



University of California  
San Francisco

# Interviewing Skills for Industry Scientist Positions

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# Seminar Goals

- Anatomy of an interview
- Frameworks to answer questions
- Phone interview, site visit and job talk tips
- Difficult questions and situations

# Learn Frameworks for Success

- Slides will be available on the iBiology website
- Review them when you are about to 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

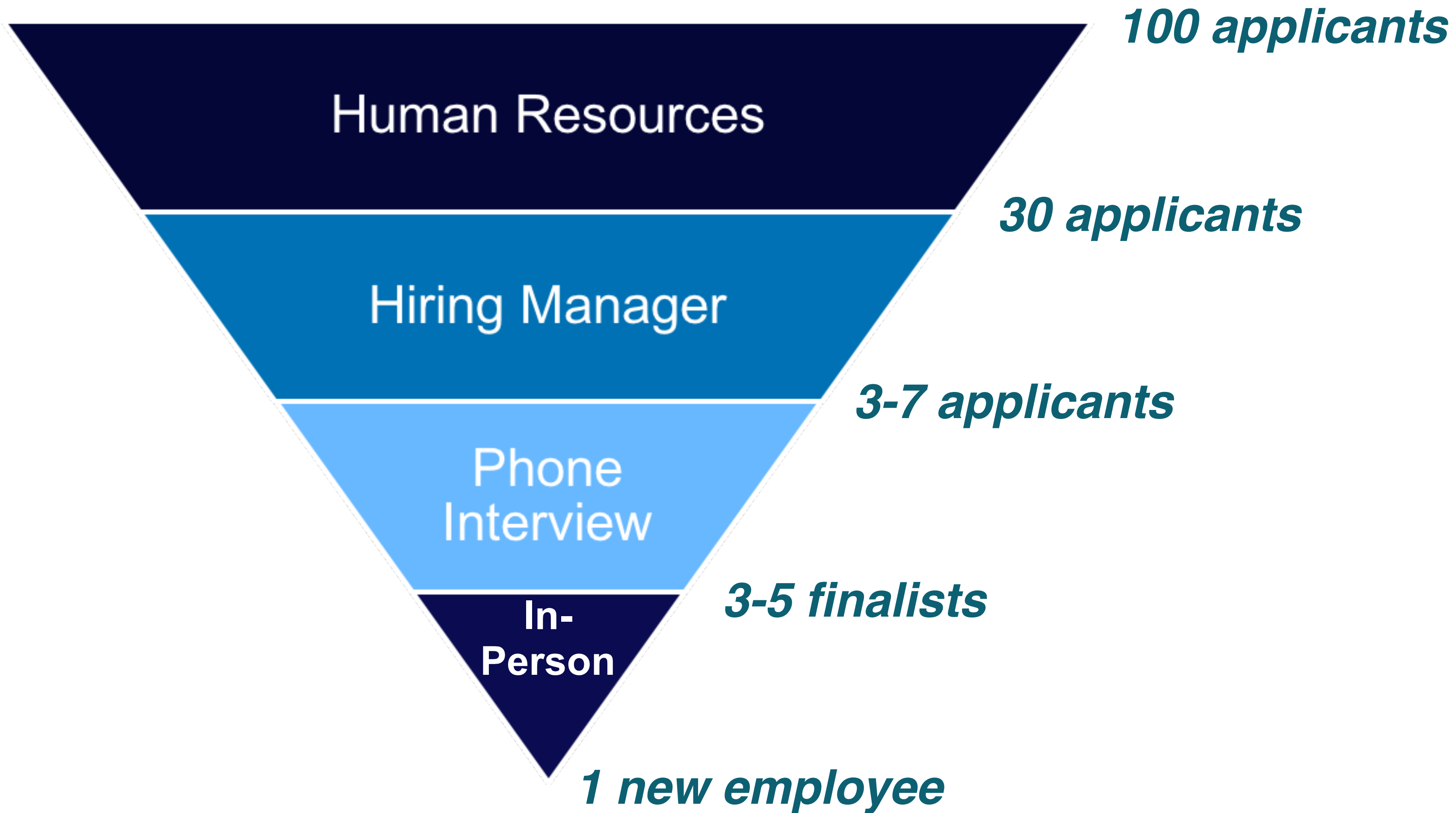
- Screen for confirmation.
- Invite you for an in-person interview?



## In-Person Interview

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

# Application Funnel



# Purpose/Goal of an Interview

- **Employer:**
  - Meet the scientific and technical priorities?
  - Good team fit?
- **You:**
  - To get the offer
  - Do you want to accept the offer?



# Anatomy of an Industry Interview

- 1. Opening / agenda setting**
- 2. Scientific / technical questions**
- 3. Interpersonal skills & team fit questions**
- 4. Your questions**

# Anatomy of an Industry Interview

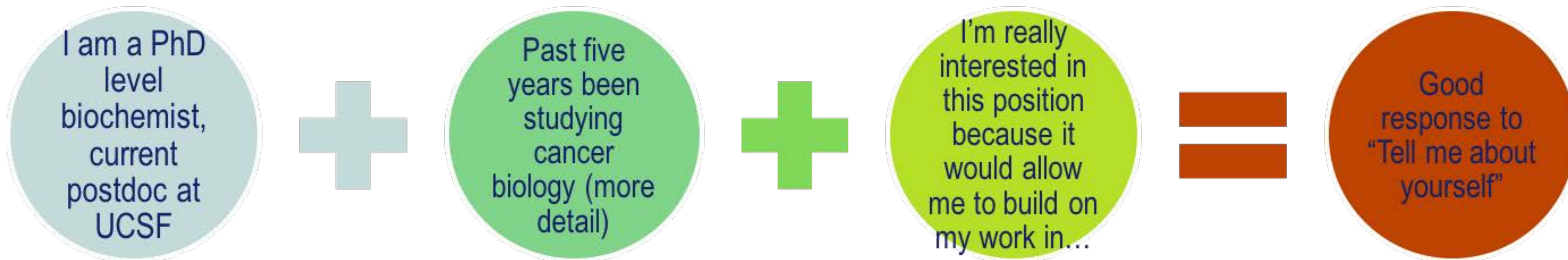
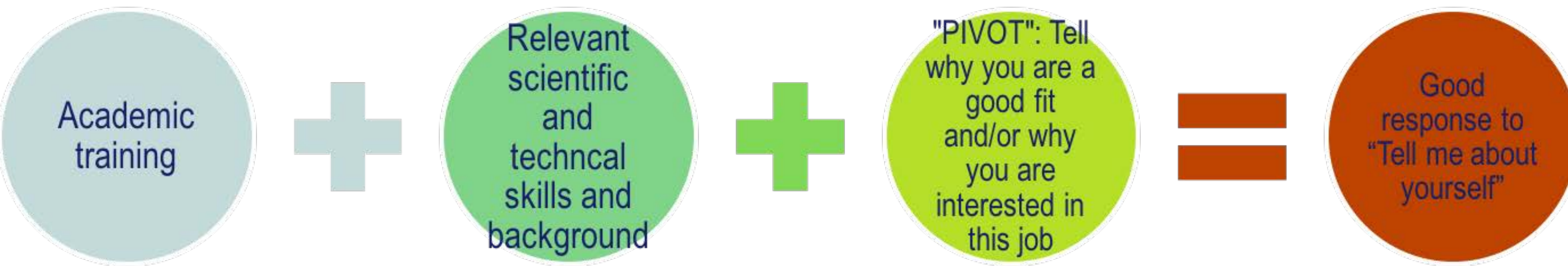
- 1. Opening / agenda setting**
- 2. ~~Scientific / technical questions~~**
- 3. Interpersonal skills & team fit questions**
- 4. Your questions**



# 1. Opening / Agenda Setting

- 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?

# Tell Me About Yourself



- Answer should be ~15-30 sec

# 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
  - Applied nature of research
  - Team-based
  - Fast-paced
- OK to be realistic about academia

# Example Answer

“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
- Initially, focus on job description
- Later interviews, mention what you've learned from earlier interviews
- To answer:
  - 1st, talk about what components of the job you like to do
  - 2nd, point out you're good at those tasks



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

- Do not focus on job titles
- 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](http://myidp.sciencecareers.org)

# Example Answer

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 non-technical
- 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 Usually Start With:

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

# Example Behavioral 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?



# More Example Questions & Resources

- [career.ucsf.edu](https://career.ucsf.edu)

- Go to “Interviewing for Jobs Outside Academia”

- <https://career.ucsf.edu/phds/non-academic-career/interviewing-effectively>

- List of 15 questions taken from biotech company interviewer scripts

# How to Answer a Behavioral Question?

Give me an example of a time when you had to manage competing priorities effectively.

# STAR Framework

- Respond effectively with very specific past tense stories:

Situation

Task

Action

Result

# Example: Manage Competing Priorities

## 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 a sense of urgency to get results.

# Example: Manage Competing Priorities

Task

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



# Example: Manage Competing Priorities

## 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 the project and set sub-deadlines for each step...

# Example: Manage Competing Priorities

## Action

Then I sat down and mapped my manuscript-related deadlines on top 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.

# Example: Manage Competing Priorities

## 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!

# Your Questions

- Have some!
- Write them down / bring them
- Don't ask negative or self-serving questions
- Focus on the job description & the company
  
- Examples:
  - What are your priorities for this position?
  - Challenges faced by the group?
  - What characteristics are rewarded/valued in this position?

# Phone Interview Tips

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



# Prepare for the Site Visit

- Get the schedule as soon as possible
- Talk/email employer pre-interview & ask questions
- “I’d like to be as prepared as possible...”
  - Ask in advance
    - What the specific priorities are
    - What their main challenges are
- Refer to these conversations during the interviews!



# Prepare for the Job Talk

- Less about your current research project
- More about *you* relative to job description
- Less *data* than an academic talk
- Make it clear what *your role* was
- Very little about future directions
- Focus on job challenges. How can you help?

# Make a Good First Impression

- Firm handshake, smile, eye contact, practice!
- Look your best, arrive early, be extra-pleasant with the administrators, smile

# Make a Good Last Impression

- Close with a summary statement
  - Prepare a 10-20 second statement
  - Tell the interviewer that you want the position & why you are good fit
  - Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to share your skills & learn more about the position
- Take business card/contact information; send a thank you note within 48 hours
- Know the hiring time frame before you leave

# What's your greatest weakness?

- Motivations for this question:
  - Are you self-aware enough to identify areas for improvement?
  - Can you self-correct?
- Talk about a true but not disqualifying issue you are working on
- Talk about it in “semi past tense”
- Describe what you did to fix it – could use STAR
- 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 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