

## Getting a Job or Assistantship: How to Surpass the Competition

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### ABSTRACT

Opportunities in fisheries are scarce and competition for them is fierce, because often demand greatly exceeds supply. We offer our advice to prospective job or assistantship seekers based on our recent experiences, both in getting positions and trying to find the best applicants to fill openings. Our focus is on state agency management jobs and Cooperative Research Unit assistantships. Tactics vary, but success requires acquiring the credentials necessary for the position you desire, investing time and energy in an organized strategy to find the positions, and properly executing the necessary steps to receive an offer. The right coursework, job and volunteer experience, and technical skills are important, but knowing how to find openings, prepare your résumé and application, and prepare for and execute exams and interviews are critical. To compete successfully, applicants must develop the personality, maturity, and track record of achievement that will make them someone that potential employers or professors will feel they can work with comfortably and productively.

Entrance into the fisheries profession can be difficult. Few professions offer as much in the way of job satisfaction, intellectual stimulation, and appealing surroundings, but these benefits attract more aspiring biologists than our profession can accommodate. The competition is therefore fierce, but *not* insurmountable. We offer the following practical advice to help those entering the fisheries profession to survive and prosper, emphasizing specific tips and tactics. It is based on our recent experiences, both in getting positions and in recruiting the best applicants for openings we have sought to fill. We originally assembled this material for a presentation at the American Fisheries Society (AFS) Annual Meeting in Monterey, California, in 1997 as part of a symposium entitled "Enhancing Graduate Education: Looking Toward Our Future" organized by the Student Subsection of the AFS Education Section. A transcript of this presentation has been widely circulated via

the Internet and we regularly receive requests for copies, as well as appeals that we publish it in *Fisheries*. This article was developed in response to those requests.

Because of our backgrounds, our focus here is on state agency biologist jobs in the United States and Cooperative Research Unit assistantships, but our advice readily extends to nontraditional fisheries positions as well. We recommend that you consult other sources as well, especially Hill and Neumann (1996), Fischer and King (1998), Grossman (1998), Gittinger and Parkos (1999), Reese (1999), your advisor or supervisor, and your successful colleagues. You should get a variety of information and advice from a number of sources to get a broad perspective and find strategies and tactics compatible with your career plans, temperament, and personality.

### Getting into graduate school

A graduate degree is now required for consideration for most entry-level positions with fishery

management agencies. Whereas position descriptions for many of these jobs do not explicitly require graduate degrees, most of the applicants for such positions will have such degrees, rendering applicants without graduate degrees uncompetitive. Therefore, your first goal is to get accepted to graduate school. However, getting into graduate school is quite different from getting accepted as an undergraduate; merely sending in your application will not suffice. You should think of getting into graduate school as getting your first real job, and as in getting a job, you should be ready to search and compete for a graduate opening.

### Finding a graduate assistantship

Agencies hire people with graduate degrees because they have accrued valuable experience and professional development while getting these degrees. Students who have worked on actual fisheries management problems for their thesis research are therefore especially competitive, because their experience prepares them explicitly for the kind of work they will be expected to perform on the job. Therefore, it is advantageous to find a thesis project that addresses an authentic fisheries management issue.

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Such projects are rarely possible without appreciable equipment, vehicles, laboratory space, boats, technical assistance, and agency support and cooperation. University faculty garner funds to support research, and to support the graduate students who perform it, by preparing and submitting grant proposals to funding agencies. When professors successfully secure grant money, they then try to find the best students available to work with them on this research. Sometimes they already have someone in mind (we will cover such instances later), but typically they do not. To find out who is available, they send out “assistantship announcements” and hope that a highly qualified potential student will see their announcement and apply for the vacancy.

Paper copies of the announcements are circulated among professors and sent by postal mail to other schools, where typically they are posted on a special bulletin board or kept in an assistantship file. Ask your advisor where they are kept at your school. Assistantship announcements are also listed in the “AFS Jobs Bulletin” section of this magazine. Paper copies are often posted on temporary “jobs boards” at professional and scientific meetings. However, the most important and efficient medium available today for dissemination and retrieval of assistantship (and job) announcements is the Internet, via list servers (e.g., AFS-L) and web pages that compile these announcements. Start at <http://www.fisheries.org/jobs.html>.

Applying to a program or faculty member that is not actively looking for a student is usually inefficient, unless your credentials are so impressive that they cannot afford to disregard you and will find a fellowship for you. Just calling or writing professors might get you on a mailing list for openings in the future, but it might not. Of course, you might submit your application just when a professor is looking for someone with your qualifications, but such coincidence is unlikely.

We believe it is much more effec-

tive to find assistantship openings by looking for assistantship announcements than by calling or writing universities or faculty members and asking them if they have openings. If they have an opening, they will have posted an announcement which you should be able to find. If they do not have an opening, you are likely wasting your time, and theirs, by calling. Never send a check for an application fee to a school before you have a firm commitment from your future major professor for an existing assistantship.

### *Evaluating a potential assistantship*

You should be selective when choosing a university, advisor, or project, but be selective for the right reasons (Grossman 1998). Try to get on a pertinent project at a quality school with a productive and respected major professor whose former students have the types of jobs you desire. Make sure that the project is

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fully funded, including an assistantship that you can subsist on. Do *not* be overly selective about where that school is and what species of fish the project involves—you should be willing to go anywhere. You will find that any locale is tolerable for a few years, if you are working with good people, have the resources you need to do good research, and are doing the kind of work that will help your career in the long run. Willingness to go anywhere is indicative of maturity and shows your dedication to the profession. Furthermore, you likely will have little choice about where your first paying position will be because of the extremely tight job market in this profession. Being flexible in where you live will be a necessity until you start accumulating experience and can start looking

for better jobs in better places. Until then, be flexible.

It is best not to let it be known that your interest in a school has something to do with its location. That can be taken to indicate that your interests may not be in research, academics, and dedication to the profession. To be competitive upon graduation, you will not have much time for recreation anyway. Graduate school is a full-time commitment. You may well be better off going to school in an insipid setting where you can get an excellent education, and few distractions will beckon you.

*On the other hand*, some faculty specifically seek students with regional ties or species-specific affinities, because they believe that such attachments will inspire and focus them. They believe that their passion for a species or topic will enhance the quality of their research and the effort they put into it. These faculty have seen students take an assistantship simply because that was all that was available, but then fail because they were not interested in the topic. Those same students excelled when given a project they had a predilection to. You should discern which type of student you are and find a compatible advisor.

### *Contacting the faculty member*

After finding an outstanding assistantship vacancy that is compatible with your interests and experience, the next step is to contact your prospective major professor and inform him or her of your availability and suitability for the project. It is critical that you make a memorable and favorable first impression. Therefore, we strongly recommend against initially contacting the professor by telephone. Instead, make your initial contact by e-mail or postal mail, emphasizing your qualifications. Your packet should include a concise, organized, and detailed letter expressing your interests, career goals, and why you are perfectly suited to the advertised assistantship. Accentuate the ways in which your skills, expertise, and experience match those needed for the described

research. Give the professor an idea of how motivated and dependable you are by emphasizing your ability to

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meet or surpass performance expectations in a previous or current assignment, completed on-time and within the limits of the available resources. Describe your involvement, progress, productivity, and enthusiasm for the work. Remember, the faculty member wants to know if the two of you are going to work productively together with a minimum of problems and inconveniences.

Research potential major professors before writing to them. Look them up on the Internet, read their recent publications, call their former students, and ask your advisor about them. Incorporate this knowledge into your cover letter and subsequent conversations. Make certain that the letter is organized, grammatically correct, and devoid of typographic errors or misspellings. A poorly written letter is indicative of poor communication skills and will get you deleted from consideration.

In addition to the letter, include a complete résumé. The résumé can be as long as necessary to describe your background fully; it need not adhere to the two-page maximum often recommended in the business world. Include sections on your education, professional and volunteer experience, professional society affiliations and service, shortcourses, certification, honors and awards, publications, and presentations. Also append photocopies of your Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores and university transcripts (which should include a current grade point average), plus the names, titles, and contact information for three professional references (professors, supervisors, or colleagues) who can describe your academic and professional abilities as well as your

character. At this stage, you do not yet need written letters of recommendation. Delay asking for these until the formal application when you know exactly what they need to address; some schools ask specific questions or use a form. Enclose an example of your technical writing ability (senior or M.S. thesis, term paper, or reprint) in your packet to illuminate your communications skills. Overnight or priority mail this preapplication packet to the faculty member.

### *Telephoning the faculty member*

If you have the necessary qualifications and have presented them favorably, the faculty member soon will be calling you. If not, give them at least a week to read your material before calling them; do not rush them. When you do call, first try to set up an appointment for a subsequent call; the professor may be busy at the moment you call and may prefer to talk to you later. Call back promptly at the appointed time. Start your conversation by reiterating your background, skills, expertise, and experience, and how these match those needed to do the research described in the assistantship announcement. Do not presume that the professor has studied your pre-application in great detail and knows who you are. Answer any questions forthrightly and honestly. Organize your thoughts and speak clearly. Think of it as a phone interview (see interviewing tips below).

Do not start by asking the professor to describe the project. You should already have a good idea of what it involves. Remember, *you* are applying for the assistantship, and the professor will have numerous candidates to choose from. If you come across as uninformed you will not be viewed as favorably as an applicant who already recognizes the relevance of the proposed research. However, you should have some *specific* questions about the study and university ready in case the professor asks if you have any questions.

If your initial conversation goes well, enlist your references, particularly your advisor, to contact the professor and speak on your behalf, especially if they already have a pre-existing relationship.

Faculty are much more comfortable accepting a student who has been endorsed by someone they know and trust than accepting a student who looks great on paper, but about whom they do not have a personal guarantee. Exploit this by using your advisor's connections. If you have any other direct connections, such as a coworker, supervisor, or fellow student who knows the professor, be sure to use these as well. Personal connections can be crucial for getting into graduate school.

### *Visiting your prospective major professor*

Schedule a visit if it seems that the major professor is interested in you and you are still interested in the assistantship. A professor is much more likely to extend an offer to someone that they have met and who appears to be someone that they can get along with and work productively

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with, than a prospect whom they know only through correspondence. A visit is also an opportunity for you to assess the school, its resources, the project, and the faculty member. Be sure to talk to his or her current students. Of course, you have to make a good impression during your visit. That is, you need to come across as mature, intelligent, knowledgeable, dedicated, productive, and someone whom a major professor can work with comfortably. See the interviewing tips described below.

If you have done all this, and you are qualified, you have a good chance of getting an offer. Give it careful consideration, weigh your options, and make a decision within a week. Call the faculty member and let him or her know what you have decided. If you decide to pass, let the faculty member know promptly, so that they can offer the assistantship to someone else. Be courteous and considerate because the fisheries profession is small and you likely will deal with this individual

again in the future. If you decide to accept, submit the official application, schedule a starting date, make plans to relocate, and get ready to begin one of the most exciting, challenging, and satisfying periods of your life.

### *Preemptive measures*

You may be able to circumvent much of the scenario we have described above, especially in the case of Ph.D. assistantships, by positioning yourself so that professors start thinking about you as a potential graduate student in their programs even before they have an opening. Then, when their grants are funded, they will contact you to see if you are interested before sending out assistantship announcements. First, get excellent grades and GRE scores, plenty of experience, and develop good working relationships with your supervisors, professors, and coworkers. Go to professional meetings and talk to faculty members. Give people a chance to get to know about you, your plans, and interests. Your advisor or supervisor will be glad to help with introductions. Do things that get you noticed such as actively participating in professional societies, serving on committees, volunteering for tough assignments, running for office, making presentations, writing a Students' Angle column for *Fisheries*, applying for a Skinner Award, and publishing technical and popular articles. These are all indications that you are serious about this profession and have the energy and motivation to be productive. When an assistantship becomes available, faculty will already know who you are and have a favorable impression of you.

### **Getting a job**

Our emphasis here is on entry-level, state agency, management-related positions of the type that students getting their M.S. in fisheries are typically interested in. See Grossman (1998) for guidance on getting academic positions. Our advice is based on the experiences of recent graduates who have successfully secured employment, as well as guidance provided by agency personnel managers. It is by necessity

general because of differences among agencies, but it provides a starting point for acquiring more specific information about particular agencies. The following advice often differs from that presented above for getting into graduate school. Effective tactics for getting an assistantship may not be appropriate for finding employment.

### *Acquiring needed qualifications*

Your first objective is to acquire the qualifications needed to be competitive to get an interview. Experience is paramount. Do whatever it takes to get as much of it as possible before, during, and after getting your M.S. degree. Volunteer experience is perfectly acceptable if no paying positions are available.

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Coursework requirements for most fisheries management positions are comparable to those required for AFS Professional Certification (Adelman et al. 1997). Certification can provide bonus application points or promotion credits with some agencies (Pegg et al. 1999). Good grades are helpful, but are much less important than experience. The more fisheries courses you have taken, the better, because you never know which one piece of information will help you answer a critical interview or civil-service exam question. Statistics courses are invaluable, because established agency personnel recognize the need for such expertise, but often do not have enough of it themselves and look for new employees to provide it.

The title of your degree can be important in some states. When scoring your application for a fisheries management position, the personnel office will not pore through your transcripts to see exactly which courses you took, but they will give you a higher score for a degree in "Fisheries" or "Fisheries and Wildlife" than for "Biology" or "Forestry." Make sure your transcripts specify your major; if not, have

the registrar's office to certify the designation. Earning your degrees at different schools is beneficial. This gives you exposure to more ideas, situations, issues, and opinions and employers view such diversity favorably.

Publications and presentations will get you points. Publications on your résumé are a strong indication that you are smart, dedicated, hard-working, and follow through on projects. Publishing your thesis research as soon as possible is critical, considering how competitive the job market is. We know of very few M.S. graduates who found permanent jobs in recent years who did not have publications, and those individuals had years of prior experience that mitigated this deficiency. Whereas publishing by their current personnel may not be a high priority for some management agencies, supervisors nevertheless recognize publishing as an effective means of gauging applicants. You must take advantage of this.

Publishing also includes popular articles, and agencies repeatedly mention their value. Magazine articles and press releases are important tools for today's fisheries manager. You easily can write a few about your current research for the local newspaper or your state's outdoors magazine. Writing skills are so important that some agencies now include a written essay question as part of the interview. Giving the right answer is important, but not nearly as important as showing that you can write.

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### **Agencies want people who can communicate with the public...**

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Presentations are evidence of your public speaking abilities, which are critically important on the job nowadays. The ability to perform well in a public hearing may make more of a difference in getting a management action implemented than the biological validity of that action. Agencies want people who can communicate with the public, as well as with other biologists. Make as many presentations

as you possibly can. Possible venues include AFS meetings (Chapter, Division, Section, and Annual), departmental seminars, state academy of sciences meetings, other professional and scientific society meetings, and special topics symposia, among others. Many of these occur within driving distance of your current location each year. Your advisor will be happy to support your travel there. A few agencies now require a presentation as part of the interview.

Involvement in professional societies does not accrue application points in most states. Therefore, you may be better off getting more diverse work experience than serving as president of your school's AFS student subunit. Also, networking acquired through involvement in professional societies is not as important as it once was for getting interviews. It is no longer *whom* you know, but *what* you know that counts in making the first cut because many states now have objective hiring guidelines to prevent discrimination. Your connections will help you get the job over comparably qualified candidates not known by the hiring panel, but you need to be selected for an interview first.

### *Finding job vacancy announcements*

Job vacancy information is now readily available on the Internet. Unfortunately for the new job seeker, employed, experienced biologists can now find out about most job openings quickly and easily, whereas in the past they were too busy during business hours to make calls to personnel offices. New job seekers are now in direct competition with these senior personnel.

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**Call the personnel office of each agency directly to find out the best way to keep track of openings and application procedures.**

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Despite the efficacy of the Internet for finding out about openings, you should not rely on it exclusively. *Call*

*the personnel office* of each agency directly to find out the best way to keep track of openings and application procedures. Some states still do not use the Internet, and others are tardy about keeping their web pages current. You have to call these personnel offices on a regular basis to find out about new openings. Most Cooperative Research Units and university fish and wildlife programs are on most agency mailing lists and either post vacancy announcements on a jobs board or keep them in a special file. If you have access to these, check them at least weekly; some positions may be advertised only on paper and not on the Internet, or vice-versa.

Your professional connections may help you find out about upcoming vacancies before your competition does. This can give you extra time to tailor your application to that particular job, and to become more knowledgeable about the position and how best to interview for it (see below).

Request application materials from agencies that you are particularly interested in *before* positions open, and ask for several copies. When a vacancy is announced, you will not have to wait for the forms and run the risk of missing a tight deadline. However, do not complete the application until you see the announcement, because you will want to tailor it to the specific position description (see below).

Some states do not advertise vacancies, but select candidates from a "register" or pool of candidates instead. They may advertise a position and then use that applicant pool to fill future similar vacancies, or they may open their register for a period of time to new applicants and then close it for a year or more. Passing an exam may be required to get on the register. Only those people on the register will be notified of job openings and be able to compete for them. Some states advertise positions, but require that you be on their personnel register to apply, and getting on it may be impossible before the vacancy period closes. Find out if the state has such a register and get on it early. Then stay on it by notifying them at the prescribed intervals (typically annually)

that you still want to be notified of vacancies. Remember to also update your résumé or application on file.

### *Tailoring your application*

Up to 200 applications are received for many vacancies, but only five to ten applicants are invited to interview. The job application is the key to getting an interview. Often, applications are scored objectively by personnel bureau functionaries, not biologists or fisheries managers, and they

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use the position descriptions in the announcements for scoring criteria. Therefore, you need to tailor your application, and résumé to that specific job description. Describe your qualifications using the *exact same wording* as used in the position description. Do not just copy the same boilerplate you have been using for other applications. This applies even when the people rating the applications know you and your qualifications. An application is an objective screening instrument that must be interpreted strictly and impartially to pass legal muster. Do not expect the people in personnel to decipher your characterizations of your professional experience and discern how well they correspond to the job description. Make it plainly obvious that your qualifications match those in the job description. Far too many qualified candidates exclude themselves from consideration for an interview by not following this simple guidance. For example, we know a district fisheries biologist with more than 15 years of experience who was rated unqualified for a similar position in another state because he did not specify on the application that his current position was "full-time." *Never assume that the personnel office will deduce anything beyond what you state explicitly.*

Many federal and some state applications require you to submit a written summary of "KSAs" or "KASOCs." KSAs are "Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities." KASOCs are "Knowledge,

Abilities, Skills, and Other Considerations.” These ask you to describe precisely *how* you qualify for the position, usually in addition to the application and résumé. Related questions may also be included in the job announcement. For example, you may be asked how your KSAs will enable you to complete specific job responsibilities. Answer each question completely and accurately, without lying or exaggerating. KSAs are the most important part of the screening process for federal positions; everything else is just supporting documentation.

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### **Emphasize experience that corresponds to that described in the position announcement.**

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Emphasize experience that corresponds to that described in the position announcement. For example, if you are applying for a fisheries management job, emphasize your experience related to those kinds of responsibilities, not technician duties. Emphasize planning, report writing, administration, coordination, study design, data analysis, supervision, and budgeting—*not* fish sampling and boat maintenance. If you lack such experience, create opportunities for such activities in your present position.

If you are not selected for an interview, call the hiring supervisor to get the information you need to ascertain why. However, *do not expect him or her to remember your name or pull your application*. Rather, ask what qualifications the interviewees possessed so that you can identify your deficiencies. If it appears that some of your qualifications may have been overlooked, rewrite your application to better emphasize them for the next opportunity.

#### *Preparing for the interview*

If you are selected for an interview, you need to learn everything you can about the position, because it is likely that many interview or test questions will be based on responsibilities of the position and current management

issues. Determine the specific responsibilities of the position, exactly what kind of work it entails, and the current management issues and problems. Acquire this information by talking to people familiar with the agency and area, including current and past employees, the person who held the job previously, the hiring supervisor, and other people who have interviewed with that agency recently. These individuals will likely be pleased to talk to you and help you prepare. This is where your AFS connections often pay off.

Read whatever relevant material you can find. Ask the people you speak with to send you pertinent reports and publications. Go to the library and research the situation there. Find Federal Aid reports out of that office and read the local newspaper and back issues of the agency’s outdoor magazine. The Internet is a great way to learn about current events and issues. Study the topics that your inquiries and investigations identify and be ready to impress the interview panel, not only with your knowledge, but also with your preparedness. The fact that you prepared in this way will be indicative to them of the kind of worker you are.

#### *The interview*

Your interview will take place in a conference room, most likely at the office where the position is located, or at the agency headquarters or a regional office. Three or more panelists will ask you questions. Generally, the hiring supervisor leads the interview. Other panelists may be supervisors from other offices or divisions.

The supervisor will start the interview by going over the ground rules. Pay close attention, particularly to the number of questions and the amount of time allotted to you. You may be given time at the end to ask them questions, but make sure you use the time available to answer all of their questions first. You can always call back later and ask your questions, but you will not be given a second chance to answer theirs. The panel will be on a strict time schedule to interview all of the candidates, eat lunch, take breaks, and get home in time for dinner. If

there will be ten questions and you have one hour, plan accordingly. That does not necessarily mean that you should spend precisely six minutes on each answer. Some questions will take longer to answer, whereas others can be answered quickly. If you are asked, “What is proportional stock density?” answer that in a minute or two. If you are asked to “Describe the education and experience you have that make you the ideal person for this job,” spend ten minutes on it, and perhaps more if you have relevant things that you need to tell them.

While you are answering, the panelists will be taking notes and perhaps already grading your responses. The exchange will not resemble a conversation, as you may be the only one talking for five or ten minutes. Most panelists will ask follow-up questions or ask you to elaborate on or clarify something you said. There may be ten official interview questions, but they may ask you additional questions if they wish. Some panelists will nod and smile at your answers and make you feel like you are doing well. Others may not give you any feedback at all—do not panic or allow yourself to feel intimidated.

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### **...be ready to impress the interview panel, not only with your knowledge, but also with your preparedness.**

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When asked a question, try to start answering after only a few seconds of thought, structuring your response in an ordered and logical sequence as it unfolds. Biologists are asked tough questions every day, and their reputation depends on thinking fast and giving a good answer. Use the interview to demonstrate to the panel that you are ready for the rigors of the job. Answer management questions with real-world, practical answers. Be careful to avoid affectations and idiosyncrasies.

Keep in mind that all agencies have a chain of command that must be followed. Whereas you want to impress the panel with your initiative and

willingness to tackle tough problems, you need to show proper deference and acknowledge that your supervisor will make many of the substantive decisions. When asked how you would handle a problem or design a study, do not be afraid to include in your response that you would ask other people, especially your supervisor, for input.

There are two questions that you can almost always expect in an interview. The first is aimed at finding out about your “people skills.” You may be asked how you would deal with a problem employee, a personality conflict with a coworker, or a troublesome constituent group. Second, they will ask you to describe a real-world management problem that you have been confronted with, and how you solved the problem. Be ready with a good example. Your M.S. research topic may be applicable; tell how it addressed a management problem and how your work helped solve it.

Unlike the graduate school advisors described earlier, employers want staff that are interested in the location and will enjoy living there. Content employees are loyal and productive. Employers do not want you to quit after a few months and will ask you, “Why do you want to come to work in this state?” They want to know that you like that state and the cultural and recreational opportunities it provides and you will stay for a while.

Regardless of your qualifications, experience, knowledge, and preparation, the interview panel especially wants to know if you are someone that they can work with comfortably *and* productively. If you are selected for an interview, you are likely qualified to do the job—the interview is an opportunity for the panelists to find out about your personality. They may, perhaps subconsciously, give you low scores if they perceive that you may be difficult or unpleasant to work with. Therefore, be polite, attentive, and congenial. Answer their questions directly and completely. Sell yourself, but do not exaggerate. Do

not come across as cocky, but *be confident in what you know*. Dress appropriately (business suit) and pay attention to personal hygiene. Talk to *all* of the interview panelists. Pay special attention to secretaries and support staff; they are often asked for their opinions of the candidates, and could be the critical difference in being selected.

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### ...be confident in what you know.

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If you interview for a job, you may receive an offer. Make sure that you want it. If an agency has gone through all of the steps, they are expecting you to take the job. If you turn it down, it means more work for them and they may not remember you favorably in the future, perhaps even years later. Of course, you do not have to accept a job offer, but if you know at some point that for whatever reason you will not take it, be nice and decline the interview invitation so that somebody else gets the opportunity.

### Persevere

If you are finishing up your M.S. and have gone straight through school, chances are that you do not yet have enough experience to be competitive for permanent biologist or manager positions. Therefore, be willing to accept any position that will give you more experience, contacts, and knowledge, including low-paying, temporary, or volunteer positions. Even short stints lasting a few days can be important. You might learn something that allows you to answer that one question that lands you the job. Expect to apply for dozens of jobs and go to at least four or five interviews before getting hired. Do not get discouraged.

The more you interview, the better you will get at it. If you get an interview, but are not selected for the position, do not consider the experience a setback. Follow up with the hiring

supervisor to find out where you fell short. Reapply to the same agency the next time they have a vacancy. Remember, more than one supervisor served on your interview panel. One of them may want you for a vacancy in their region, so try to impress them all during the interview, not just the hiring supervisor for that one job. Show them that you would be a great employee for their agency at any duty station. If you are highly qualified, they will remember you the next time they have an opening. When you get that second chance, you will have an edge over the competition, so take full advantage of it. You know what kinds of questions to expect, you know the protocol, and the panelists already know you. You can relax, do well, and vanquish the competition.

The bottom line, for either assistantships or jobs, is that hard work and preparation pay off in this competitive environment. Therefore, acquire the needed credentials, find the appropriate opportunities, assert a positive attitude, and prepare fully for each opportunity you get. 🐟

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