Free career resource · Interviews

How to prepare for a cyber security interview

Entry-level cyber security interviews usually mix three things: questions about you and why you want the role, technical basics, and scenarios that test how you think. Nobody expects you to know everything. Interviewers want to see that you understand the fundamentals, can explain your own projects and stay calm and methodical when you don't know an answer.

By the Cyberend team · Published and updated 22 November 2026

THE SHORT ANSWER

- **Three kinds of question:** about you, technical basics, and “what would you do if” scenarios.
- **Use STAR:** Situation, Task, Action, Result keeps your examples clear and complete National Careers Service.
- **“I don't know” is fine:** follow it with how you'd find out. That's what the job involves every day.
- **Some roles need clearance:** be honest and consistent on any vetting forms GOV.UK.

What to expect

Every employer is different, but most entry-level hiring includes some of these stages:

STAGE 1

Application

CV or form, sometimes online tests

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STAGE 2

Screening call

A short phone or video chat

STAGE 3

Interview

Competency and technical questions

STAGE 4

Practical or assessment centre

A task, case study or group exercise

STAGE 5

Offer and checks

References and any vetting

How to prepare

THE WEEK BEFORE

- [ ] Read the job description and note the skills and experience it asks for **National Careers Service**
- [ ] Research the organisation: what it does, who it protects, and any security news involving it or its industry
- [ ] Re-read your CV and write down the questions each line might prompt
- [ ] Prepare four or five examples from work, study or projects that you can reuse for different questions
- [ ] Re-read your project write-ups so you can explain them without notes
- [ ] Read a few days of **cybersecurity news** so you can talk about something current
- [ ] Check whether it's in person, by phone or by video, and test your set-up if it's online

Answering with the STAR method

For “tell me about a time when” questions, the National Careers Service recommends the STAR method National Careers Service: describe the **Situation**, your **Task**, the **Action** you took and the **Result**. Spend most of your answer on the action, and say “I”, not “we”.

TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU SOLVED A PROBLEM

✕ Without STAR

I'm good with problems. At my last job I sorted out lots of IT issues for people.

✓ With STAR

In my retail job, our card machines kept dropping off the Wi-Fi at busy times (situation). I was asked to find out why (task). I logged when it happened, noticed it matched the times the guest network was busiest, and suggested moving the tills to a separate network (action). The drop-outs stopped, and my manager adopted the change across two other stores (result).

An illustrative example. Use your own, true experiences: interviewers often ask follow-up questions.

Technical questions to expect

For a first role, technical questions test the fundamentals. Short, clear answers with an example beat long, memorised definitions. These come up often:

What is the CIA triad?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

Confidentiality (only the right people can see data), integrity (data isn't changed without permission) and availability (systems work when people need them). Give an example of an attack on each.

What's the difference between a threat, a vulnerability and a risk?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

A vulnerability is a weakness, a threat is something that could exploit it, and risk is how likely that is and how much harm it would do.

What happens when you type a web address into a browser?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

A DNS lookup finds the server's IP address, the browser opens a connection, sets up encryption for HTTPS, then requests the page.

Which common ports do you know?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

22 for SSH, 53 for DNS, 80 for HTTP, 443 for HTTPS and 3389 for Remote Desktop. Explain why an open 3389 on the internet worries people.

What's the difference between hashing and encryption?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

Encryption can be reversed with the right key. Hashing is one-way, which is why passwords should be stored as hashes.

Why does multi-factor authentication matter?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

A stolen password alone isn't enough to sign in. Mention that some methods, like app prompts or security keys, are stronger than text messages.

What does a SIEM do?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

It collects logs from many systems in one place so analysts can search them and get alerts when something looks wrong.

How do you keep up with security news?

WHAT A GOOD ANSWER COVERS

Name real sources you use, and be ready to talk about one recent story and what organisations could learn from it.

You'll also be asked about anything on your CV. If you list a tool or a project, expect to explain it in detail. Our **portfolio projects guide** has ideas if you need more to talk about.

Scenario questions

Scenario questions test how you think, not whether you know the "right" answer. A common one: *a colleague says they clicked a link in a suspicious email. What do you do?* A good answer walks through calm, ordered steps:

STEP 1
Reassure and gather facts
What did they click, when, and did they enter anything?

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STEP 2
Contain
Follow the process: reset passwords, isolate the device if needed

↓

STEP 3
Escalate
Tell the right team, with what you've found

↓

STEP 4
Check for spread
Did others get the same email?

↓

STEP 5
Record and learn
Write it up and share the warning

KEY TAKEAWAY

If you don't know something, say so, then explain how you'd find out: who you'd ask, where you'd look and what you'd check first. That's a genuinely good answer.

Questions to ask them

You'll usually get time at the end to ask your own questions National Careers Service. Write two or three down beforehand, such as:

- [ ] What does a typical week look like for someone in this role?
- [ ] What training or certification support do new starters get?
- [ ] Does the role involve shifts or an on-call rota?
- [ ] What would a good first six months look like?
- [ ] How does the team share what it learns from incidents?

Assessment centres and the Civil Service

Assessment centres are common for graduate schemes and apprenticeships. Expect group exercises, a case study or a presentation. Employers are watching how you work with others, deal with problems and communicate National Careers Service.

Civil Service roles, including the Cyber Security Fast Stream, use Success Profiles. Each advert says which of five elements it will test: behaviours, strengths, ability, experience and technical skills Success Profiles. Read the advert carefully and prepare STAR examples for each behaviour it lists.

Security checks

Many government, defence and supplier roles need security clearance, from the basic BPSS check to SC and DV GOV.UK. Clearance normally expects a period of UK residency, though a shortfall isn't automatically a bar Home Office Careers. You can't apply for clearance yourself: the employer sponsors it after an offer.

Honesty matters more than a perfect history

Vetting looks at reliability and honesty. Answer every question truthfully and keep your answers consistent with your CV and interview. Leaving something out usually causes more problems than the thing itself.

Common questions

What if I can't answer a technical question?

Say you don't know, then explain how you'd find out or reason through it out loud. Interviewers for junior roles are often more interested in your approach than the answer.

Should I mention a certification I'm still studying for?

Yes. Say which one, how far through you are and when you plan to sit the exam. It shows commitment and direction.

Is it OK to ask about salary?

If it wasn't in the advert, it's reasonable to ask at the offer stage. The National Careers Service suggests making your salary expectations clear before you accept National Careers Service.

What if I don't get the job?

It's common to have several interviews before an offer. Ask for feedback, note the questions you found hardest and practise those for next time National Careers Service.

Sources and method

General interview advice, including the STAR method, follows the National Careers Service. How the Civil Service assesses candidates is from the Cabinet Office's Success Profiles framework, and security clearance information is from GOV.UK and Home Office Careers.

The technical questions are common topics for entry-level security roles rather than a list from any one employer. The example answer is illustrative.

National Careers Service: Interview tips Official guidance

Official advice on preparing for interviews and assessment centres, including the STAR method.

Cabinet Office: Success Profiles: the Civil Service recruitment framework Official guidance

The five elements the Civil Service assesses candidates on: behaviours, strengths, ability, experience and technical.

Civil Service Careers: Cyber Security Fast Stream Published by the employer

Entry requirements, duration and pay for the Civil Service Cyber Security Fast Stream, 2027 entry.

Cabinet Office: National security vetting: clearance levels Official guidance

What BPSS, SC and DV clearance involve and which posts need them.

Home Office: Security checks Published by the employer

UK residency normally expected before clearance: 3 years for CTC, 5 for SC and 10 for DV, though a shortfall is not automatically a bar.

> Every figure and link in this guide was checked against its source on 22 November 2026. Live job listings update every few hours.

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