The TOP 10 Mistakes: The Unwritten Rules of Interviewing for Industrial and Academic Jobs

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Why this talk?
What do we look for in an interview?

- curiosity
- initiative
- confidence
- risk taking
- perseverance
- independence
- teamwork
- communication skills
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What’s missing?
Getting your foot in the door

- The MYTH of job postings
  - Many posted jobs are already taken
  - Some jobs are never posted
  - Good candidates make their own job postings

- Not as true on the academic side
  - Still helps to know someone on the inside
  - Even better if you have someone recommend you
Use your Networks

- No, it’s not cheating!
  - Use email – but expect that you may not get a response
  - Social media is now becoming more accepted
- On the academic side
  - Conferences are still the mainstay
  - Department seminars also a good place
  - Professional societies
15 Seconds per resume

- Tailor your resume to the position you are applying for
- Make sure it’s addressed to the right person/institution
- Double check your spelling and grammar
- Try to be specific rather than general
- DO NOT lie, pad, exaggerate
Academic CVs are different

- CVs are the norm
  - Consider focusing on areas of importance: research, teaching, service
- Will also need research statement and teaching statement
- Highlight your accomplishments; not just a laundry list
Researching the institution

- Check the Web
- Follow up on papers and reports written by the research staff/faculty
- Use your network
- A typical interview question is why did you apply to this position?
I’d like you to give a presentation

- Who’s the audience?
  - You have to know the audience
  - Be flexible – you don’t know who will actually be in the audience until the day of the talk

- What’s the purpose of the talk?
  - High level overview
  - Technical project description

- How long should it be?
  - Different length talks have different purposes
  - You must ask ahead of time

What should you include in your talk?

- Why is this problem important?
  - Why should I care?
- What was the outcome or product?
  - Did you actually finish something?
- What was your contribution?
  - OK to use words like “we”, “the group”, “my advisor”
  - But they must be offset by words like “This is my main result”
How long should your talk last?
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- 1 hour
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- 1 hour
- 50 minutes
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- As long as people keep asking questions
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- As long as people keep asking questions
- As long as it takes
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The single most important point is that you MUST finish on time.
The interview talk can make or break the interview

- You need to be able to convey:
  - Technical competence
  - Critical thinking skills
  - Self-confidence
- Practice your talk ahead of time
- Be prepared for technical difficulties
Technical competence is not enough

- Technical competence is always highly valued, **BUT** not sufficient
- High level of creativity/curiosity
  - Much sought after – and rare
  - Critical thinking skills and follow-through
- High level of enthusiasm/passion
  - More important than you might think
  - Team dynamics increasingly important
Questions and Answers

- Prepare for questions
  - Think of interview as a final exam
  - Prepare for “easy” questions
- Need to learn how to handle many different types of questions
- You can also use this time to learn about the institution and how you fit into it
Bad Answers to Good Questions

5 Easy Ways to Not Get a Job Offer
What do you want to work on?
What do you want to work on?

- I’m very flexible
What do you want to work on?

• I’m very flexible
  • I don’t know what I want to do
What do you want to work on?

- I’m very flexible
  - I don’t know what I want to do
- Anything you want me to work on
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  - I don’t know what I want to do
- I don’t know
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- Anything you want me to work on
  - I don’t know what I want to do
- I don’t know
  - I don’t know what I want to do
Why did you work on this problem?
Why did you work on this problem?

Because my advisor told me to
Why did you work on this problem?

- Because my advisor told me to
  - I need to be told exactly what to do
Why did you work on this problem?

- Because my advisor told me to
  - I need to be told exactly what to do
- It looked kind of interesting
Why did you work on this problem?

- Because my advisor told me to
  - I need to be told exactly what to do
- It looked kind of interesting
  - I can’t prioritize tasks
Why did you work on this problem?

- Because my advisor told me to
  - I need to be told exactly what to do
- It looked kind of interesting
  - I can’t prioritize tasks
- I wanted to graduate
Why did you work on this problem?

- Because my advisor told me to
  - I need to be told exactly what to do
- It looked kind of interesting
  - I can't prioritize tasks
- I wanted to graduate
  - I'm tired of school and I'm desperate for a job (funding ran out).
What attracted you to this position?
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- I’m applying to a lot of places
What attracted you to this position?

- I’m applying to a lot of places
  - I can’t prioritize
What attracted you to this position?

- I’m applying to a lot of places
  - I can’t prioritize
- I like California/Texas/etc.
What attracted you to this position?

- I’m applying to a lot of places
  - I can’t prioritize
- I like California/Texas/etc.
  - Where I live is more important than what I do
What attracted you to this position?

- I’m applying to a lot of places
  - I can’t prioritize
- I like California/Texas/etc.
  - Where I live is more important than what I do
- I have family in the area
What attracted you to this position?

- I’m applying to a lot of places
  - I can’t prioritize
- I like California/Texas/etc.
  - Where I live is more important than what I do
- I have family in the area
  - You have few options
Do you have any questions?
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- I can’t think of any right now
Do you have any questions?

- I can’t think of any right now
  - It’s all I can do to stay awake
Do you have any questions?

- I can’t think of any right now
  - It’s all I can do to stay awake
- No, you’ve covered everything so well already
Do you have any questions?

- I can’t think of any right now
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- No, you’ve covered everything so well already
  - I wasn’t paying attention
Do you have any questions?

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Do you have any questions?

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• No, you’ve covered everything so well already
  ▪ I wasn’t paying attention
• Everyone else has already answered my questions
  ▪ I take the first response to any question as the truth
  ▪ Your viewpoint doesn’t matter to me
Dinner conversation

- So now you can relax, right?
  - Think again, you’re still on an interview
  - Follow your host/hostess lead
    - Again, show enthusiasm
- Is there life after work?
  - Now is a good time to ask those questions
  - Try to find out how you’ll fit into the group
- Stay away from hot-button issues
  - Politics, religion, is P = NP?
Top 10 Mistakes

• Not using your network
• Unprofessional resume/CV
• Not doing homework on the place you’re applying to
• Not stating the importance of the problem you’re studying
• Not stating your contribution to the research
Top 10 Mistakes (continued)

- Not finishing your talk on time
- Overrating technical skills versus other competencies
- Not asking questions during the interview
- Not viewing the social setting as part of the interview
- Not showing enthusiasm
Summary
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- Have a game plan for what you want to say and practice it
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- Demonstrate enthusiasm
Summary

- Have a game plan for what you want to say and practice it
- Demonstrate enthusiasm
- Technical skills are necessary, but “soft skills” will win the day
Thank you!
Common Interview Questions

Tell me about yourself ...

- Highlight your accomplishments and how they are related to the position requirement
- Explain why you want the job
- Keep it short (5 minutes max)
Some typical questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Where do you want to be in five years?
3. Why should I hire you?
4. What have you learned on your own?
5. What would you like to know about us?
6. How do you work under pressure?
7. What do you expect to accomplish here?
8. What kind of decisions do you find most difficult to make?
9. Give me an example of …
Questions you might ask

1. What would a normal working day be like?
3. What do you expect from the successful candidate in the first three months?
4. Who will the new employee report to?
5. Do you see any major changes within the company that will affect this position?
6. How often are performance reviews given?
7. How does the tenure process work?
8. Does the company provide any training or other educational opportunities for staff?
The phone call interview

- Preparing for the interview
  - Read up on the company
  - Read up on the department
  - Read up on your new colleagues/boss

- Asking questions
  - Be ready with questions

- Show enthusiasm!
  - Do you really want the job?

- Alert your roommates, spouse, children, ...