

# Pre-screening interview questions

Fifty pre-screening interview questions grouped by purpose, each with what the answer tells you; pick ten to twelve for a role and ask them in the same order for every candidate.

- Pick ten to twelve questions for a 15-minute screen: two or three on logistics and knockouts, two on background, two on role skills, one or two on motivation, one on pay, and two to close.
- Replace each [bracketed] placeholder with the role's own details before the first screen.
- Ask every candidate the same questions in the same order, and follow up on any vague answer.
- Treat a no to a knockout question as a flag for a recruiter to review, not an automatic rejection.

| #                          | Question                                                                                                   | What it tells you                                                                                                                    | Notes |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Availability and logistics |                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                      |       |
| 1                          | When could you start, and how much notice do you need to give?                                             | Whether your timelines fit. Listen for a specific date or notice period, not "as soon as possible".                                  |       |
| 2                          | This role is [on-site, hybrid or remote], based in [location]. How does that work for you?                 | Location fit, settled early. Listen for a plain yes, or the conditions they would need, such as a relocation date.                   |       |
| 3                          | The role involves [amount of travel]. Is that workable for you?                                            | Whether travel is a real fit or a stretch. Listen for a clear yes, or exactly how much they can commit to.                           |       |
| 4                          | Are you interviewing elsewhere, and how far along are those processes?                                     | Your deadline. Final rounds and pending offers elsewhere set the pace for your process.                                              |       |
| 5                          | Are there any dates in the next few weeks when you can't interview?                                        | Lets you book the next round before the candidate goes quiet. Write the dates straight into your notes.                              |       |
| 6                          | How did you hear about this role?                                                                          | Which sources bring candidates who get through the screen. Listen for a referrer's name to follow up with.                           |       |
| 7                          | Have you applied or interviewed with us before, for this or another role?                                  | History you may already have. Check your notes from last time before the next round.                                                 |       |
| Background and experience  |                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                      |       |
| 8                          | Walk me through your current role: what you own, who you work with, and what a normal week looks like.     | Scope and level. Listen for what they own versus what they help with: "I run" and "I was part of" describe different jobs.           |       |
| 9                          | What made you move from [previous role] to [current role]?                                                 | How they make career decisions. Listen for the reasoning, and whether the same reasoning points toward this role.                    |       |
| 10                         | Which part of your experience is most relevant to this role?                                               | Whether they have read the job. Listen for a direct match to the role's top requirement, in their own words.                         |       |
| 11                         | Tell me about something you achieved in the last two years that you're proud of. What was your part in it? | Impact and ownership. Listen for a result, ideally with a number, and what they did personally.                                      |       |
| 12                         | How big is what you handle today: the team, budget, caseload, territory or customer base?                  | Scale. Compare the numbers with the role; a big gap in either direction deserves a follow-up.                                        |       |
| 13                         | Which tools or systems do you use every day, and how well do you know them?                                | Ramp-up time. Listen for the systems named in your job description, and for depth: configuring a system is not the same as using it. |       |

| #                    | Question                                                                                              | What it tells you                                                                                                                     | Notes |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 14                   | What does your current manager rely on you for?                                                       | Their value in someone else's eyes. Listen for something specific that a manager would actually say.                                  |       |
| 15                   | Is there anything relevant to this role that isn't on your résumé?                                    | What the paper leaves out. Listen for projects, training or responsibilities that never made it onto the page.                        |       |
| <b>Motivation</b>    |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                       |       |
| 16                   | Why are you looking now?                                                                              | The push. Listen for a concrete reason, then check whether this role fixes it. If it doesn't, the same reason may move them on again. |       |
| 17                   | What made you apply for this role in particular?                                                      | The pull. Listen for something specific to the posting or the company, not an answer that fits any job.                               |       |
| 18                   | What do you want more of in your next role, and what do you want less of?                             | What they are choosing for. Compare the answer with what the job actually involves day to day.                                        |       |
| 19                   | What would make this role a step forward for you?                                                     | Whether the move makes sense for them. Listen for growth the role can genuinely offer.                                                |       |
| 20                   | What would make you turn down an offer from us?                                                       | Deal-breakers, early. Listen for anything you already know is true of the role.                                                       |       |
| 21                   | What do you need from a manager to do your best work?                                                 | Management fit. Pass the answer to the hiring manager rather than judging it yourself.                                                |       |
| <b>Role skills</b>   |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                       |       |
| 22                   | Tell me about a recent time you [core task of the role]. What was the situation, and what did you do? | Evidence for the role's top requirement. Listen for a specific example, their own actions and the outcome.                            |       |
| 23                   | How would you approach [a typical task from the first month]?                                         | Practical judgment. Listen for the questions they would ask first and a sensible order of work.                                       |       |
| 24                   | What's the hardest [type of problem] you've had to solve in this kind of role?                        | Their ceiling. Listen for real complexity, and for how they knew it was solved.                                                       |       |
| 25                   | How do you know when you're doing this job well?                                                      | Whether they know what good looks like. Listen for the measures the hiring manager actually uses.                                     |       |
| 26                   | Tell me about a mistake you made in this kind of work, and what you changed afterwards.               | Self-awareness. Listen for a real mistake and a specific change, not a strength dressed up as a weakness.                             |       |
| 27                   | Which part of this job would be newest to you?                                                        | Honest gaps. Listen for candor, and for how they learned something similar before.                                                    |       |
| 28                   | How have you kept your [field] skills current over the last year?                                     | Learning habits. Listen for something concrete and recent: a course, a certification, a project.                                      |       |
| 29                   | If we asked a colleague who has watched you work, what would they say you're best at?                 | Self-perception. Listen for a strength that matters in this role, backed by an example.                                               |       |
| <b>How they work</b> |                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                       |       |
| 30                   | Tell me about a time you had more work than time. What did you drop or push back on?                  | Prioritization. Listen for a real trade-off and how they explained it to the people affected.                                         |       |
| 31                   | Tell me about a disagreement with a colleague or manager. How did it end?                             | How they handle conflict. Listen for the other person's view, described fairly, and an actual resolution.                             |       |

| #                         | Question                                                                                                                        | What it tells you                                                                                                                               | Notes |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 32                        | Give me an example of feedback that changed how you work.                                                                       | Coachability. Listen for specific feedback and a specific change.                                                                               |       |
| 33                        | Do you do your best work with close direction or with a lot of independence?                                                    | Working style. There is no right answer; compare it with how the team actually works.                                                           |       |
| 34                        | How do you keep your manager and teammates up to date on your work?                                                             | Communication habits. Listen for a routine, not "I just keep everyone in the loop".                                                             |       |
| 35                        | Tell me about a process you improved. What was wrong with it, and what changed?                                                 | Initiative. Listen for a problem they noticed themselves and a result they can describe.                                                        |       |
| 36                        | What do you do when you're stuck on a problem?                                                                                  | Resourcefulness. Listen for what they try on their own first, and when they decide to ask for help.                                             |       |
| <b>Compensation</b>       |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                 |       |
| 37                        | The range for this role is [pay range]. Does that work for you?                                                                 | Alignment before anyone invests more time. Listen for a clear yes, or how far apart you are.                                                    |       |
| 38                        | What are you looking for in total compensation?                                                                                 | Their expectation, in their words. Ask what they want rather than what they earn now: current pay describes their last employer, not this role. |       |
| 39                        | Besides base pay, which parts of the package matter most to you?                                                                | What to emphasize later: bonus, flexibility, time off, benefits or development. Listen for priorities you can meet.                             |       |
| 40                        | Pay here is [structure, such as base plus commission or hourly plus shift differentials]. How does that structure sit with you? | Comfort with how pay works, not just how much. Listen for experience with a similar structure.                                                  |       |
| <b>Knockout questions</b> |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                 |       |
| 41                        | Do you hold [required license or certification], and is it current?                                                             | A hard requirement. Note the type, the issuer and the expiry date, and verify them later rather than taking them on trust.                      |       |
| 42                        | The role requires [nights, weekends or an on-call rotation]. Can you work that as described?                                    | A schedule requirement. Describe it exactly, so that a yes means yes.                                                                           |       |
| 43                        | This role needs hands-on experience with [must-have skill or system]. How much have you used it, and how recently?              | The real minimum, asked so that it can't be answered with a bare yes. Listen for how much and how recently.                                     |       |
| 44                        | The job involves driving to [sites]. Do you hold a valid driver's license?                                                      | Ask it only when driving is part of the job. A yes-or-no with nothing to interpret.                                                             |       |
| 45                        | Training runs full time from [start date] to [end date]. Can you attend all of it?                                              | A fixed commitment. Better to hear about a clash now than in the second week of training.                                                       |       |
| <b>Closing</b>            |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                 |       |
| 46                        | What questions do you have about the role or the team?                                                                          | Engagement and preparation. Thoughtful questions about the work are a good sign.                                                                |       |
| 47                        | Is there anything we haven't covered that the hiring manager should know?                                                       | A last chance to add something relevant. Write it down in their words.                                                                          |       |
| 48                        | On a scale of 1 to 10, how interested are you in this role right now, and what would make it a 10?                              | Interest, and the objection to work on. Listen for the gap, not the number.                                                                     |       |
| 49                        | The next steps are [steps and dates]. Does that timeline work for you?                                                          | Expectations on both sides. Listen for clashes with their other processes.                                                                      |       |

| #  | Question                                                                               | What it tells you                                                                               | Notes |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 50 | Is there anything that would stop you from moving to the next round if we invited you? | Last-minute blockers. Listen for anything that has changed since the start of the conversation. |       |