

Recruiter interview questions

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What to expect

Recruiter interviews test whether you can actually run a hiring process end to end, not just talk about people skills. Expect a mix of past-experience questions, live scenarios and practical questions about tools and metrics, often with a panel that includes a hiring manager or team lead alongside HR.

- **Behavioural:** Past examples of sourcing, screening or closing a difficult placement, used to check your actual process and judgement under real conditions.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical situations, such as a counter-offer or an unhappy hiring manager, to see how you'd handle pressure and conflicting interests in real time.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about managing hiring manager or client expectations, since recruiters sit between candidates and internal or external clients.
- **Technical/process:** Questions about the tools, metrics and pipeline management you'd use day to day, such as ATS use and time-to-fill tracking.

Most recruiter interviews start with a phone or video screen focused on your recruitment background and reason for moving, followed by a longer interview or panel round with a hiring manager or team lead that mixes behavioural questions with a live scenario or role-play, often a mock negotiation or a difficult stakeholder conversation.

1. Tell me about a time you successfully filled a role that was proving hard to source for.

Why they ask

Checks whether you have a genuine sourcing strategy beyond posting a job ad, and whether you can push through a slow pipeline.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the role and why it was hard to fill, the sourcing actions you took, and the outcome including how long it took or how the hire performed.

Example answer

"I was briefed on a technical role that had been open for six weeks with almost no applicants through the job board. I switched approach and used LinkedIn Recruiter to build a targeted list of people already in similar roles, then reached out directly rather than waiting for inbound applications. I also asked the hiring manager to loosen one non-essential requirement that was narrowing the pool unnecessarily. Within a few weeks I had three candidates through initial screening, and the client made an offer to one of them that was accepted."

2. Walk me through how you'd build a candidate pipeline from scratch for a new client or a role with no existing applicants.

Why they ask

Tests your practical process for sourcing, not just which tools you know the names of.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: describe the sequence of steps from briefing to shortlist, naming the specific tools or channels you'd use at each stage.

Example answer

"I'd start with a proper briefing with the hiring manager to understand the must-haves versus nice-to-haves, since a lot of pipeline problems come from a vague brief. Then I'd search LinkedIn Recruiter and any existing ATS database for near matches, post on relevant job boards, and tap my

own network or referrals if the role is niche. I'd track everyone who enters the pipeline in the ATS so nothing falls through, and review progress against a rough timeline with the client weekly."

3. A candidate you're about to place tells you they've received a counter-offer from their current employer. What do you do?

Why they ask

A common real scenario that tests negotiation skill and whether you can keep a deal together under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state your immediate response, the questions you'd ask to understand their real motivation, and how you'd balance the candidate's interests against the client's timeline.

Example answer

"I'd ask what's actually changed for them: is it purely the money, or does the counter-offer address something deeper like career progression or workload that a pay rise won't fix long term. I'd remind them why they started looking in the first place, but without pressuring them, since a candidate talked into staying against their instincts often leaves within months anyway. If money is the gap, I'd go back to the client to see if there's flexibility, but I'd also be upfront with the client early rather than let them find out at offer stage."

4. How do you handle a hiring manager who keeps rejecting candidates but can't clearly explain what they're looking for?

Why they ask

Recruiters constantly manage stakeholders whose requirements are unclear or shifting, so this tests your ability to push back constructively.

How to structure your answer

STAR, focused on the conversation you had to clarify requirements and the change in outcome that followed.

Example answer

"I had a hiring manager rejecting several strong candidates with vague feedback like 'not quite right.' I asked them to walk me through exactly what they liked and disliked about each one, and it turned out the real issue was communication style rather than the skills on the resume. Once I understood that, I adjusted my screening questions to test for it directly, and the next two candidates I put forward were both progressed to offer stage."

5. A client is unhappy with the shortlist you've sent through. How do you handle that conversation?

Why they ask

Directly tests client relationship management, a core part of the role's account management responsibilities.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: describe how you'd respond in the moment, what you'd ask to understand the real concern, and how you'd adjust the process going forward.

Example answer

"I'd start by listening properly rather than getting defensive, since 'unhappy with the shortlist' usually means the brief and the candidates don't match on something specific. I'd ask which candidates missed the mark and why, then go back to my sourcing criteria and adjust. If the issue is more about expectations than the candidates themselves, like salary range being unrealistic for the market, I'd raise that directly with data rather than just trying to find more candidates who don't exist."

6. What tools have you used to manage your recruitment pipeline and report on hiring metrics like time-to-fill?

Why they ask

A practical question to confirm hands-on experience with the systems recruiters use daily, not just familiarity with recruitment theory.

How to structure your answer

Straightforward technical answer: name the specific tools you've used and what you actually did in them.

Example answer

"I've used an ATS to log every candidate against a role and track their stage in the pipeline, which is essential once you're juggling more than a couple of roles at once. For reporting, I've pulled data into Excel to track time-to-fill and source-of-hire by channel, so I can show clients where their best candidates are actually coming from rather than guessing. I've also used LinkedIn Recruiter's own reporting to check response rates on outreach messages and adjust my approach when they're low."