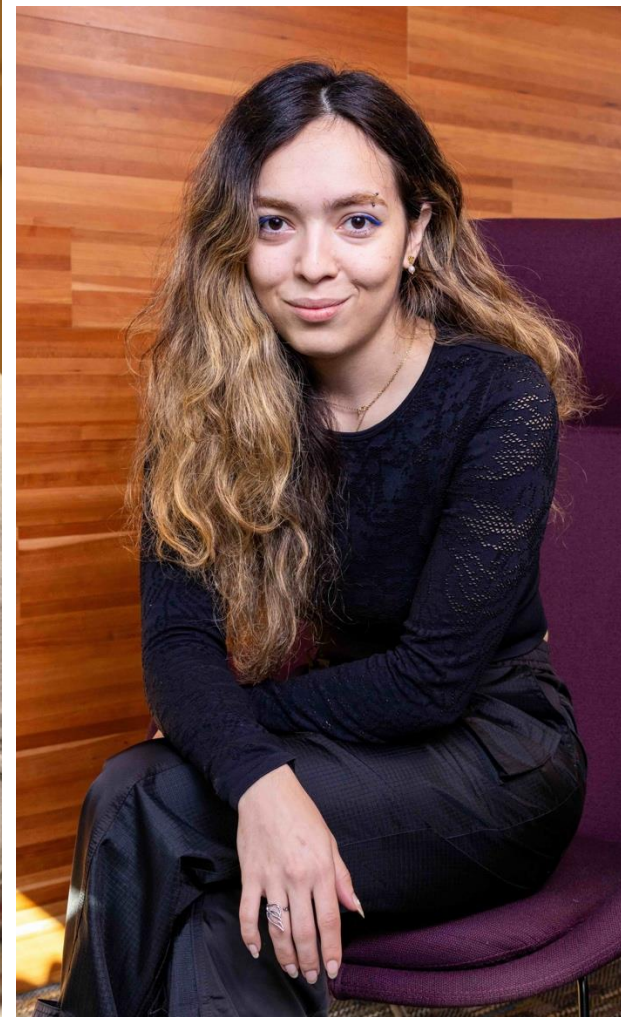
It's time to move on... but are you ready?

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w/ help from [Sasha Rush](#)



About Me

- Postdoc at UW NLP (since 2023)
 - w/ Yejin Choi and Yulia Tsvetkov
- PhD from UC San Diego (2018-2023)
- Started in computer architecture, privacy
- Switched to NLP in year 3 of PhD
- I am extremely glad I did my postdoc!



Disclaimers and Preface

- You won't learn:
 - How to **apply** to postdocs
 - How to **prepare** for and do well in interviews
- Target audience: anyone who is **confused**, specifically in CS and AI/ML/NLP
- Take everything with a grain of salt, I may be biased!
 - I have always wanted to do **academia**
 - I have **not held a 9-5 industry job** (I have done internships, no FTE)
 - However, I am **not** one of those people who thinks academia is the **true righteous path** for everyone...

What Is a Postdoc?

- A postdoc is like having a situationship... as a job!
 - Temporary, low commitment (1-3 years)
 - No fixed agenda
 - Flexible structure
 - You define your path



Standard Types of Postdocs



Academic postdocs

Academic institution, apply by reaching out directly to faculty.

Exceptions/Variants:

* Faculty Fellows at NYU, TTIC, Simons institute ...



Industry postdocs

Industry research lab, apply through company portal, rather limited and more scoped.

As far as I know Amazon, Meta and Microsoft Research have such opportunities.

Exceptions/Variants:

* Allen institute for AI (AI2) has a young investigator program (YI) which I would classify as closer to academic.

* Schmidt Sciences has recently started a postdoc/Fellow position.

Standard Types of Postdocs



Academic postdocs

Academic institution, apply by reaching out directly to faculty.

1. More **freedom**
2. **Lower pay** (\$50-85k)
3. Broader **exposure** (other departments ...)
4. **Teaching, advising, grant** writing opportunity



Industry postdocs

Industry research lab, apply through company portal, rather limited and more scoped.

As far as I know Amazon, Meta and Microsoft Research have such opportunities.

1. More **structured**
2. **Higher pay** (\$120-165k)
3. **Product** impact
4. Access to **interns/resources**

What I Gained in My Academic Postdoc

- Freedom in **place, time, topics** and **collaborations**
 - Collaborated with ppl, across institutions/universities
 - Advised 15 students, 8 outside UWNLP!
 - Traveled (for work/life) A TONE!
 - Access to folks at AI2, and security and policy lab at UW
- Teaching: invited **lectures** and **co-instruction**
- **Grant** writing: Helped PIs
- **Communication** skills and story telling

Should I Do a Postdoc?

Questions to ask yourself before deciding:

1. **Personal/life constraints:** Are you trying to start and financially support a family soon?
 - Yes: don't do a postdoc, or do one in industry unless you are a die-hard fan of academia!



Should I Do a Postdoc?

Questions to ask yourself before deciding:

2. **Academia/industry:** which are you leaning towards more?

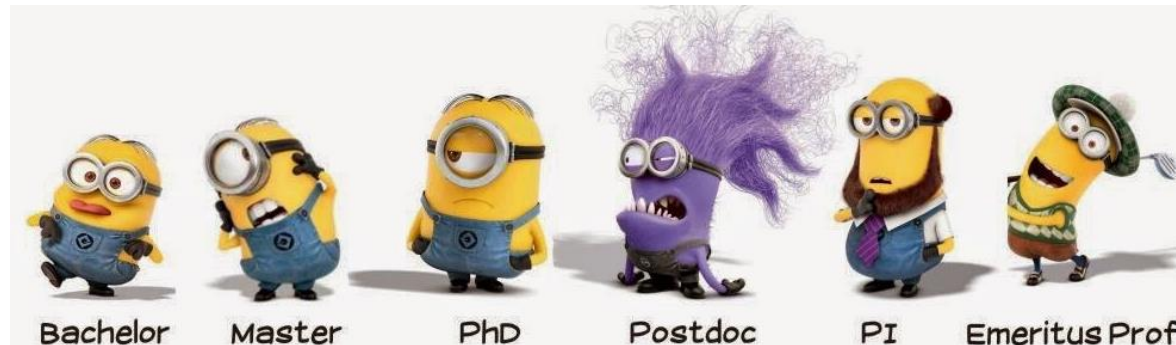
- **Industry:** Apply to industry full time positions!
- **Absolute 50-50 Split:** Do an academic postdoc!
- **Academia:** Do an academic postdoc!
 - **Smaller lab:** if you want more 1:1 time with the prof to tackle problems together and learn technical details
 - **Bigger lab:** If you have your agenda figured out but want more time to build a stronger profile and need more senior letter writers

Should I Do a Postdoc?

Questions to ask yourself before deciding:

3. **Timeline:** Do I **stay in my PhD** for a year longer, or do I **go do a postdoc** elsewhere?

- If you have an agenda, think your PhD has **run its course** and you want **diversity** and to **learn new things**, do an academic postdoc!
- If you know your PhD has **unfinished business** and think staying and **closing the loop** is more beneficial for your future job talk, then stay!



More on My Personal Experience!

I wasn't even thinking of a postdoc initially ...

- How I decided to do a postdoc
- How I chose where to do it
- Which postdoc did I end up doing?
 - Academic
 - Mix of small and big-lab (co-advised!)
 - Mostly advising students, did some research myself too though!
 - I had a clear idea of my research agenda and what I wanted to do



All the amazing friends I made in WA!

Parting Notes

- You can always mix and match!
 - Your experience is a function of you, the PI/advisor, and your surrounding lab and institution, nothing is rigid!
- Keep an open heart and mind!
 - You can surprise yourself with what you learn!
- Feel free to reach out to me!
 - nilloofar@cs.washington.edu
 - @nilloofar_mire on X

