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Advice to Applicants for Academic Positions (Master Students, PhD Students, and Postdocs)

You are considering applying for an academic position with the Aguzzi lab - congratulations! However, you should be aware that every week we receive more than 10 applications by e-mail from interested parties worldwide. It is therefore absolutely necessary, in order to have a realistic chance of being considered, to present yourself in the best possible way. I have found that even those applicants who are academically outstanding do sometimes exhibit a certain degree of naivety when introducing themselves to a potential host lab. Therefore, I have compiled the advice below.

1. State in the clearest terms the academic reasons *why you want to join my laboratory*. It is perfectly legitimate to wish to move to my institute because you like the Lake of Zurich, or the Swiss mountains, or because your girlfriend or boyfriend has received a job offer in Zurich and you want to join her/him. However, all of these reasons are at best ancillary. You are not going to get a position in my lab unless you clarify, in the most convincing terms, why all of the thousands of different labs that you could potentially join, you have chosen mine. Please do keep in mind that this is absolutely crucial for being considered.
2. Be *very thoroughly prepared* for your interview. I expect you to know everything that is publicly known about the research that my laboratory is conducting. Of course, I fully understand that there is no way that you can know about the newest things, because they are typically not yet published – yet I do expect you to have read all of the papers my laboratory has published in the last 2 years at least. The depth of your knowledge about what my laboratory actually does will be one of the most important factors that will help me deciding whether you might fit my laboratory.
3. Don't delude yourself about any automatic chances of getting great publications simply because you are a member of my lab. All too often, I read application from possibly very good students who simply state "I wish to join your lab because historically your students

have published a bunch of papers in *Nature* and *Science* and I would also like to publish a paper in a high-impact journal". This is a misconception. You do not publish papers in the top journals by simply going to the top labs. The process of getting the top publications depends most heavily on your intelligence, your commitment to working hard, your ability to ask the right questions, and (sometimes) a certain amount of luck. Besides, I vastly prefer students who are fascinated by the research that I am doing over those who want to join my lab primarily in order to optimize their career chances (although the latter is perfectly legitimate).

4. I love to surround myself with extremely self-critical and knowledgeable people. Ideally, you should be better prepared and more intelligent than I am. I will teach you things, but I expect you to teach me things as well. This way you will impress me, and I will not only offer you a job, but I can guarantee you a productive and pleasurable time. What I cannot suffer, is coworkers who do not think along and do not think ahead. My academic coworkers should not be the mere executors of my own ideas, but should rather become sparring partners with whom I can exchange ideas and experiences – so we grow together and enhance the knowledge of mankind through our science.
5. Finally, very hard work is "necessary but not sufficient" for success, and may not even be the most important factor. I have seen people working day and night and still being only moderately successful. It is much more important that you are extremely self-critical, and that you think very hard about the projects that you are taking up and the way you are executing them. If your idea has a fatal logical flaw to start with, there is no amount of work that will rescue that – hence it's worth thinking very hard about what you intend to do, and be very conversant with all the relevant literature!