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The Interview

Psychology Sheet.

25 questions recruiters ask — and what they're really trying to find out.

Behaviour & Competency

Scope & Scale

Performance & Impact

Ownership & Judgement

Motivation & Fit

Most candidates prepare what to say. The ones who get hired understand what the interviewer is actually listening for. This sheet gives you the decoder — so you can stop guessing and start answering with intention.

HOW TO USE THIS

For each question, note what competency or signal the interviewer is reading for. Before your next interview, identify which of your real experiences provides the strongest evidence for that competency. Stop preparing scripts. Start preparing evidence.

01 — Behaviour & Competency

These are the classic competency questions. Most candidates tell a story. The interviewer is listening for evidence of a specific behaviour — not the drama.

QUESTION · WHAT TO THINK ABOUT	WHAT THEY'RE REALLY ASSESSING
<i>"Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult person."</i> THINK ABOUT Trigger event · your specific role · how you handled it · outcome	Conflict management, emotional maturity and communication. They want to see how you navigate tension without losing professionalism.
<i>"Tell me about a time you made a mistake."</i> THINK ABOUT The mistake · what you did when you realised · what changed after	Accountability, self-awareness and learning. A candidate who cannot name a real mistake raises flags. One who names it and shows growth stands out.
<i>"Tell me about a time you had to make a difficult decision."</i> THINK ABOUT The stakes · what options you had · why you chose what you did · outcome	Judgement, decision-making and ability to weigh risk and trade-offs under pressure.
<i>"Tell me about a time something did not go according to plan."</i> THINK ABOUT What broke down · your immediate response · how you adjusted · what you learned	Adaptability, problem-solving and composure. They are watching whether you freeze, blame others, or navigate.
<i>"Tell me about a time you received difficult feedback."</i> THINK ABOUT The feedback · your honest initial reaction · what you did with it · the outcome	Coachability, self-awareness and willingness to change. Nobody wants to manage someone who cannot hear criticism.

KEY INSIGHT

The interviewer is not necessarily interested in the story. They are listening for evidence of a particular behaviour. Lead with the behaviour — use the story to prove it.

02 — Scope & Scale

Candidates rarely think to quantify their experience. Numbers give interviewers context — and context is how they compare you to every other candidate they have seen.

QUESTION · WHAT TO THINK ABOUT	WHAT THEY'RE REALLY ASSESSING
<i>"How many people did you manage?"</i> THINK ABOUT Team size · direct vs indirect reports · their seniority · your actual authority	Management scope, complexity and seniority. Three people in a startup often means more than ten in a large corporate. Context matters as much as the number.

<i>"How many clients or accounts did you manage?"</i> THINK ABOUT Number of accounts · complexity of relationships · revenue or value where relevant	Portfolio size, workload and relationship-management complexity. They are calibrating how much pressure your experience was actually under.
<i>"How many projects were you working on at once?"</i> THINK ABOUT Volume · how you prioritised · tools or systems used · how you managed the pressure	Capacity, prioritisation and ability to manage competing demands simultaneously.
<i>"What was the size or value of the budget you managed?"</i> THINK ABOUT The number · what it covered · how you tracked it · decisions you made with it	Financial responsibility and commercial exposure. Even small budget ownership signals accountability.
<i>"How many customers, orders, cases or transactions did you handle?"</i> THINK ABOUT Daily or monthly volume · your specific role in that process · quality metrics alongside volume	Volume, pace and operational scale. They are building a picture of what your normal environment actually looked like.
KEY INSIGHT <i>They are using scale as a proxy for complexity. Do not just give the number. Give enough context to understand what that number meant in your specific environment.</i>	

03 — Performance & Impact

Most candidates describe what they did. Interviewers are measuring what changed because of it. Activity is table stakes — impact is what gets you hired.

QUESTION · WHAT TO THINK ABOUT	WHAT THEY'RE REALLY ASSESSING
<i>"What are you most proud of?"</i> THINK ABOUT Choose something real · explain why it mattered to you · quantify the impact if possible	What you consider a meaningful achievement and the kind of impact you believe you have had. Reveals your internal standard for what "good work" looks like.
<i>"What targets were you responsible for?"</i> THINK ABOUT The specific target · who set it · what it meant to hit or miss · your ownership of it	Your performance expectations and level of accountability. Were you responsible for outcomes or just activity?
<i>"Did you meet your targets?"</i> THINK ABOUT Be specific and honest · if you missed, explain why and what you did · trend matters as much as result	Consistency and credibility of performance. Honesty matters here — interviewers often already have context before asking.
<i>"How did you measure success in that role?"</i> THINK ABOUT The metrics used · who tracked them · whether you could directly influence them	Whether you understand outcomes rather than just activity. Do you know the difference between being busy and being effective?
<i>"What was the result?"</i> THINK ABOUT The specific outcome · what it changed · what happened next because of what you did	Whether your actions actually produced a meaningful outcome. Activity without impact is not evidence of performance.

KEY INSIGHT

Activity tells me what you did. Impact tells me why it mattered. For every achievement, ask yourself: so what? That answer is your impact statement.

04 — Ownership & Judgement

When an interviewer keeps asking "why?" they are trying to get past the action and understand your judgement. They are hiring the person who made the decision — not the decision itself.

QUESTION · WHAT TO THINK ABOUT	WHAT THEY'RE REALLY ASSESSING
<i>"What was your specific role in that project?"</i> THINK ABOUT Your title vs actual contribution · decisions only you made · what would have been different without you	Whether you actually owned meaningful work or were simply adjacent to a team that did. "We" answers raise this question. "I" answers answer it.
<i>"How did you decide what to do?"</i> THINK ABOUT What information you used · who you consulted · what you ruled out · how confident you were	Your reasoning and judgement. Process matters as much as outcome — especially in roles where decisions have consequences.



"What alternatives did you consider?"

THINK ABOUT

Options you genuinely weighed · why you rejected the others · the risk of each

Critical thinking and ability to evaluate trade-offs. Did you make a decision or just do the obvious thing?

"Tell me about a problem you had to solve."

THINK ABOUT

How you defined the problem · what you did to understand it · the solution · what it cost vs what it fixed

Your approach to diagnosing and resolving problems. They want to see your methodology — not just that you fixed it.

"What would you do differently now?"

THINK ABOUT

Something real · what changed your thinking · what you would change specifically · not "nothing"

Reflection, learning and the ability to improve. The best candidates can critique their own decisions without falling apart.

**KEY
INSIGHT**

The interviewer is drilling past the "what" to the "why." When they follow up with "and then what?" or "why that approach?" — they are mapping your judgement, not fact-checking your story.



05 — Motivation, Fit & Practical

Not every question is testing a competency. Some are risk assessments. Some are logistics. Knowing the difference stops you over-performing on questions that just need a clean, direct answer.

QUESTION · WHAT TO THINK ABOUT	WHAT THEY'RE REALLY ASSESSING
<i>"Why do you want this role?"</i> THINK ABOUT What specifically about this role · why now · how it connects to where you are headed	Whether the role genuinely fits your interests, experience and direction — or whether you are applying broadly and hoping something sticks.
<i>"Why do you want to work for us?"</i> THINK ABOUT Something real about the company · not what they list on their website · what you could not get elsewhere	Whether you have thought specifically about this company. A candidate who cannot say something specific signals low intent.
<i>"Why are you leaving your current role?"</i> THINK ABOUT Keep it professional · honest about direction without blaming · show what you are moving toward, not just away from	What motivates you to move — and whether the same issue could make you leave them in six months. A risk assessment dressed as a question.
<i>"What are your salary expectations?"</i> THINK ABOUT Research the market first · give a range not a single number · anchor to role value, not your current salary	Whether expectations align with what they can offer — and how you handle a commercially sensitive question under pressure.
<i>"What is your notice period and when can you start?"</i> THINK ABOUT Your actual notice period · any flexibility · projects to hand over · your genuine availability	Whether the practical timing of the hire works. This is logistics — but a messy answer creates doubt about your commitment.

KEY INSIGHT

These questions look like conversation. Some of them are risk assessment. "Why are you leaving?" is partly asking: "Could you leave us for the same reason?" Answer with where you are going — not just what you are leaving.



Your Evidence Bank.

Stop preparing answers. Start preparing evidence.

An interviewer can tell when you are reciting a prepared answer. What they cannot dismiss is a real example, told clearly, with a specific outcome. Before your next interview, build your evidence bank. When a question comes, you are not trying to remember a script — you are selecting the right evidence.

5 achievements	Specific outcomes you produced. Quantified where possible.
3 difficult situations	Times things went wrong and what you did about it.
3 mistakes or failures	Things you would do differently — with what you learned.
3 leadership moments	Times you influenced, led, or brought people together.
3 problem-solving stories	Problems you diagnosed and solved — with your reasoning visible.

YOUR KEY NUMBERS

Team size · budget managed · clients handled · targets set · volume of work · timeline of projects · revenue influenced. Know these before you walk in. You will be asked.

Have an interview coming up?

Knowing what the interviewer is asking is one thing. Knowing which parts of your experience will best answer it is another. Our interview playbooks walk you through how to build and deliver answers that land. Or book a private Interview Preparation Session with The Source International — one session, built around your specific role, your experience, and your next interview.

thesourceinternational.com