

Job hunting: Interviewing for positions

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Presenter



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Interviewing Skills

for Industry Scientist Positions

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Postdoctoral Services*

Agenda

- **Interviewing Skills**
 - Anatomy of an industry interview
 - Opening questions
 - Interpersonal and team skills questions
 - Phone interview, site visit and job talk tips
 - Difficult questions and situations

Goals

- **To provide graduate student and postdocs with a set of *frameworks* for responding effectively to common industry interview questions**
 - Slide deck designed for you to return to, when you land that awesome industry interview!

Overview of the Hiring Process



Human Resources (HR)

- Is the candidate a general fit for the position description?
- Cover letter (10 sec); resume (20 sec)



Hiring Manager (HM)

- General fit?
- Cover letter (10 sec); resume (1-2 min)



Phone Interview(s) with HR &/or HM

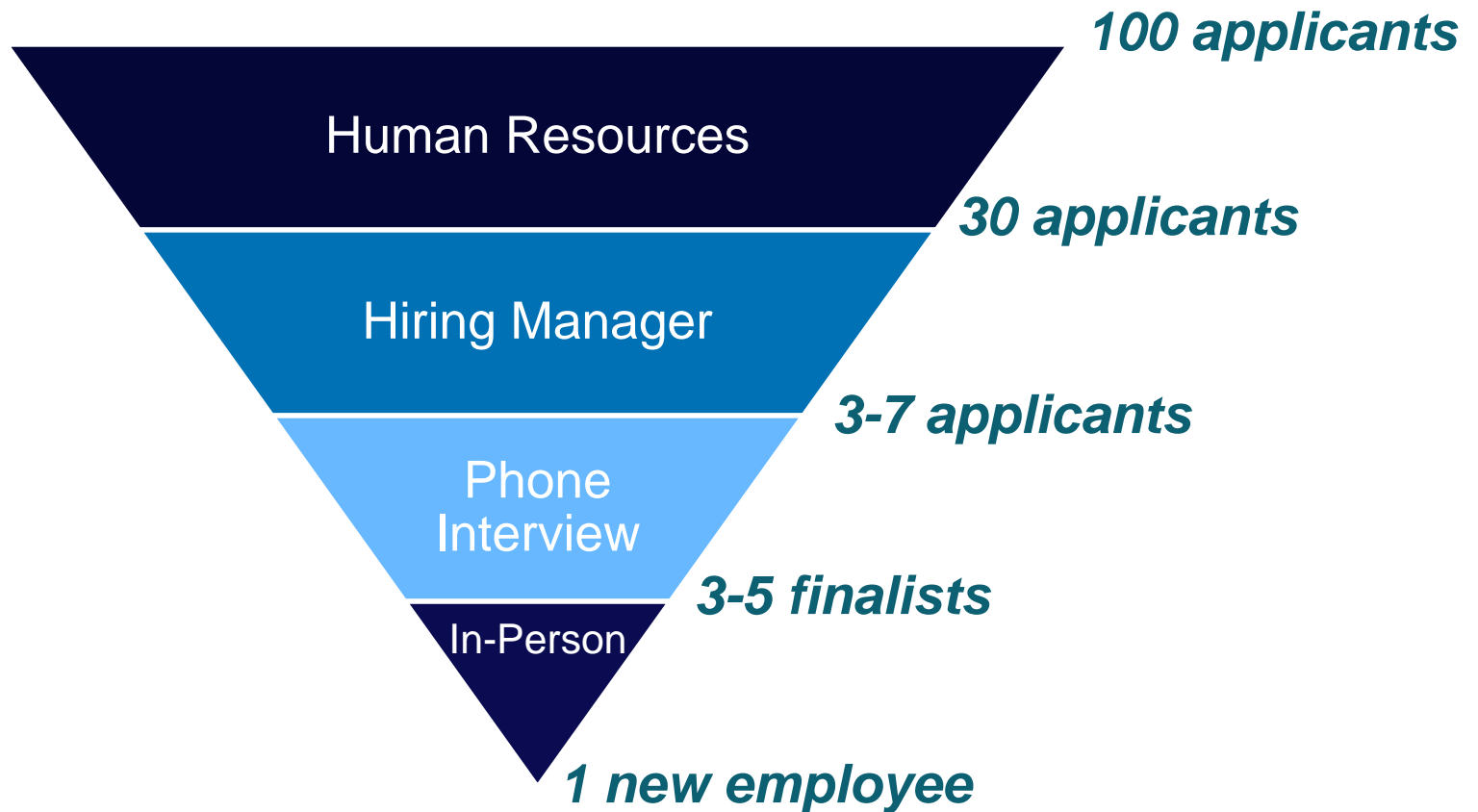
- Screen for confirmation.
- Invite you for an in-person interview?



In-Person Interview

- Meet with HM
- May meet with potential colleagues, HR, &/or leadership
- Possible job talk

Overview of the Hiring Process



Purpose/Goal of an Interview

- **Employer:**
 - To find out if you can meet the scientific and technical priorities of the job.
 - To confirm that you are a good addition to their team.
- **You:**
 - To get the offer.
 - To discover if you want to take the offer.

Anatomy of an Industry Interview

Or, why is the Hiring Manager asking you that question?

- 1. Opening/Agenda Setting**
 - 2. Scientific discussion/technical questions**
 - 3. Interpersonal skills and team-fit questions**
 - 4. Your Questions**
- **Conduct your interview preparation with this structure in mind.**

Anatomy of an Industry Interview

Or, why is the Hiring Manager asking you that question?

- 1. Opening/Agenda Setting**
 - ~~2. Scientific discussion/technical questions~~**
 - 3. Interpersonal skills and team-fit questions**
 - 4. Your Questions**
- **Conduct your interview preparation with this structure in mind.**

Opening/Agenda Setting

Typical Questions

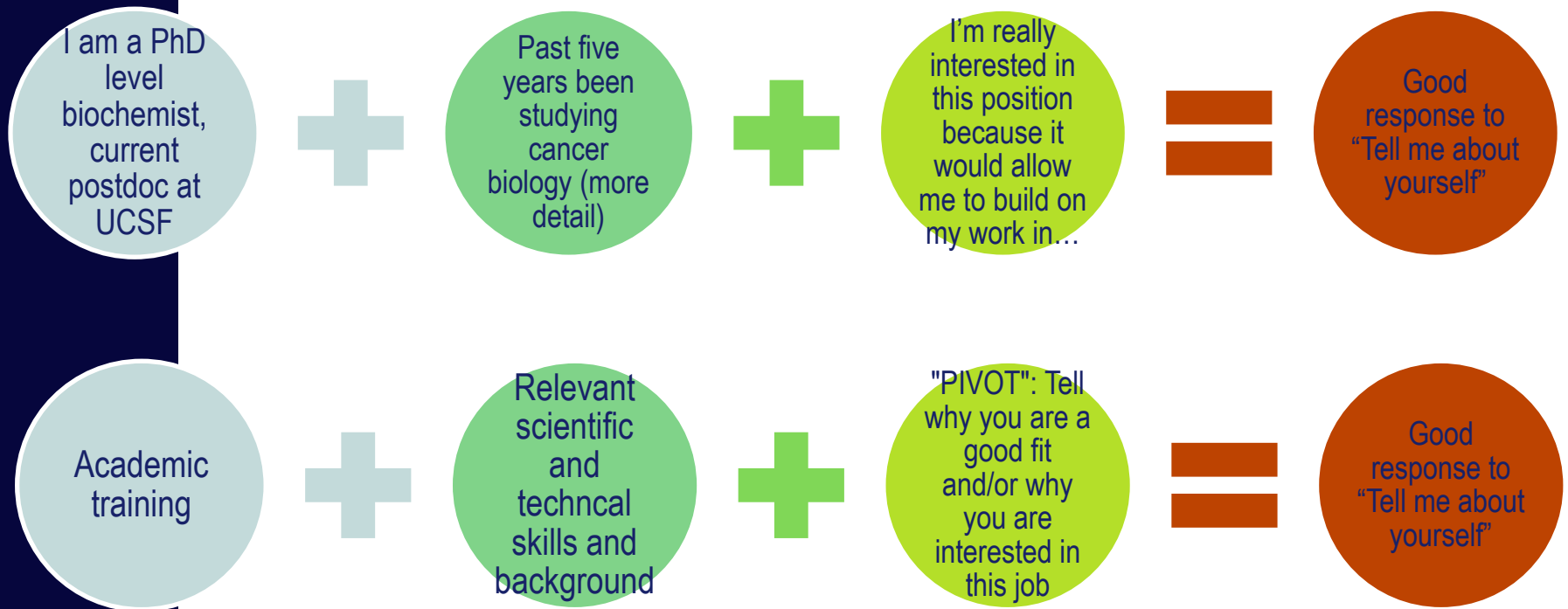
- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you interested in the position?
- Why are you interested in this company?
- Why do you want to leave academia?
- Where do you hope to be in 5 or 10 years?

Dream job description

- Job title
- Type of organization
- Required qualifications
- Type of science or tasks or activities

Opening/Agenda Setting

Tell me about yourself (15-30 sec)



Opening/Agenda Setting

Why are you leaving academia?

- Do not focus on the negative or what you are moving away from
- Focus on what you are moving toward, what's attractive about industry
 - applied nature of research
 - team based
 - fast paced
- Ok to be realistic about academia

Opening/Agenda Setting

Why are you leaving academia?

- Balance: Do not sound naïve. Ok to be realistic but not overly negative about academia. Refer to conversations with experienced industry scientists.
 - “I’ ve realized how much I enjoy working toward goals as a member of a team, and while my time in academic research has been rewarding and productive, the further I’ ve progressed, and the more independence I’ ve gained at the bench, the more isolating my daily work has become. I’ ve had several long conversations with others who have moved from UCSF to industry settings, and it’ s clear to me that moving to an industry environment will allow me to balance my love for research activities with the opportunity to work more closely with others.”

Why are you interested in this position?

- Question is about what motivates you
- For initial interviews, focus on job description
- Later interviews, mention what you've learned from earlier interviews
- Talk first about what components of the job you like to do, then move to the fact that you are good at those tasks as well.

Opening/Agenda Setting

Where do you want to be in 5 or 10 years?

- Do not focus on job titles
- If you want to move away from research long-term, an interview for a Scientist 1 position might not be the place to bring that up
- Focus on *characteristics* of your ideal job in 5-10 years
- Start with list of career-related values: What intrinsic rewards or outcomes are important to you?
 - Values Assessment tool at myidp.sciencecareers.org
 - Handout
 - Authenticity

Opening/Agenda Setting

Where do you want to be in 5 or 10 years?

- It's difficult to predict the exact title or position I will have in the future. I hope that I'll be playing some sort of leadership role within the research enterprise...but whatever my role is...it's really rewarding for me when I am recognized as an expert in a skill or knowledge. So I hope that within 5 years I can build a reputation for deep expertise in one or more areas. Also, it would be really rewarding if, in 5-10 years, I will have realized a connection between my efforts and a product that's going to make a positive difference for patients. This is why I got into science in the first place...One thing that draws me to this particular position and this company is that it seems like all of these goals are possible to achieve.

Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Behavioral Interview Questions:

- Generally about non-technical aspects of position.
- Basic principle: **Past** behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.
- Questions are about your **past** behaviors to see if you have demonstrated *behaviors considered critical for success in that position*
- Behavioral questions designed to help the employer learn how you handled a situation in the past, so the employer can predict how you will respond in the future.

Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Behavioral questions usually start with:

- “Tell me about a time when...”
- “Give me a past example of a situation when you...”

Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Questions focused on your past behaviors

Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior!

3 Behavioral Interview Questions

- Give me an example of a time when you had to manage competing priorities effectively.
- Give me an example of a crisis situation you have handled successfully.
- Tell me about a tough situation where you had to get cooperation from others to help you. What was the issue and how did you go about delegating tasks?

Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Typical questions focused on past behaviors

- Career.ucsf.edu
 - PhD's
 - Non-academic careers, interviewing skills pages
 - Review list of 15 questions taken from biotech company interviewer scripts

15 Behavioral Interview Questions commonly asked in biotech interviews

Sample Questions

1. Tell me about a time when you faced a difficult problem which you initially failed to solve? How did you approach the problem the second time? What did you do differently? (*A Behavior based interview question, but if possible, add in what you also learned from this process about avoiding similar problems in the future.*)
 2. Give me an example of a crisis situation you have handled successfully.
 3. Give me an example of a time when you used your leadership skills.
 4. What has been your greatest challenge thus far? How have you attempted to meet that challenge?
 5. Give me an example of a time when you had to manage competing priorities effectively.
 6. Give me an example of a time where you've had to handle criticism, opposition or rejection? How did you respond?
 7. Tell me about a situation where you had to be a good team player? Explain your role on the team.
 8. What other things have you done that are not related to your field? What have you learned from those involvements?
 9. Tell me about a difficult goal you have set for yourself. How did you reach it?
 10. Tell me about a tough group you had to get cooperation from. What was the issue and how did you go about obtaining "buy-in".
 11. What was the most difficult decision you've made in the last months, and how did you go about making that decision?
 12. Describe a particularly difficult person with whom you've worked, what made them difficult, and tell me about a specific situation where you dealt successfully with that person.
 13. Have you presented a project summary to other team members on any of the above projects?
 14. Describe a situation where you had to work on a challenging project and had an obstacle that you need to overcome. How did you resolve the challenge and what was the outcome?
 15. Have you ever encountered a challenge in dealing with a team member on any project and how did you resolve the conflict with this team member?
-

Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Typical Questions

- Give me an example of a time when you had to manage competing priorities effectively.
- Give me an example of a crisis situation you have handled successfully.
- Tell me about a tough group you had to get cooperation from. What was the issue and how did you go about obtaining “buy-in”?
- SITUATION, TASK, ACTION, RESULT

Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Responding Effectively: STAR framework

- Respond with very specific past tense stories:

Situation

- As a graduate student, I've had to manage multiple projects at one time, some of my own and some of which were collaborations with other researchers. In the past year, I was wrapping up a set of experiments for a first author paper. At the same time, I was collaborating with a postdoc in another lab on some animal studies. In both cases, there was sense of urgency to get results.

Task

- So I knew that if I didn't carefully organize my time, I would not be able to hit all of my deadlines.

Action

- The animal studies were time-consuming, requiring daily measurements. Therefore, first I met with my postdoc collaborator and set a schedule that divided up the responsibilities for that project and set sub-deadlines for each step.
- Then I sat down and mapped my manuscript-related deadlines on top of that other list. This ensured that we would complete the experiments in a timely manner and allowed me the time I needed to complete my independent experiments and draft a manuscript.

Result

- Manuscripts for both sets of experiments were submitted within 1 month of each other, and both have been accepted for publication now. One is even going to be in a top journal!

Interpersonal Skills and Team Fit

Practice the STAR technique

- Select behavioral style questions from large list
- Write out stories in STAR format
- Practice and critique with a partner
- Stories are “portable” to other questions

Situation

Task

Action

Result

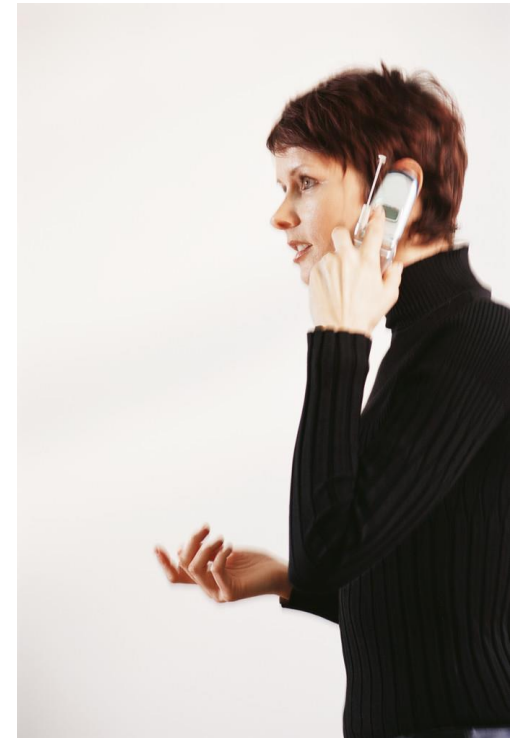
Your Questions

- Have some!
- Write them down; get the agenda as early as possible
- Don't ask negative or self serving questions: Remember your purpose/goal is to find out if you'd like to work there AND to get an offer.
- Before the interview, think about what you want to learn and research the company or unit.
- Questions should reflect your particular interest in the position and the company; base Q's on the job desc
- Examples:
 - Boss: What are your priorities for this position?
Challenges faced by the group? What characteristics are rewarded/valued in this position?

General Interview Tips

Be Prepared for Phone Interviews

- Express enthusiasm
- Politely ask to call them back
- Call on a land line, quiet place
- Focus on brevity
- Stand up, walk around



General Interview Tips

Be Prepared for the Site Visit

- Get the schedule as soon as possible
- Talk/email w employer (scientist/boss); ask questions
 - Know what the specific priorities are, in advance
 - Know what their main challenges are, in advance
 - Refer to these conversations during the interviews!
- Preface your pre-interview questions with “I’d like to be as prepared as possible...”
- Also, read up on their business news and history; build questions in advance; show curiosity

General Interview Tips

Be Prepared for the Job Talk

- Less about your current research project
- More *you* than an academic talk
- Find out who will be in your talk audience; then start big and funnel down to your talk topic
- Less *data* than in an academic talk
- Make it clear what *your role* was
- Very little about future directions
- Instead, what challenges is the group facing? How are you going to help?

General Interview Tips

Make a Good *First* Impression

- There are many ways you can make a first impression
 - Web presence
 - Voicemail message
 - Email address
- Entrance: Look your best, arrive early, be extra-pleasant with the administrators, smile
- Greeting: Firm handshake, smile, eye contact, practice!
- Eye contact and smiles throughout, practice!

General Interview Tips

Make a Good *Last Impression*

- Close with a mature summary statement
 - This comes after they ask if you have any final questions
 - Prepare a 10-20 second statement that tells the interviewer that you want the position and why you are good fit
 - Keep in mind that you may need to adapt your statement based on what you learn in the interview.
- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to share your skills and experiences and learn more about the position
- Take their business card/contact information so you can send a thank you note within 48 hours
- Make sure you know their hiring time frame before you leave

Difficult Interview Situations

- What's your greatest weakness?
 - Motivations for this question:
 - Are you self-aware enough to identify areas for improvement?
 - Can you take it on yourself to correct?
 - Talk about a true but not "torpedo" area you are working on
 - Talk about it in semi past tense
 - Describe what you did to fix it – perhaps use the STAR approach
 - Talk about it as if it's not going to be an issue for the employer

Additional Resources

- UCSF Office of Career and Professional Development
<http://career.ucsf.edu> → non-academic careers
- Checklist for own interview prep:
 - Practice with others - introductions, handshakes, eye contact, and your “Last Impressions” speech
 - Prepare responses and practice for all of the “Opening/Agenda Setting” questions
 - Prepare responses for 5-10 behavioral questions using the STAR framework
 - For site visits: Try your best to learn about your future boss’s priorities for the position and challenges the group is working on

[Make a Counseling Appointment](#)

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Location: **Mission Hall**



**Biotech Industry
Researcher Series:
Interviewing** Jul 21

Location: **Mission Hall**



**Biotech Industry
Researcher Series: The
Job Talk** Jul 26

Location: **Genentech Hall**



**Biotech Industry
Researcher Series:
Compensation Negotiation** Jul 28

Location: **Mission Hall**



**Personal Branding:
Organizing Your
Professional Goals &
Achievements into a
Cohesive Narrative** Aug 2

Location: **Mission Hall: 550 16th Street**



**Fellowships overview
for early-career stage
international postdocs** Aug 9

Location: **Mission Hall: 550 16th Street**

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Interviewing for Jobs Outside Academia

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[PDF](#)

Getting an interview means the employer sees you as a qualified candidate and is interested in hearing more about your training, skills and experience. To succeed, prepare effectively and look your best. The resources below will support you in every stage of the interview process, including preparing for an interview, presenting your skills, experiences and interests effectively, and following up professionally with an employer.

1. Find Out What is Expected

- Download our [brief list of key questions to ask about your interview](#) to ensure you prepare most strategically.
- Learn [what to Expect at your Biotech Interview](#), article from Nature.com

2. Prepare for the Interview

- Download the handouts for our series titled *Job Hunting in the Biotech Industry: Interviewing and Negotiating Skills: Interviewing & Negotiation Skills*
- Read [how to answer the "What's your weakness" question](#), from OCPD
- Read [how to answer the "Have you ever been fired?" question](#), article from Careerealism
- Read [how to prepare and communicate effectively on a phone interview](#), from OCPD
- Watch this video on how to look good in Skype/Video interviews, Youtube

3. Prepare Your Job Talk (if necessary)

- Download our [quick tips about industry job talks](#), and how they differ from academic research talks
- Read [how to prepare for your industry job talk](#), article from ScienceCareers
- Practice part of your talk at one of our Practice Your Talk workshops, listed in the ["Professional Communication Skills"](#) section of our [Calendars page](#)

4. Practice Answering Interview Questions

- Review [sample industry interview questions](#) shared by UCSF student and postdocs
- [Prepare specifically for behavioral based questions](#) by reviewing sample questions
- Read [common interview questions and answers](#), article from BioSpace
- Check out [questions great candidates ask](#), article from Inc

Questions?



Bill Lindstaedt
Assistant Vice Chancellor
UCSF



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