

Painter interview questions

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What to expect

Painter interviews for residential and commercial roles tend to mix practical trade questions with safety checks and a look at how you handle client-facing situations on site. Employers want to know you can deliver a consistent finish, work safely at height, and manage your time across multiple jobs or rooms without close supervision.

- **Technical/process:** Questions about surface preparation, coating selection and application methods for different substrates and finishes.
- **Safety:** Questions on working at heights, scaffolding setup and general WHS compliance on site.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking you to describe past situations, such as handling a difficult finish or a dissatisfied client, using specific examples.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd respond to problems like a colour mismatch discovered mid-job or a tight deadline.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about communicating with homeowners or site managers, managing expectations and handling complaints.

Expect a short discussion of your ticket and licence history (white card, any specific coating certifications), followed by process and technical questions, then one or two behavioural or scenario questions to see how you handle real-world problems. Site-based or trade interviews sometimes include a practical assessment or a walk-through of a sample job.

1. Walk me through how you'd prepare a previously painted interior wall with visible cracks and flaking paint before repainting.

Why they ask

This checks whether you understand proper substrate preparation, which affects the durability and appearance of the final coat.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step process: assessment of the surface, tools used at each stage, and the order of operations from cleaning through to priming.

Example answer

"First I'd inspect the wall to work out whether the flaking is a moisture issue or just age, since that changes the approach. I'd scrape back loose paint, sand the edges smooth so they don't show through the new coat, then fill any cracks with an appropriate filler and let it cure. Once that's sanded flush I'd wipe the wall down to remove dust, spot-prime the filled areas and bare patches, and only then move on to the finish coats. Skipping the priming step on filled areas is a common cause of flat spots showing through later, so I always check that before applying colour."

2. What's your process for setting up and working safely from scaffolding or elevated access equipment?

Why they ask

Working at height is a core safety risk in this trade, and employers need confidence you'll follow procedure without being told each time.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a safety checklist walk-through, covering setup, inspection and ongoing checks during the job.

Example answer

"Before I get on any scaffolding I check it's been tagged and signed off, and I do my own visual check of the base, ties and platform for anything that looks off. I make sure I've got the right footwear and that tools and paint are secured so nothing can fall. If I'm using a ladder for shorter jobs, I check the angle and footing on-site rather than assuming it's the same as the last job. I also keep an eye on weather, since wind changes how safe spray work at height can be, and I'll stop and reassess rather than push through."

3. Tell me about a time a client wasn't happy with a finish or colour result. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

Client satisfaction and callback rates matter directly to a painting business, so employers want evidence you can manage disputes professionally.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"On one job the client felt the feature wall colour looked different to the sample they'd approved, once it was up on the full wall. The situation was tense because they'd already had friends around to see it. My task was to work out whether it was a genuine mismatch or a lighting effect, and fix it either way. I brought the original sample chip into the room at different times of day to compare, and it turned out the colour was accurate but looked different under their downlights than it had in the showroom. I explained this clearly, offered to test an alternative shade at no extra charge if they preferred, and they ended up keeping the original once they saw it in daylight. They were satisfied and referred a neighbour to us afterwards."

4. If you were halfway through spraying a large wall and noticed the batch of paint didn't quite match the colour used lower down, what would you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you'll cut corners to save time when quality is on the line.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a judgement scenario: identify the risk, weigh the options, state the decision and the reasoning.

Example answer

"I'd stop straight away rather than keep going and hope it blends, because dried mismatched paint is much harder to fix than pausing the job. I'd check the batch numbers on both tins first, since that's often the simple explanation. If it doesn't match, I'd remix using a sample from the section already applied, or order the same batch number if there's time. I'd rather explain a short delay to the site supervisor than hand over a wall with a visible colour line, since that reflects on the quality of the whole job."

5. How do you decide between brush, roller and spray application for a given job?

Why they ask

This is a core technical decision that affects finish quality, speed and material cost, and shows how much practical experience you actually have.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a decision framework, explaining the factors you weigh before choosing a method.

Example answer

"It comes down to the surface, the finish required and the site conditions. For cut-in work around trims and corners I'll always use a brush for control. Large flat wall or ceiling areas go faster with a roller and give a consistent texture. Spray is best for large runs where speed matters and overspray can be contained, like a new build before flooring goes down, but I'm careful about masking and wind if it's outdoors. On a fit-out with a lot of fine joinery, I'd lean more on brush work even though it's slower, because the finish quality matters more there than speed."

6. How do you manage your workload when you've got several rooms or jobs on at once with a tight handover date?

Why they ask

Painters often work to builder or client deadlines with limited supervision, so this checks planning and reliability.

How to structure your answer

Answer with a brief example showing how you sequence and prioritise work, similar to a mini STAR.

Example answer

"I usually plan backwards from the handover date and work out which rooms need the most drying time between coats, so those go first. On a recent renovation with four rooms and a hard handover date, I started the wet areas first since they needed an extra coat for moisture resistance, and left the simpler rooms for the final two days when I had more flexibility. I checked in with the site supervisor midway through to flag that one room's plaster wasn't fully cured yet, rather than painting over it and risking a poor finish. We still hit the handover date because I'd built in that buffer early."