



Breaking Into Tech

From a Non-Traditional Background



Copyright© 2023 Sundog Software LLC DBA Sundog Education. All rights reserved worldwide.



amazon

What We'll Cover

- What employers really care about
- Beating the catch-22 of experience
- Building your network
- Essential habits for tech success
- Turning your non-traditional background into an advantage
- Beating the interview loop

**What
employers
really care
about**

**What you've
done vs.
what you've
learned**

Communication skills



Communication Essentials

- Speak clearly, enunciate
- Use proper grammar, especially with management
- Be concise
- Avoid filler words
- Avoid jargon with non-engineers
- Practice! Push yourself to do some public speaking.

Should I get certified?

- Usually it can't hurt
 - As long as it's a respected one
 - AWS, Azure, Google, CompTIA
 - "Certifications" from people like me don't count.
- Research what your target employers require.
- It's a big investment of time and money
 - So make sure it's worth it

ACTIVITY:

Polish your résumé (or C.V.)

Things to tweak:

- Emphasize WHAT YOU HAVE BUILT and why it was impactful
- Don't waste space on irrelevant experience
- Include relevant side projects; link to them
- Ensure proper grammar, capitalization, formatting.
- Be concise
- Be honest

Beating the Catch-22 of Experience

**Make your
own
experience**

Making your own experience

- Open-source projects
- Personal projects
- Your own side business
- Freelancing, consulting
- Internships, apprenticeships

**Have you
considered
self-
employment
?**



Self-Employment isn't for everyone.

- It can be unstable
- You need savings to fall back on
- You may have higher:
 - Taxes
 - Health insurance costs
 - Accounting / Legal fees
- You won't just be doing engineering.
 - (maybe that's a good thing?)

ACTIVITY:
**Find 3 tech
projects you
can tackle on
your own.**



BUILDING YOUR NETWORK

**Knowing
people on
the inside is
essential.**



Get past the gatekeepers.

Modern networking techniques

- Online
 - LinkedIn, social networks
 - GitHub
 - Quora
 - Medium
 - Tech-focused groups
 - Relevant Discord / Slack
 - Organizations with virtual meetings
- In-person
 - Conferences
 - Events
 - Clubs & societies
- Collaborative projects on the side



Cast a wider
net.
Look at
smaller
companies.

ACTIVITY:
Find 3
organizations
or projects to
get involved
with.

ESSENTIAL HABITS (that give you an advantage)

Curiosity and lifelong learning



**Building
things for
fun**



**Ruthless
efficiency**

**A strong
sense of
ownership
and
perseverance**

Bias for action

ACTIVITY:
Practice
demonstrating
these habits
to an
interviewer.



TURN YOUR
BACKGROUND
TO YOUR
ADVANTAGE

**A bias
toward
simplicity.**

**You are
results-
oriented.**

**You are self-
motivated.**

You approach
problems holistically.



**You approach
problems
from the
customer's
standpoint.**



**You approach
problems
from the
customer's
standpoint.**

ACTIVITY:
**Prepare stories
about how your
unique
background
helps you solve
technical
problems.**

A man and a woman are sitting at a wooden table in a modern office setting. The man, on the left, is wearing a blue suit and is looking towards the woman. The woman, on the right, is wearing a green sweater and is looking down at a laptop. There are two yellow cups on the table. The background shows a large window with a view of a city building. The image is overlaid with a dark semi-circular shape on the right side and a dark vertical bar on the left side. There are also orange decorative bars at the top left and bottom right corners.

Preparing for the interview

**Behavioral
interviewing
is your
friend.**

Anticipating objections

- What about this gap in your experience?
 - Here's what I was doing during that time to keep up my skills
- Your education doesn't really meet our requirements
 - Here's what I have done to self-educate, and apply that knowledge
 - Here's what I was building during that time instead

What to expect

- Coding problems
- System design problems
- “Culture fit”
 - Research the companies’ stated values ahead of time
 - Come prepared with stories of how you exemplify them
- Gauging how you handle difficult situations
- A long day

Hint: this isn't really a binary tree.

**Study up on
whatever
tech is
trendy right
now.**

**Practice
coding at the
whiteboard
(real or
virtual)**

shop

check for existing user with the new id

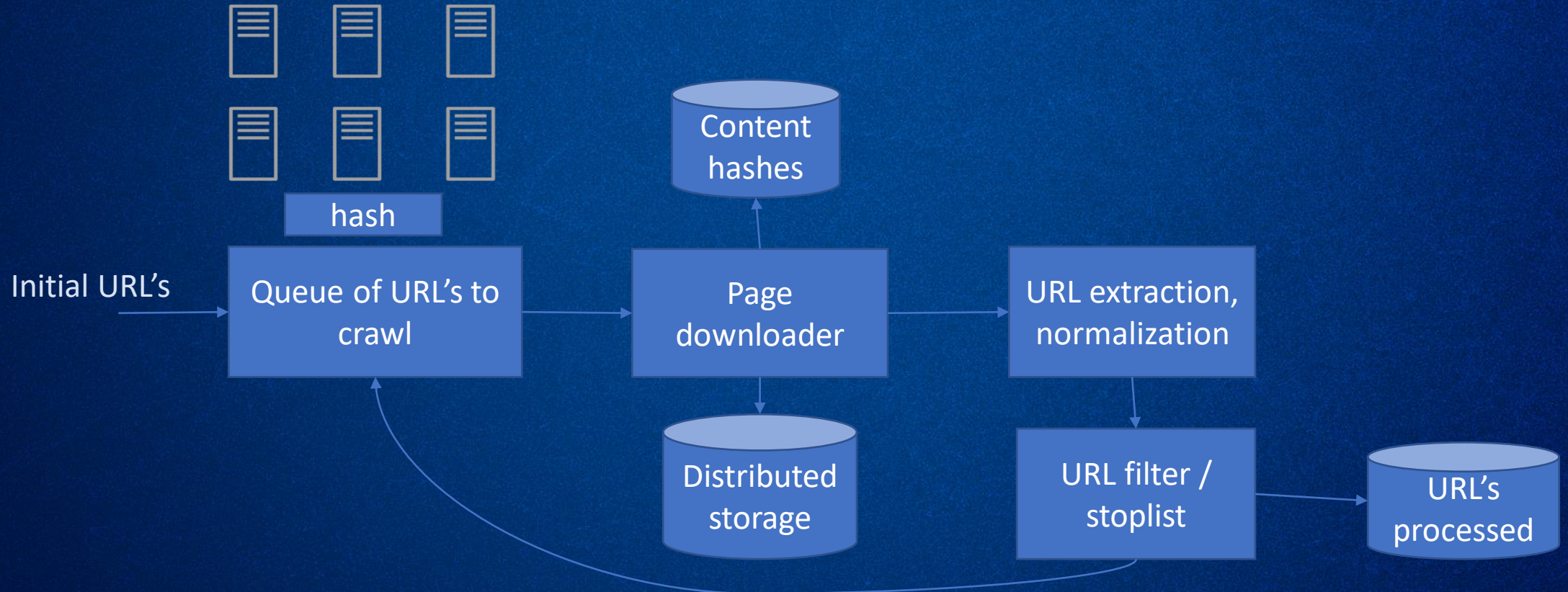
```
sql = "SELECT COUNT(*) FROM user WHERE  
userid = '$_POST[newid]'";
```

```
result = mysql_query($sql);
```

```
if ($result) {
```

error occurred

Practice system design.



“Bio-Hacks” for interview success

- If traveling, arrive a day or two early to acclimate
- Eat a good breakfast
- Use the restroom before heading in
- If caffeine is your thing, go for it
- Take a shower that morning

General interview tips

- Come prepared with good questions for your interviewers
 - What's their day like?
 - How is success measured?
 - How has their career progressed at this company?
- Smile, be someone they want to work with
- Don't be afraid to say "I don't know," but make an effort to reason through it.
- Think aloud!

ACTIVITY:

Mock interview with your hiring manager

What we learned

- Stressing your results over your education
- Making your own experience
- Networking to find hidden opportunities
- The essential habits to demonstrate
- Describing your non-traditional background as an advantage
- Interview preparation tips

