

Interview preparation workbook

The method, the machinery, and the six stories you will be asked for — with space to build them. Print it and write in it.

Reading is not the skill. Saying is the skill. Everything here is designed to get answers out of your mouth before the day, because the distance between knowing what a good answer contains and being able to produce one under pressure is exactly where interviews are lost.

THE METHOD

Two rooms. Almost nobody does the second one.

- 1** The empty room — say it out loud, alone
Wherever you are: a kitchen, a car, a walk. Take a question and answer it aloud, in your own words, without looking at the page after the first go. It will come out wrong the first time — you will waffle, lose the thread, reach for a word that is not there. That is the point. The empty room is where you find out that the answer you understood perfectly falls apart the moment it has to leave your mouth, and where you fix it for free with nobody watching.
- 2** The second room — say it to a person
Get a friend, a colleague, an ex-manager, anyone, and have them ask you the questions. It does not matter that they are not a security expert; most interviewers are not experts in your specific answer either. What matters is that a human is now across from you — someone who might interrupt, follow up, pull a face, ask what you mean. Ask them to be a little difficult, and to tell you afterwards not whether the answer was right, but whether you sounded like someone they would want to work with.

Say it alone until it is smooth. Say it to someone until it survives contact.

THE MACHINERY

Four stages, four different assessments. Never give the same interview twice in one process.

Recruiter screen In-house talent team, or an external specialist.

Assessing: Basic fit, salary alignment, and whether you are broadly who the CV claims.

Pitch: A filter, not an assessment. Pass it without underselling yourself on money.

Hiring manager The person who will actually manage you.

Assessing: Whether you can do the job, and whether they want you in their team.

Pitch: Competency and motivation questions cluster here. This is where your stories earn their keep.

Technical stage A panel, a live exercise, a take-home task, or a combination.

Assessing: Domain depth, and how you reason when you reach the edge of what you know.

Pitch: Depth beats breadth. One question answered to root cause outperforms ten recited.

Final stage A stakeholder, a skip-level manager, or a wider panel.

Assessing: Judgement, culture, and how you would represent the function.

Pitch: Common for senior or regulated roles. Pitch upward: outcomes, not tooling.

WHICH STAGE IS NEXT FOR ME

DATE AND FORMAT

YOUR STORY BANK

Six stories cover most of what a UK panel asks. Draft them once, use them for years. Specific beats impressive.

1 Working under pressure

An incident, a deadline, or a queue that would not stop. What you did when it mattered.

Interviewers are checking you stay methodical rather than heroic, and that you know when to escalate.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

2 Escalating well

A time you raised something upward — and ideally one where you were ignored and had to persist.

This separates people who own outcomes from people who own tasks. Escalating is not passing the buck.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

3 Explaining something technical to a non-technical audience

A board, a client, a manager, a colleague in finance. What you changed about how you said it.

Almost every UK security role is judged on this, and almost nobody prepares an example for it.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

4 Being wrong, and what you did about it

A judgement call that turned out badly, or a finding you got wrong.

The tell is whether you name the mistake plainly. Defensive answers fail here; so do fake ones.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

5 Disagreeing with someone senior

An auditor, an architect, a manager. How you made the case and what happened.

They are testing whether you can hold a position without making it personal.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

6 Learning something quickly

A tool, a domain, a system you had to be useful in fast.

For career changers this is the single most valuable story you own. Make it specific and recent.

SITUATION AND TASK

WHAT YOU DID

OUTCOME, WITH A NUMBER IF ONE EXISTS

WHAT YOU ASK THEM

Your due diligence, and the part most candidates waste. Tick three to five, and know why you are asking each.

ABOUT THE ROLE ITSELF

- ☐ What does a typical week look like for whoever is in this role?
 - ☐ What would a successful first six months look like to you?
 - ☐ Why is the role open — growth, backfill, or a new function?
 - ☐ Which part of this job do people find hardest?
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ABOUT THE TEAM AND THE WORK

- ☐ How is the security function structured, and where does this role sit in it?
 - ☐ How much of the work is reactive versus planned, roughly?
 - ☐ Who does this role work with most outside the security team?
 - ☐ What is the on-call or shift pattern, honestly?
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ABOUT MATURITY AND REALITY

- ☐ Where would you say the security programme is most mature, and least?
 - ☐ What happened at the last significant incident, and what changed afterwards?
 - ☐ How are security decisions escalated when the business disagrees?
 - ☐ What tooling is in place, and what is on the roadmap to replace?
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ABOUT YOU, IN IT

- ☐ What does progression from this role usually look like?
 - ☐ Is there budget and time for certifications and training?
 - ☐ What would make you regret hiring someone into this role?
 - ☐ Is there anything in my background you would want reassurance on?
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THE CHECKLIST

Once the work above is done, this is what is left.

THE WEEK BEFORE

Groundwork. Most of the value is here, not on the day.

- ☐ Research the organisation properly: what it does, how it makes money, any recent security or regulatory news
 - ☐ Find the people you will meet on LinkedIn and understand their backgrounds
 - ☐ Re-read the job specification and map your evidence to its first three requirements
 - ☐ Work the relevant technical section of the bank, plus the adjacent one — real interviews cross boundaries
 - ☐ Prepare and rehearse aloud four or five competency examples, structured, with outcomes and numbers
 - ☐ If it is a Success Profiles interview, identify the named behaviours and prepare an evidenced example for each
 - ☐ Prepare one current vulnerability or development you can discuss a level below the headline
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- ☐ Choose three to five questions to ask them, and know why you are asking each
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THE DAY BEFORE

Confirmation and rest. Resist the urge to cram.

- ☐ Confirm the time, the format, and whether it is in person or remote
 - ☐ Test the technology if it is remote: camera, microphone, the platform itself
 - ☐ Re-read your own CV and be ready to speak to every line on it
 - ☐ Re-read your strongest two or three prepared examples — do not attempt to memorise them word for word
 - ☐ Plan the journey, or the room you will sit in, and give yourself margin
 - ☐ Stop preparing at a sensible hour. Tired outperforms over-prepared.
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THE HOUR BEFORE

Logistics and settling. Nothing new goes in now.

- ☐ Arrive or log in early enough that you are not rushing
 - ☐ Have water, your CV, the job specification and your questions in front of you
 - ☐ Remind yourself of the four or five stories you intend to land, not the whole bank
 - ☐ Remember the two habits that carry every technical answer: think out loud, and mark clearly where your certainty ends
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IN THE ROOM

Habits, not facts. These are what interviewers actually score.

- ☐ Listen to the whole question before answering, and ask for clarification where it is genuinely ambiguous
 - ☐ Narrate your reasoning rather than delivering conclusions from silence
 - ☐ When you reach the edge of what you know, say so plainly and reason from there — never bluff, particularly on cryptography
 - ☐ Give specific examples with outcomes, not general claims about how you always work
 - ☐ Ask your questions, and listen to the answers as your own due diligence
 - ☐ If an earlier answer landed badly, use the closing moments to put it right — one sentence is allowed, expected, and occasionally decisive
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AFTERWARDS

Ten minutes now saves an hour before the next one.

- ☐ Write down the questions you were asked while they are fresh — they are the best preparation material you will ever get
 - ☐ Note anything you answered poorly and work out what the better answer was
 - ☐ Send a brief thank-you note if it feels natural; keep it short and specific
 - ☐ Whatever the outcome, the notes make the next interview better. Most people skip this step, which is precisely why it compounds.
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THE ONE-PAGER

PRINT ONE OF THESE PER INTERVIEW — THIS IS THE SHEET YOU TAKE IN

Everything above is preparation. This is the single page you have in front of you on the day, and the only page you should be looking at. Fill it in the night before, when you have stopped preparing.

ORGANISATION

ROLE

DATE, TIME, FORMAT

STAGE — AND WHAT IT ASSESSES

WHO IS IN THE ROOM, AND THEIR BACKGROUND

WHAT THEY DO, AND HOW THEY MAKE MONEY

THE THREE STORIES I WILL LEAD WITH, AND WHICH REQUIREMENT EACH ONE ANSWERS

1

2

3

THE WEAK SPOT I EXPECT TO BE PROBED ON, AND MY ONE HONEST LINE ABOUT IT

MY SALARY NUMBER

MY FLOOR, AND WHAT I TRADE FOR IT

THE FIVE QUESTIONS I AM ASKING THEM

NOTES DURING — QUESTIONS ASKED, NAMES, ANYTHING TO FOLLOW UP

DEBRIEF

Fill this in within an hour of walking out, every time.

ROLE AND ORGANISATION

DATE AND STAGE

QUESTIONS I WAS ASKED THAT I HAD NOT PREPARED FOR

THE ANSWER I WAS LEAST HAPPY WITH, AND WHAT THE BETTER ANSWER IS

WHAT I WILL DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME

The questions themselves are free too.

275 real UK cybersecurity interview questions, searchable by domain and level, each with what the panel is actually assessing.

ronanblake.co.uk/questionbank

Drawn from The Honest Guide to UK Cybersecurity Interviews, Sections 1, 2 and 5, and Appendix C.