DevOps Conf 2022

DevOps Conf · June 14, 2022

Assessing SRE skills

Interviews on system design and troubleshooting



Alexander Polomodov

Speaker Hello

I lead digital ecosystem development at Tinkoff

- I curate our System Design Interviews
- And I interview for troubleshooting myself

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From the hiring funnel to how to learn this

What we'll cover

- The hiring process and why we check troubleshooting
- What the candidate gets out of the section
- How the section and a typical task look
- Scoring, the contrast with design, and growth

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Part 1

01

What SRE hiring looks like

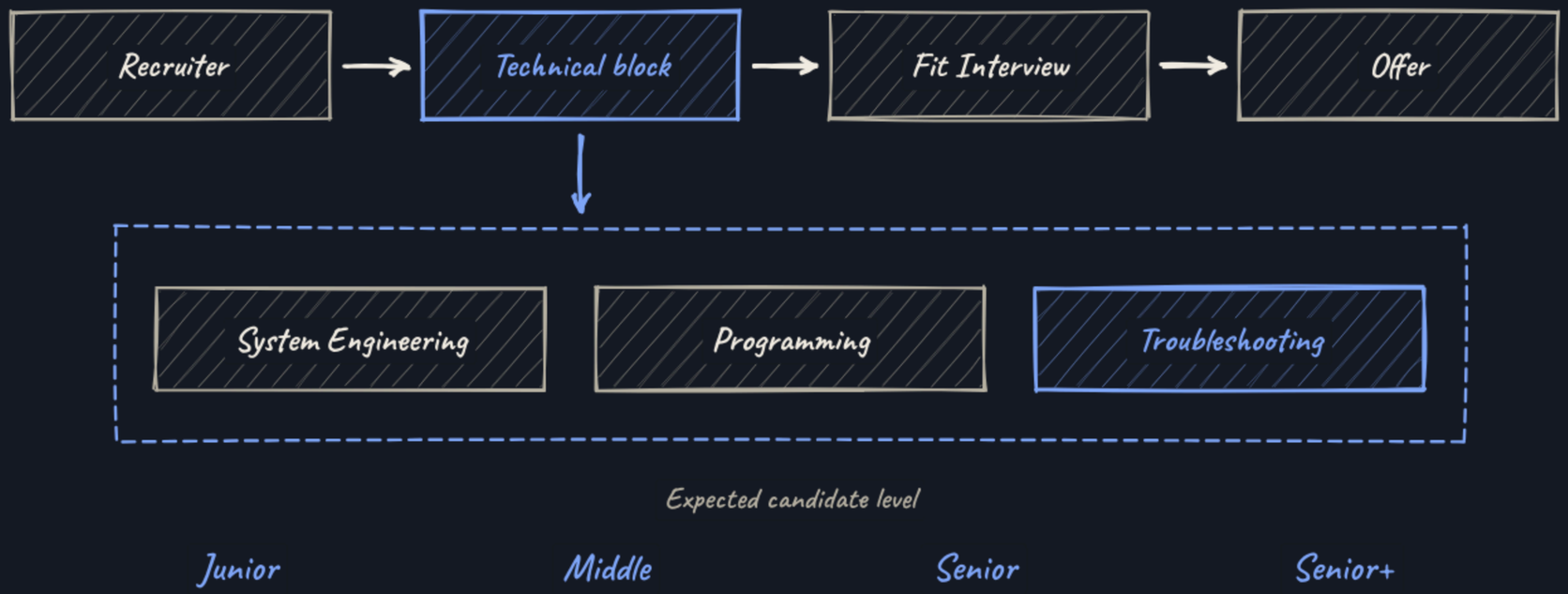
Hiring stages and candidate levels

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Troubleshooting sits inside the technical block

Funnel Hiring stages

Hiring stages against the candidate's level



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Part 2

02

Why we check this at all

From the company's side and the candidate's

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Reliability is decentralised — the teams own it

Company | Why we do

Why we check troubleshooting skills

- 25M+ customers, and both they and the load grow
- Many business lines, platforms and service lines
- The products merge into an ecosystem
- Engineers own the reliability of their own systems

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An incident almost like the real one, at a low price

Candidate | What they get

What the candidate gets out of it

- Working an incident under near-real conditions
- Normally only a production system gives that
- Went brilliantly — likely a Senior/Lead offer
- Went poorly — we say what to work on

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Part 3

03

What the troubleshooting section looks like

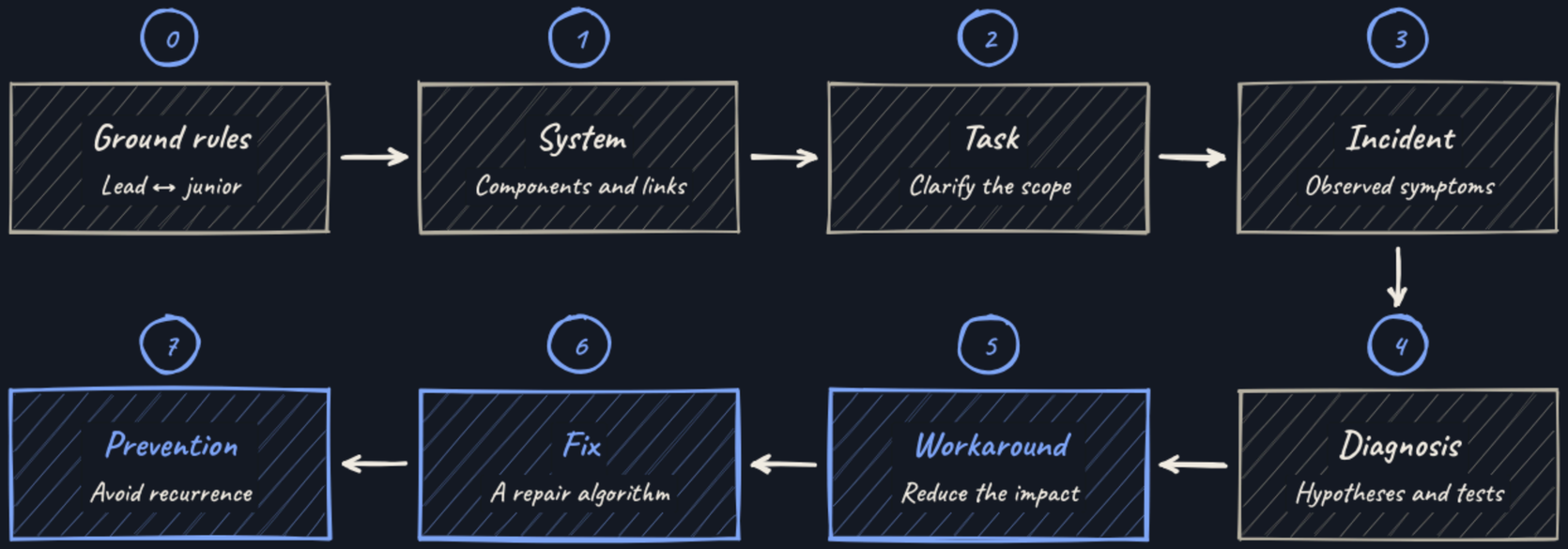
Eight steps and a typical task

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The candidate leads the incident investigation

Structure 8 steps

What the troubleshooting section looks like



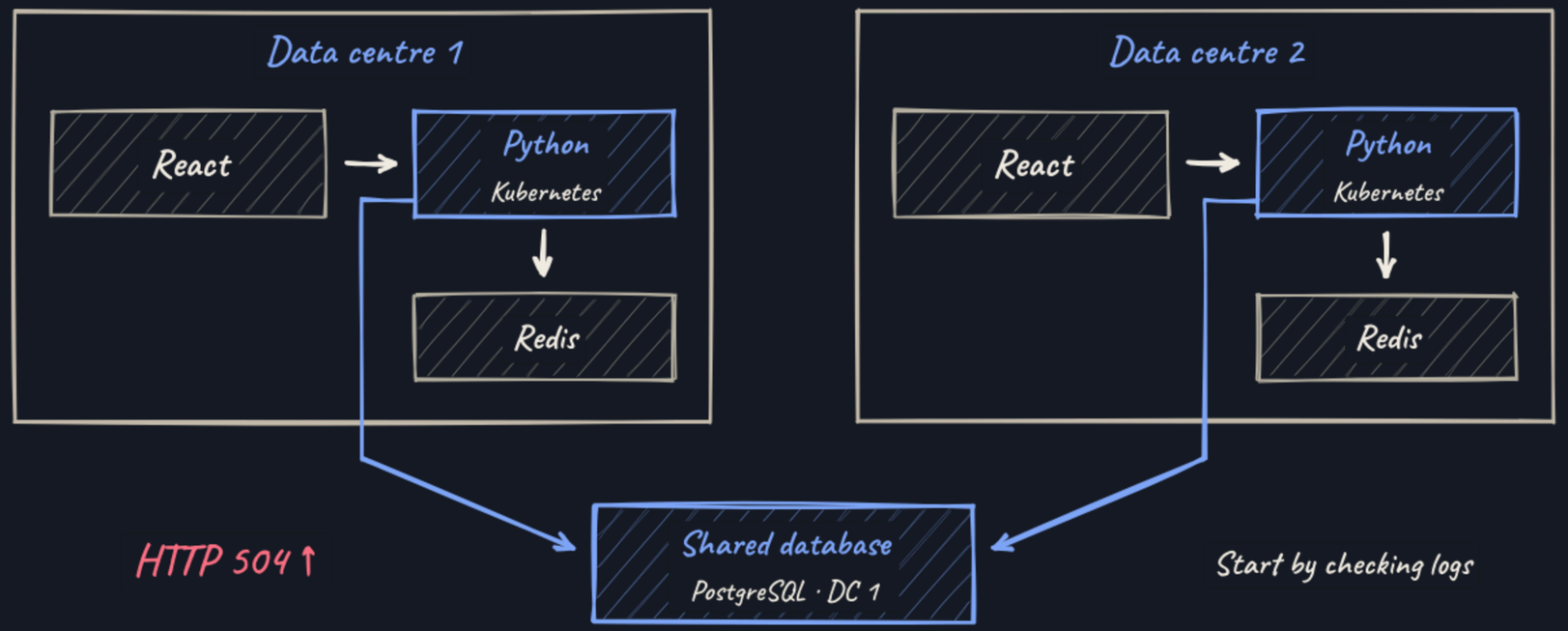
One incident: from symptoms to preventing recurrence

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Two data centres share one database

What a typical task looks like

Task `Typical task`



Part 4

04

How we score the candidate

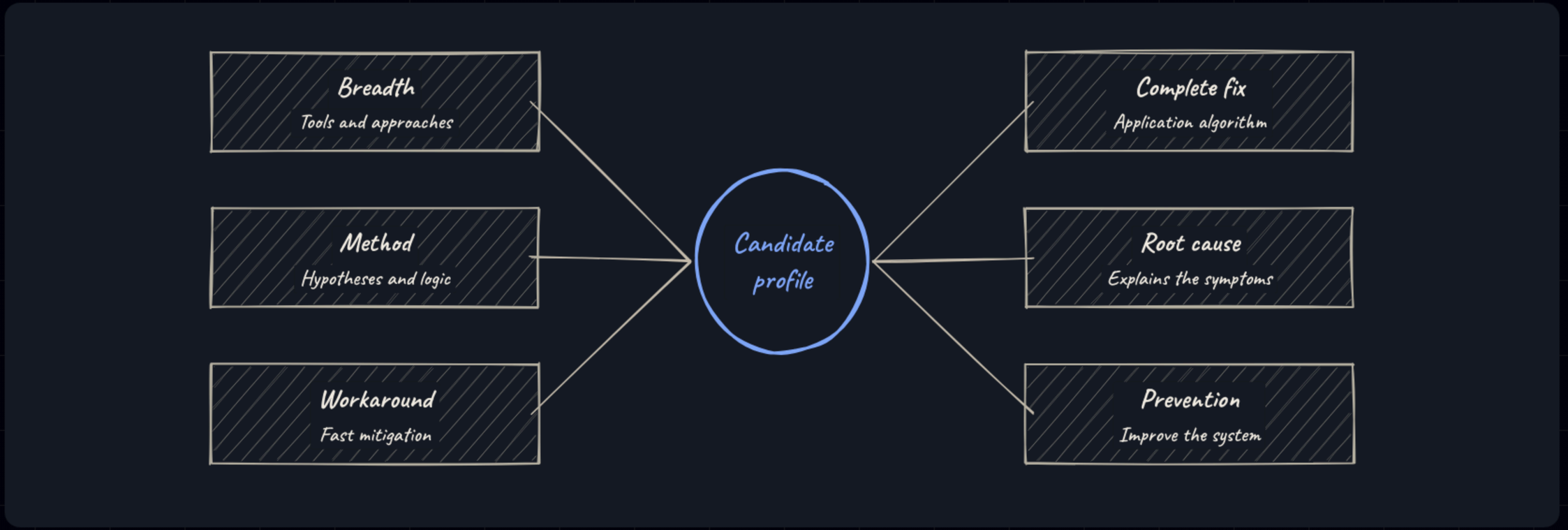
Six axes and the level read off them

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Six criteria form the candidate profile

Criteria 6 axes

The scoring criteria



Part 5

05

Troubleshooting and system design

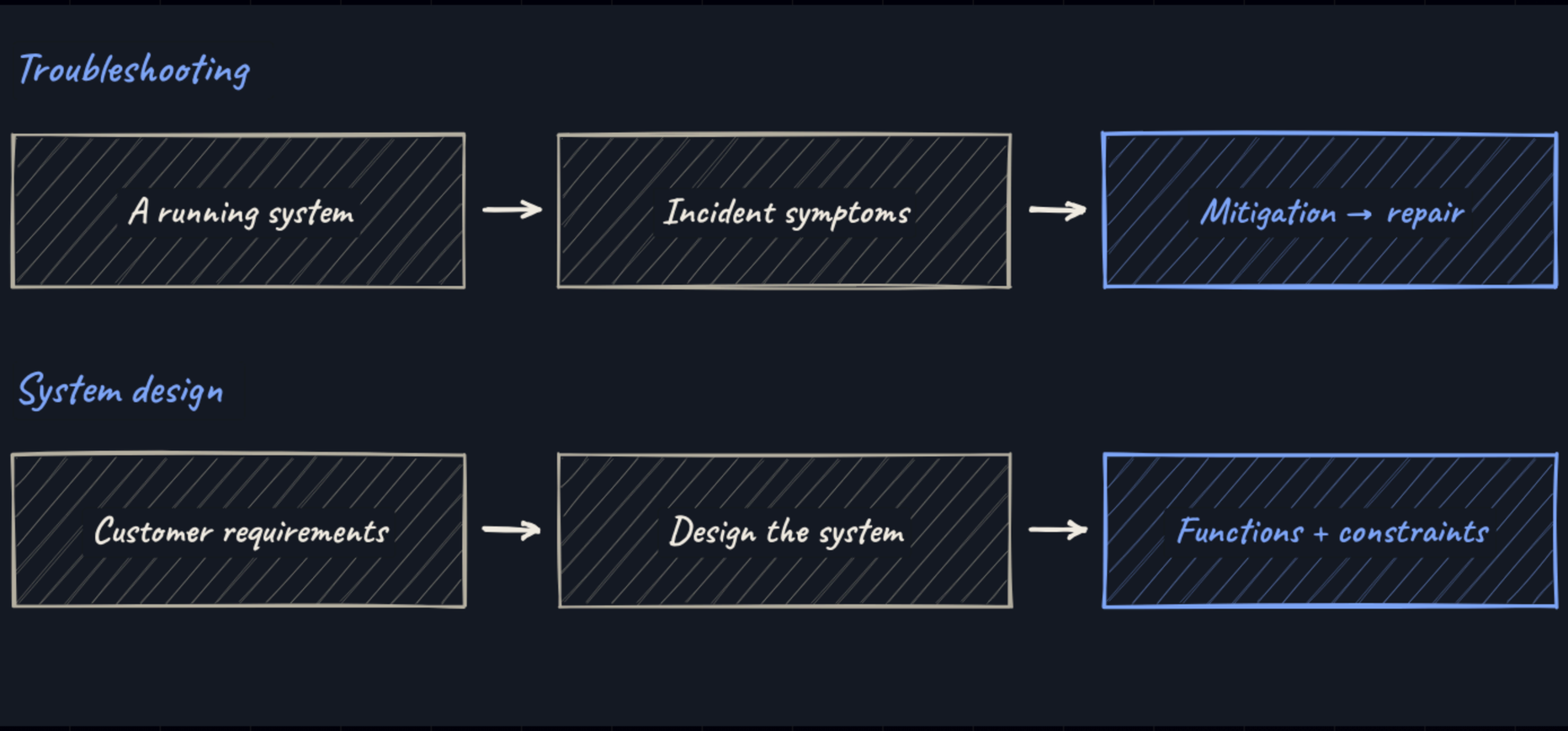
How they differ and why one section remained

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Restore a system or design one

Contrast Two sections

How troubleshooting and system design differ



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System design dropped: candidates averaged Junior

Decision One remained

Ideally SRE = troubleshooting + system design

- The ideal: fight fires and design systematically
- The reality: design was passed at Junior level
- So we stopped asking System Design
- But we decided to teach it internally

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Part 6

06

Wrap-up and how to get better

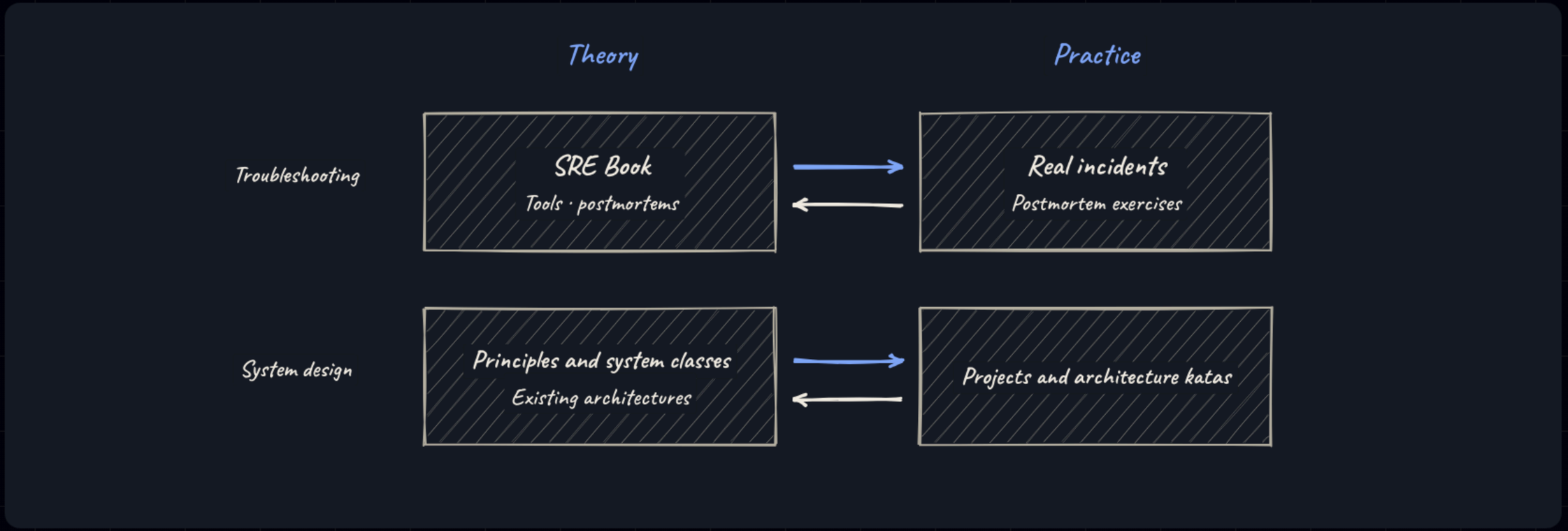
Theory and practice for both sections

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Theory only works alongside practice

Growth | Theory and practice

How to get better at system design and troubleshooting



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The questions we covered

Wrap-up We covered

From the hiring process to how the two sections differ

- What the hiring process looks like
- Why we check troubleshooting skills
- What the candidate gets out of it
- What the section and a typical task look like
- How we score, and how the sections differ

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Links for further study

The sources from the talk's closing slide

- An article based on this talk
- Google SRE Book, SRE Workbook, a Mobile SRE Report review
- «Release It!» and a repository of postmortems
- My articles on the System Design Interview and preparing for it

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Thank you!

All slides and links are in the Telegram channel

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