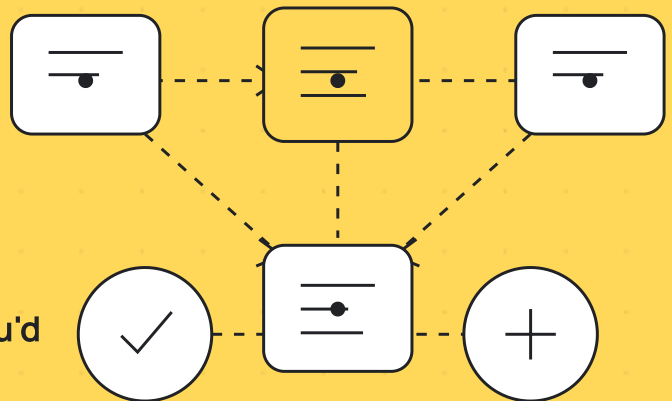


INTERVIEW PLAYBOOK / BEHAVIOURAL

Behavioural Interview Playbook

They're won by answers that survive follow-ups about what you actually decided, what went wrong, and what you'd do differently.

for engineers of any stack • 2-8 yrs • hiring-manager & behavioural rounds



THE PREMISE

You rarely lose the round on the first answer.
You lose it when the interviewer asks *why*,
what failed, and *what did you personally do?*

60

QUESTIONS

200+

FOLLOW-UPS

10

MODULES

60

FRAMEWORKS

60

REJECTION SIGNALS

10

DRILLS

What's inside this sample

One flagship question from eight different rounds — the complete weak-answer teardown, follow-ups and answer framework for each, exactly as they appear in the full playbook.

01	Why are you looking to leave your current role? Tell me about yourself · Q1.2	p. 3
02	Tell me about a conflict you handled badly. Conflict · Q2.3	p. 4
03	Tell me about a bug or an outage you caused in production. Failure · Q3.3	p. 5
04	Tell me about a time you had to deliver bad news to a stakeholder - a slip, a cut, or a problem. Stakeholder management · Q6.4	p. 6
05	Tell me about a time a senior person was dismissive of your input or blocked your work. Difficult teammate · Q7.5	p. 7
06	What's your greatest weakness? Why should we hire you · Q9.4	p. 8
07	The offer is ₹X. Is that acceptable to you? (counter-offer moment) Salary negotiation · Q10.2	p. 9
08	We can't move on base salary - this is our final number. How do you respond? Salary negotiation · Q10.5	p. 10

Q1.2

Why are you looking to leave your current role?

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS Whether your reason is a considered pull toward something, not just a bitter push away - and whether you badmouth your employer.

! WEAK ANSWER

"Honestly my current company is a bit of a mess. Management keeps changing priorities, the codebase is a nightmare, and I'm underpaid for what I do. I just need to get out and find somewhere better."

WHY IT FAILS

- * Entirely push, no pull - nothing you're moving toward.
- * Badmouths the employer, which reads as how you'll talk about them later.
- * "Underpaid" as the headline reason signals money-only motivation.
- * No self-reflection on your own part in the situation.
- * Gives the interviewer nothing about what you actually want.

L FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1 REFLECTION

What would need to change for you to stay?

Whether the problem is fixable or a genuine ceiling.

2 OWNERSHIP

What are you moving TOWARD, not just away from?

A pull motivation, not just grievance.

3 TECHNICAL

Have you tried to change any of that from the inside?

Agency vs passive complaint.

4 MEASUREMENT

What did you actually get out of your time there?

Ability to stay fair about a job you're leaving.

→ ANSWER FRAMEWORK

- 1 One fair sentence on the current role →
- 2 What you've gained / are grateful for →
- 3 The specific ceiling you've hit →
- 4 What you want next that they can't offer →
- 5 Why this role provides exactly that →
- 6 No badmouthing.

✗ REJECTION SIGNALS

- * Only complaints, no forward pull.
- * Badmouths people or the company.
- * Money is the sole stated reason.
- * No acknowledgement of anything learned there.

✓ MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- I've had a good run at my current company - it's where I grew from mid to senior and where I learned to own a service end to end, and I'd genuinely recommend it.
- The honest reason I'm looking is a scale ceiling: we serve a regional market, our traffic has plateaued, and the hard distributed-systems problems I want to work on just don't come up any more because the load doesn't demand them.
- I tried to create that challenge internally - I pushed for us to consolidate a couple of services and take on more traffic - but the business direction is deliberately steady-state, which is fine, it's just not where I want to spend the next few years.
- I want to work somewhere the scale forces those problems, and that's specifically why your platform interests me.
- It's a pull, not an escape.

Q2.3

Tell me about a conflict you handled badly.

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS Self-awareness - whether you can own a time your own behaviour made a conflict worse, rather than dressing up a success as a failure.

! WEAK ANSWER

"Hmm, I can't really think of one where I handled it badly. I'm pretty easy-going and I don't really get into conflicts. If anything I'm too accommodating, so any conflicts usually resolve themselves."

WHY IT FAILS

- * Dodges the question - "I don't get into conflicts" is not believable for an experienced engineer.
- * "Too accommodating" is the humble-brag weakness in disguise.
- * No self-awareness about any real misstep.
- * Signals either no reflection or an unwillingness to be honest.

L FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1 OWNERSHIP

Everyone's mishandled one - what's the closest you've come?

Willingness to be honest about a real flaw.

2 REFLECTION

What did you do or say that you regret?

Concrete self-critique.

3 MEASUREMENT

What was the actual cost of handling it that way?

Honest about consequences.

4 TECHNICAL

What do you do differently now because of it?

A behaviour change, not just remorse.

→ ANSWER FRAMEWORK

1 The conflict

→ 2 What you actually did wrong

→ 3 Your honest role in escalating it

→ 4 The cost (relationship, delivery, trust)

5 How it was eventually repaired

→ 6 What specifically changed in your behaviour

→ 7 Evidence the change stuck.

x REJECTION SIGNALS

- * Claims to have never mishandled conflict.
- * Reframes a win as the "badly handled" story.
- * Blames the other person even in a story about their own failure.
- * No behaviour change resulted.

✓ MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- Early on I handled one badly. A colleague kept approving PRs that I thought lowered our test quality, and instead of talking to him, I started leaving pointed public comments on his reviews - technically correct, but I was clearly scoring points.
- It escalated: he got defensive, our reviews turned into a slow tit-for-tat, and a feature slipped by about a week because we were bottlenecking each other.
- What I did wrong was making it public and making it about being right rather than fixing the actual standard. It got repaired when a senior pulled us both aside and I realised I'd been the aggressor; I apologised directly and we agreed on a written testing bar so it wasn't personal opinion any more.
- What changed is that I now raise this kind of thing in a private message first and push for a written standard rather than litigating case by case.
- I've caught myself about to do the public thing since and stopped - that's how I know it stuck.

Q3.3

Tell me about a bug or an outage you caused in production.

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS Whether you own a mistake with real blast radius, how you responded under pressure, and whether you fixed the class of problem, not just the instance.

! WEAK ANSWER

"There was an outage once but it wasn't really down to me specifically - the deploy process was fragile and there weren't enough safeguards in place. I pushed a change and something broke, but honestly the system should have caught it before it went out."

WHY IT FAILS

- * Immediately deflects to "the process", not their change.
- * "Not really down to me" despite having pushed the change.
- * No account of how they responded during the incident.
- * Blames the safeguards rather than owning the mistake AND improving the safeguards.
- * No lesson beyond "the system should have caught it".

L FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1

TECHNICAL

You pushed the change - what exactly did it do wrong?

Owning the actual mistake.

2

OWNERSHIP

What did you do in the first ten minutes once it broke?

Incident response under pressure.

3

MEASUREMENT

How many users or how much revenue did it affect?

Honest about blast radius.

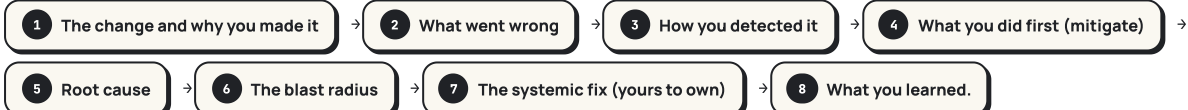
4

REFLECTION

What did you change so this class of bug can't recur?

Systemic fix, not just a patch.

→ ANSWER FRAMEWORK



× REJECTION SIGNALS

- * Blames the process instead of owning the change.
- * No mitigation story - just "someone rolled it back".
- * Downplays or won't quantify the impact.
- * Fixed only the instance, added no guardrail.

✓ MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- I once took down checkout for about 20 minutes. I shipped a migration that added a NOT NULL column with a default to a large table, and I didn't realise on our Postgres version it would rewrite the whole table and hold a lock - checkout writes queued up and timed out.
- I caught it fast because I watched the deploy and saw the error rate spike within a minute.
- My first move was to mitigate, not diagnose: I rolled the migration back immediately, which released the lock and recovered checkout, and only then dug into why. Blast radius was roughly 20 minutes of failed checkouts, a real revenue hit I didn't try to minimise in the postmortem.
- The systemic fix I drove was adding a check to our migration tooling that flags table-rewriting operations and forces them into a safe expand/contract pattern, so no one - including future me - can do this by accident.
- What I learned is to treat schema changes on big tables as inherently dangerous and always ask 'does this rewrite the table' before shipping.

Q6.4

Tell me about a time you had to deliver bad news to a stakeholder - a slip, a cut, or a problem.

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS Whether you communicate bad news early, honestly, and with a plan - versus hiding it, sugar-coating it, or dropping it as a last-minute surprise.

! WEAK ANSWER

"When a project was running late, I waited until I was sure of the new timeline before telling anyone, so I wouldn't cause unnecessary alarm. When I did tell them, I kept it brief and reassuring. I don't like to worry stakeholders prematurely."

WHY IT FAILS

- ✗ "Waited until I was sure" often means the stakeholder lost time to react.
- ✗ "So I wouldn't cause alarm" rationalises delayed communication.
- ✗ "Brief and reassuring" can mean under-disclosing the real problem.
- ✗ No plan or options offered alongside the news.
- ✗ Prioritises the candidate's comfort over the stakeholder's ability to adjust.

L FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1 OWNERSHIP

When did you first suspect the slip, versus when you told them?

Early warning vs a comfortable delay.

2 TECHNICAL

Did you bring options, or just the bad news?

News with a plan vs a problem dumped.

3 MEASUREMENT

How did the stakeholder react, and what did they do with the news?

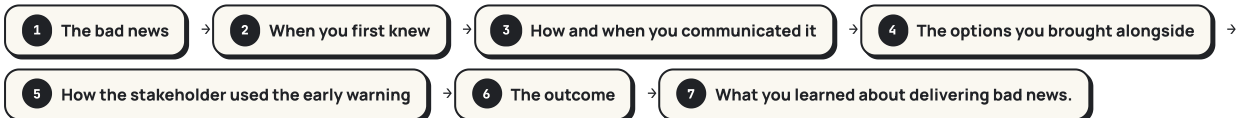
Whether early news let them adjust.

4 REFLECTION

What would sitting on it longer have cost them?

Understanding the cost of delay.

→ ANSWER FRAMEWORK



✗ REJECTION SIGNALS

- ✗ Delays news for their own comfort.
- ✗ Sugar-coats or under-discloses.
- ✗ Brings the problem with no options.
- ✗ Surprises the stakeholder at the deadline.

✓ MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- About a week into a three-week build I realised a third-party dependency we'd assumed was ready was actually months from stable, which put the whole date at risk. My instinct to look competent said wait until I had a full replan - but sitting on it would only shrink the stakeholder's options.
- So I told the product owner the same day, framed as 'here's a risk and here are three ways forward', not 'we're doomed'.
- The options were: swap to a different provider (adds a week), build a temporary shim ourselves (adds three days, some tech debt), or descope the feature that needed it. Because I flagged it early, she had room to take it to her stakeholders and chose the shim, and we hit a date only three days later than original instead of blowing it by weeks.
- Had I waited until I was 'sure', that choice wouldn't have existed.
- What I learned is that stakeholders forgive an early, honest 'here's a problem and options' far more than a late, tidy surprise.

Q7.5

Tell me about a time a senior person was dismissive of your input or blocked your work.

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS

Whether you can advocate for your ideas against seniority with composure and evidence, without either backing down entirely or turning it into a fight.

WEAK ANSWER

"A senior engineer kept shutting down my ideas in meetings, probably because I was more junior. It was demoralising. I mostly stopped sharing ideas with him and just went to other people instead, since he clearly wasn't interested in what I had to say."

WHY IT FAILS

- * Assumes the motive ("because I was junior") without checking.
- * "Stopped sharing ideas with him" is disengagement, not advocacy.
- * Routes around the person rather than addressing it.
- * No attempt to make the ideas land better.
- * Ends demoralised and avoidant, with no growth.

FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1

REFLECTION

Did you check whether it was really about seniority, or something else?

Checking assumptions about motive.

2

TECHNICAL

How did you try to make your input harder to dismiss?

Strengthening the case vs giving up.

3

OWNERSHIP

Did you address it with him directly?

Confronting vs avoiding.

4

MEASUREMENT

What changed - did you ever get through?

An outcome.



ANSWER FRAMEWORK

1

The situation

→

2

Whether you checked the real reason

→

3

How you strengthened your input to be harder to dismiss

→

4

How you raised it directly

→

5

How it shifted

→

6

The outcome

→

7

What you learned about advocating upward.



REJECTION SIGNALS

- * Assumes motive, disengages.
- * Routes around rather than addressing.
- * No attempt to improve how ideas were presented.
- * Ends in avoidance.



MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- A staff engineer repeatedly waved off my suggestions in design reviews, and my first read was 'he doesn't rate juniors'. Before deciding that, I paid attention to what he DID engage with, and I noticed he only took ideas seriously when they came with data or a prototype - my suggestions were verbal and hand-wavy by comparison, so they were easy to dismiss.
- So rather than disengage, I changed how I brought ideas: for the next proposal I built a small benchmark showing my approach halved p99 latency and brought the numbers to the review.
- He engaged seriously with it and we adopted it. Later I also told him directly, lightly, that his quick dismissals in the room sometimes shut down ideas before they were fully formed, and he actually took that on board.
- The outcome was that I got through, and we ended up on good terms.
- What I learned is to test my assumption about someone's motive before acting on it, and that the fix for 'not being heard' is often to make the idea impossible to wave off rather than to stop talking.

Q9.4

What's your greatest weakness?

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS Self-awareness and honesty - whether you can name a real weakness and show active work on it, rather than a disguised strength or a throwaway.

! WEAK ANSWER

"My greatest weakness is probably that I'm a perfectionist - I care too much about getting things exactly right, so sometimes I spend too long polishing. But I'm working on being okay with 'good enough'. I guess I just have high standards."

WHY IT FAILS

- * "Perfectionist" is the most transparent fake weakness there is.
- * Framed as a strength in disguise ("high standards").
- * No real cost or example.
- * "Working on it" is generic with no concrete action.
- * Reads as evasive - refuses to expose a genuine flaw.

L FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1

OWNERSHIP

That's a humble-brag - what's a weakness that's actually cost you?

Willingness to name a real flaw.

2

MEASUREMENT

Give me a specific time it caused a problem.

A concrete cost.

3

TECHNICAL

What concretely are you doing about it?

Active mitigation vs 'working on it'.

4

REFLECTION

How do you know it's improving?

Evidence of change.

→ ANSWER FRAMEWORK

1

A genuine weakness

→

2

A specific time it cost something

→

3

Why it's a real limitation

→

4

The concrete steps you're taking

→

5

How you check it's improving

→

6

How you contain it in the meantime.

× REJECTION SIGNALS

- * Disguised strength ("perfectionist", "work too hard").
- * No real cost or example.
- * Vague "working on it".
- * No evidence of improvement.

✓ MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- A real one: I've tended to under-communicate when I'm heads-down on a hard problem - I go quiet for a day or two because I'm absorbed, and it leaves people guessing about status. It cost me concretely once: I was deep in debugging a nasty issue and didn't update my PM, who then got blindsided in her own stakeholder meeting because she thought we were on track and we weren't.
- That's a genuine limitation, not a humble-brag - silence isn't a virtue.
- What I'm concretely doing is a standing rule for myself: end-of-day status even when there's nothing pretty to report, especially a 'still stuck on X, here's where I am'.
- I check it's working by asking my PM directly whether she feels in the loop, and she's said the difference is noticeable.
- In the meantime I contain it by defaulting to over-communicating when a task is at risk, which is the exact moment I used to go dark.

Q10.2

The offer is ₹X. Is that acceptable to you? (counter-offer moment)

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS

Whether you can counter professionally with a data-backed anchor and justification, rather than accepting immediately or countering with an arbitrary number.

! WEAK ANSWER

"Oh, that sounds great, thank you so much! Yes, that works for me, I'm really happy with that. I'm just excited to join, so wherever you land is fine - I don't want to be difficult about the money."

WHY IT FAILS

- * Accepts instantly, leaving likely money on the table.
- * "Wherever you land is fine" abandons all negotiating position.
- * "Don't want to be difficult" treats normal negotiation as rudeness.
- * No counter, no data, no attempt to improve the offer.
- * Signals the candidate can be underpaid without pushback.

L FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1 MEASUREMENT

You didn't counter at all - what's the cost of accepting on the spot?

Understanding the value left on the table.

2 TECHNICAL

How would you counter with a number that isn't arbitrary?

A data-anchored, justified counter.

3 TRADEOFF

What if they say the base is fixed?

Negotiating other levers.

4 OWNERSHIP

How do you counter without souring the relationship?

Collaborative, non-adversarial framing.

→ ANSWER FRAMEWORK

1 Warm thanks and genuine enthusiasm

→ 2 Ask for time to consider (don't accept on the spot) →

3 Counter with a specific number anchored on data

→ 4 Justify it with your value and market evidence →

5 Signal flexibility across the package

→ 6 Keep it collaborative and forward-looking

→ 7 Confirm you want to make it work.

✗ REJECTION SIGNALS

- * Accepts immediately.
- * No counter or justification.
- * Treats negotiating as being difficult.
- * Anchors the counter on nothing.

✓ MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- I'd never accept on the spot, however good it feels. I'd say: 'Thank you, I'm genuinely excited about this and I want to make it work.'
- Could I take a day to review the full package?' Then I'd come back with a data-anchored counter, not a number from the air: 'I've looked at levels.fyi and Blind for this level and location, and comparable roles are landing around ₹X+15%.'
- Given the payments-reliability experience I'd bring straight in - the re-architecture that took a 2% failure rate to zero at 5x load - I was hoping we could get the base to ₹Y.' I anchor with the market data first, then justify with specific value.
- If they say base is capped, I pivot to other levers rather than digging in - sign-on bonus, equity, or an earlier review.
- And I keep it warm throughout: 'I want to join, I'm just trying to get this right for both of us.' The point is a justified counter almost always nets more and rarely costs you the offer if it's reasonable and well-framed.

Q10.5

We can't move on base salary - this is our final number. How do you respond?

WHAT IT REALLY TESTS Whether you can negotiate the whole package creatively when one lever is stuck, rather than caving immediately or fixating only on base.

! WEAK ANSWER

"Oh okay, if the base is fixed then I understand, I'll just take it as it is. I don't want to push too hard and risk the offer. The base is the main thing anyway, so if that can't move then that's fine, I accept."

WHY IT FAILS

- * Caves the moment one lever is declined.
- * "Base is the main thing anyway" ignores the rest of the package.
- * "Don't want to risk the offer" - a reasonable ask on other levers rarely risks it.
- * Explores none of the other negotiable components.
- * Leaves total compensation value unclaimed.

L FOLLOW-UP LADDER

1 TECHNICAL

Base is one lever - what else is negotiable?

Knowing the full package (sign-on, equity, review, etc.).

2 TRADEOFF

How do you test whether 'final' is really final?

Politely probing without brinkmanship.

3 REFLECTION

Which non-base lever is worth most to you, and why?

Prioritising the whole package to your situation.

4 OWNERSHIP

How do you ask without seeming to disregard their 'no'?

Respecting the constraint while still negotiating.

→ ANSWER FRAMEWORK

1 Acknowledge and respect the base constraint →

2 Pivot to other levers (sign-on, equity, review timing, start date, title, PTO, remote, learning budget) →

3 Prioritise the lever that matters most to you →

4 Ask specifically and reasonably →

5 Frame it as making the total work →

6 Confirm your enthusiasm regardless →

7 Get any agreement in writing.

× REJECTION SIGNALS

- * Caves instantly.
- * Fixates on base, ignores the package.
- * Explores no alternative levers.
- * Treats any further ask as too risky.

✓ MODEL ANSWER SKELETON

- I'd respect the constraint but not treat 'base is fixed' as 'the negotiation's over': 'That's completely fair, I understand base is capped at this level - could we look at the rest of the package instead?' Then I pivot to the levers that ARE usually movable: a sign-on bonus to bridge the gap, a larger equity grant, or an accelerated performance review at six months to revisit base. I'd prioritise based on my situation - if I trust the company's trajectory I'll push on equity; if I want certainty I'll push on sign-on or the early review.
- I ask specifically and reasonably - 'would a ₹1L sign-on be possible to close the gap?' - rather than vaguely.
- I frame it as making the total work for both of us, and I make clear I'm enthusiastic either way so it never sounds like an ultimatum.
- And whatever we agree, I get it in writing in the offer.
- Caving the moment base is capped leaves real money - often several thousand in sign-on or equity - completely untouched.

YOU JUST READ 8. THERE ARE 60.

The full round is **waiting.**

This sample gave you one question from each of eight rounds. The full playbook carries every question, every follow-up, and the answer framework for all 60 – the ones most likely to appear in your next interview.

01

See the full contents

Every module, every question and the exact follow-ups an interviewer asks after your first answer.

02

Practise the second question

Anyone can rehearse the opener. Strong candidates separate on what failed, what they owned, and what they would change now.

03

Walk in ready

Downloadable PDF, yours to keep. Read it the night before and stop being surprised by the follow-up.

A polished answer can sound borrowed. A specific answer sounds true.