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## Interview Practice 02/25: The House of the Weird Suns

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Hello Friends,

This Saturday, we're going to be practicing whiteboard questions at [Twitter HQ](#)!

Whiteboards. If you've ever had or looked for a CS job, you're familiar with this sort of interview. Someone hands you a dry-erase marker and a question, and you have to write up a solution on the fly while explaining what you're doing. Nasty? Absolutely! Are you going to do them to get a data science job? Absolutely!

Fortunately, just like any other type of interview, being able to whiteboard effectively is a learned skill. We're going to do a similar format as last time, with instruction followed by breaking into pairs and interviewing.

### Logistics

We're going to be hosting at Twitter HQ, **12 noon - 5:00**. It's a quick BART trip, and Jessica and I will be there to let people in. I will also be staying until at least 7 to answer individual questions & hold office hours; people will probably break off in groups to go to dinner & hang out in SF.

12 - 2: Panel Discussion. Jessica will be interviewing me in front of you guys, we'll talk about interview techniques & things to be aware of

2 - 5: Mock interviews. These will be **30 minutes** apiece; because these will take place in multiple rooms **you need to set your own timers and move to the next room on time**. Once again, I recommend recording the interviews & leaving 10 minutes at the end for feedback.

### Special Guests

We're rolling out the big guns for this one, so if you have any questions about problem-solving in general this is the time to ask.

[Jessica Su](#), Quora celebrity & CS grad student @ Stanford. Super generous host who's letting us all hang out at her office.

[Brian Bi](#), programmer @ Google who medaled twice at the International Computing Olympiad. Good at stuff  
[Christopher Chang](#), mathematician & programmer @ Human Longevity. Oh, and he got a gold medal at the International Math Olympiad.

### Preparation

**Please come prepared with 1-2 of your own questions!** It can be light programming, SQL, or even an analysis / math problem.

For example, here's a good whiteboard SQL question. I'd start with the following intro

->There's a table, friend\_requests\_sent, which has three columns: sending user ID, receiving user ID, and a timestamp. There's also a second table, friend\_requests\_accepted, which has the sending user ID, receiving user ID, and a timestamp.

Then I'd ask questions, get the interviewee to write code, and see that it's correct

->What % of friend requests are accepted?

- >Can you find me a list of users, ordered by number of declined friend requests?
- >Can you find me a list of users who have had every friend request they've sent accepted?

For particularly skilled candidates, I might throw in a complication. The friend\_requests\_sent table has a bug and is logging every request twice. So I'd say something like "you run this query, and you find that 40% of friend requests are accepted. This seems low. What might you try to validate the data?"

A good whiteboard analysis / math question would be "How many golf balls can fit in a 747? Explain your reasoning." Then the candidate gets up, has to draw a picture of a 747 and calculate out scratchwork. Meanwhile I'm assessing to see if his or her assumptions are roughly accurate and if he or she is thinking in a clear and logical way.

Best,  
Robert  
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