

## **Career options for PhD graduates in linguistics and cognitive science**

### **Last updated March 2021**

This is simply a rather disorganized list of 1) career resource sites, 2) job types, and 3) types of companies. I created it to help PhD graduates identify possible careers but it is also very relevant for postdoctoral researchers or other early career researchers who also want to consider all options.

Sometimes I hear from junior researchers that they want to consider a range of different careers but don't know what they could do with their skills and knowledge set. The answer - pretty much anything!

A PhD in cognitive science or linguistics gives you a very valuable skill set. How many other people are there in the world who can:

- write fluently and well (usually in English, but sometimes in more than one language)
  - give clear effective verbal presentations
  - do complex maths and statistics
  - do computer programming
  - do project management: design projects from beginning to end and implement them effectively
  - analyse complex datasets
  - teach (i.e. explain complex concepts in simple terms to non-specialists)
  - work effectively in teams (often multilingual, multicultural teams)
  - work independently and manage their own time effectively
  - critically evaluate resources and evidence
  - problem solve - don't underestimate the fact that your training has taught you to face a tricky problem and not run from it but put in the hard work needed (investigating, reading, googling) to solve it.
  - THINK! (this is in capitals because we all sometimes forget how important thinking is. It is the key to every successful professional career).
- **Some resources**
    - Career linguist: <https://careerlinguist.com/about-this-blog/>
    - Superlinguo: <https://www.superlinguo.com/post/185161601508/the-superlinguo-linguist-job-interviews-master>
    - Open Post Academia: <https://openpostac.org/about/>
    - Outside Academia on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/GoodbyeAcademia?s=20>
    - A slide set resource about using linguistics in your career: [https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1zNAIATRu-PkJF7-vcl\\_T5URYrB\\_7fVI\\_y6Ev\\_M4Q1M8/edit#slide=id.gd9424f6c9e\\_0\\_3](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1zNAIATRu-PkJF7-vcl_T5URYrB_7fVI_y6Ev_M4Q1M8/edit#slide=id.gd9424f6c9e_0_3)
  - **Types of careers available**

These career ideas come from colleagues and friends, or from websites. They are all genuine opportunities for PhD graduates in linguistics and/or cognitive science. Many of

them came from super helpful Twitter colleagues:

<https://twitter.com/CaroRowland/status/1368954148012572674?s=20>

(This is a bit of a mishmash of a list - shout if you can think of a better way to organise it)

- **Researcher in a university or research institute**

- Postdoctoral researcher. These are normally short-term posts where you are hired for a few years to work on a particular project. They are usually funded by 'soft money', which means money that a research funding agency has awarded to a researcher to carry out a particular research project. There are two ways of securing a postdoc job. First, you can apply for a post in someone else's project. For example, someone who has been awarded a research grant will advertise for postdocs to work on that grant - you can then apply for that job. Second, you can apply for grant funding yourself. There are a number of schemes, some designed specifically for early career researchers, but they are extremely competitive, so your application has to be outstanding, plus you need a little bit of luck. You can find great tips for applying for research grants here: <https://parkerderrington.com/>.

- **Researcher in industry, business, government, charities or other organisations outside academia**

- Research Scientist. It isn't just universities and research institutes that conduct research. Other organisations also employ researchers (sometimes also called research scientists). The advantage of these posts is that they are usually permanent, not short-term positions, unlike the postdoctoral researcher jobs above.
- UX (user experience) research (see e.g. [here](#))
- Product development.
- Marketing and branding
- Health economics and outcomes research (HEOR) (see e.g. [here](#))
- There is a growing demand for cognitive science PhDs in businesses working in AI, human factor, game design and neural networks

- **Research support positions in universities but also business, industry, charities, hospitals research institutes, research consultancy etc...**

Research doesn't just happen in a vacuum. There are many people who support researchers in their work. [Here](#) is a great blog by Ashleigh Johnstone about her transition from a PhD to working at Gorilla. And here are a few examples of types of jobs:

- Grant management
- Commercial grant/protocol writing (e.g. there are companies that provide such services to researchers)
- Management training (e.g. intercultural communication, research data management, open science training)
- Lab/centre manager or research coordinator
- PR and science communication
- Science collaboration (e.g. [www.cscce.org](http://www.cscce.org))
- Other research support (e.g. working for an organisation like [COS](#))
- Roles linking science/industry/tech with policy roles in funders/journals/charities
- Policy advocacy

- **Data/statistics positions in business, industry, charities, universities, hospitals, research institutes etc**
  - Data scientist/data analyst
  - Internal quantitative work in hospitals, universities etc
  - Computational linguist
  - Software developer
  - Programming
  - Note also that there are roles for cognitive science PhDs in tech businesses working in AI, human factor, game design and neural networks etc, who often need experts in human behaviour.
- **Government research/research support**
  - Government labs. The examples I was given were defense, intelligence and security but I am sure there are other areas. There are roles for cognitive scientists, modellers and linguistics (e.g. [www.dstl.gov.uk](http://www.dstl.gov.uk), <https://afresearchlab.com/>; <https://www.dst.defence.gov.au/>, <https://www.darpa.mil/>, <https://www.onr.navy.mil/> etc).
  - Policy making and evaluation. Note that these jobs occur not only in government but also in 3rd sector organisations like charities and funding bodies. There are also businesses that are commissioned by governments/charities to do policy evaluation
  - Roles interfacing between policy and practice, e.g. on health boards
  - Oversight of future research funding (e.g. in government department and funding bodies)
- **Publishing and media positions**
  - Editor (e.g. of science journals/magazines)
  - Science communication officer/press officer (e.g. for research institute, university)
  - Journalist
  - Author
- **Education**
  - Teaching (at university, other adult education centres, schools, or freelance educator)
  - Test or curriculum content creation (e.g. for an exam board or test publisher)
  - Applied research jobs
- **3rd sector (non-profit organisations)**

Charities often benefit from the wide ranging skill sets of PhD graduates in roles as wide-ranging as administration, fund-raising, press releases.
- **Types of businesses/companies that linguistics/cognitive scientist PhD graduates have worked at:**
  - Advertising agencies
  - Standardised testing organisations (e.g. test publishers)
  - Non-profit organisations (e.g. charities)
  - Government agencies
  - Tech companies

- Publishing companies
- Consultancy firms
- Toy companies
- Schools and adult education colleges
- Universities/research organisations (not as researcher)

Some PhD graduates set up their own companies to make use of their skills/knowledge as an entrepreneur or consultant. Here are some examples of free-lancers who have made successful careers out of a range of opportunities:

- <https://www.michaelerard.com/> (Michael Erard is an author, linguist and consultant)
- <https://www.emilyraesabo.com/> (Emily Raesabo is a linguist, teacher and content creator)
- <https://www.techplaycollab.com/> (founded by Laura Zimmermann to provide education research consulting)