

INTERVIEW GUIDE

3-Step Interview Guide for Commercial Irrigation

A practical framework for interviewing commercial irrigation candidates — technical fit, motivational fit, and culture fit, with real questions for each of the 10 recruited roles.

One framework, ten roles, and a scorecard you can actually compare across candidates.

This guide gives you a consistent 3-step interview framework — technical fit, motivational fit, culture fit — plus role-specific technical questions for the ten positions commercial irrigation contractors recruit for most. Use the general framework for every candidate, then pull the questions for their specific role from the reference section.

Score each step 1-5 as you go. A candidate who's strong on technical fit but weak on culture fit is a different hiring decision than one who's the reverse — the scorecard makes that visible instead of relying on a gut "good interview" feeling.

3-STEP FRAMEWORK

Technical fit. Motivational fit. Culture fit. In that order.

Most irrigation interviews go straight to "tell me about your experience" and never verify which credential — if any — a candidate actually holds. This guide gives you three structured steps, each with real questions, so you leave the interview with actual signal — not just a good feeling.

Step 1 — Technical fit: confirm the exact credential (CIT, CIC, CID, CLIA, or ASSE 5110) and ask system-specific questions.

Step 2 — Motivational fit: understand why they're moving and how they handle a seasonal schedule.

Step 3 — Culture fit: how they work with a crew and think about water-use responsibility.

STEP 1

Technical fit — verify which credential, not just whether they have one.

Before the interview: ask which specific credential a resume line refers to. "Certified irrigation technician" could mean CIT, CIC, or nothing verifiable — get the exact name and confirm it's current, since both CIT and CIC require ongoing continuing education to stay active.

Ask in the room:

- "Which system types have you actually installed or serviced in production — drip, rotor, spray, smart-controller?"
- "Walk me through how you diagnose a pressure or flow problem before replacing parts." (This is where inexperience shows up fastest.)
- "Walk me through your winterization and spring-startup process, specifically." (Seasonal shutdown and turn-on is where a lot of commercial system damage actually happens.)
- "What's the largest or most complex system you've worked on start to finish?"
- For backflow-related roles specifically: "Walk me through an ASSE 5110 test you've performed and what you document."

STEP 2

Motivational fit — why now, and how do they handle a seasonal trade.

- "What made you start looking?" (Vague answers here are a bigger flag than an honest "the off-season work wasn't steady enough.")
- "How do you think about the seasonal rhythm of this work — installation season versus service and winterization season?"
- "Tell me about a time a job didn't go the way you planned. What did you do?"
- "What does a bad day on this job look like to you, and what do you do about it?"

Candidates who can talk specifically about how they've handled an off-season gap, a schedule slip, or a difficult property manager tend to be far more reliable hires than candidates who only talk in generalities about "hard work."

STEP 3

Culture fit — crew dynamics and water-use responsibility.

- "Tell me about a time you caught a leak, overwatering issue, or system inefficiency before it became a bigger problem. What did you do?"
- "How do you handle it when a crewmate isn't pulling their weight?"
- "What's your take on documenting a job thoroughly when it slows you down?"
- "How do you like to receive feedback from a foreman or property manager?"

Red flags checklist

- Can't name the specific credential they hold when pressed — only says "certified" without specifics
- Credential can't be verified, or claims a level (CIC, CID, CLIA) inconsistent with their stated years of experience
- No real answer for winterization/spring-startup process — a core seasonal responsibility
- Dismisses documentation or water-use questions as "not a big deal"

Score every candidate on the same four dimensions.

DIMENSION	1-2	3	4-5
Technical skill	Can't confirm credential or system experience	Confirms basics, vague on complex systems	Specific on credential, systems, and largest job run
Seasonal reliability	No plan for off-season, vague reasons for gaps	Reasonable continuity, plausible explanations	Clear seasonal plan and steady track record year to year
Culture fit	Dismisses documentation, blames others	Says the right things generically	Specific example of catching a problem early, owns mistakes
Trajectory	No interest in certification growth	Open to it, no plan	Actively pursuing next Irrigation Association credential

A candidate scoring 4-5 across the board is a fast yes. A candidate scoring 1-2 on technical skill is a no regardless of the other three — verified competence is non-negotiable in a trade this specialized.

Irrigation Technician / Installer & Certified Irrigation Technician (CIT).

Irrigation Technician / Installer: "What system types have you installed most recently, and on what kind of property?" · "How do you handle a layout that doesn't match the design once you're on site?"

CIT holder: "Walk me through the field-experience hours that led up to your CIT exam." · "What part of the CIT exam — irrigation principles, electrical, or hydraulics — did you find hardest, and why?"

Irrigation System Designer & Backflow Prevention Specialist.

Designer: "Walk me through designing a zone layout for a mixed-use commercial property." · "How do you account for water pressure and flow constraints in a design?" · "Are you CID-certified, or working toward it?"

Backflow Specialist: "What's your ASSE 5110 status, and which assemblies are you certified to test?" · "Walk me through what you document on a routine annual test." · "How do you handle a failed test on an occupied commercial property?"

Irrigation Service / Repair Technician & Irrigation Foreman / Crew Lead.

Service / Repair Tech: "Walk me through diagnosing a zone that isn't getting pressure." · "How do you prioritize service calls when you've got five properties on your route in one day?"

Foreman / Crew Lead: "How do you sequence a crew's day when three properties need service and one needs an install?" · "Tell me about a time you had to pull someone off a job for quality or safety reasons."

Irrigation Project Manager & Irrigation Estimator.

PM: "Tell me about a bid-to-build irrigation job where the schedule slipped. What did you do?" · "How do you coordinate irrigation scope with the broader landscaping or site-work schedule on a live project?"

Estimator: "Walk me through a takeoff on a commercial irrigation package." · "Tell me about a bid you lost and what you learned from the debrief."

Smart / Controller Systems Technician & Landscape Water Management Auditor.

Smart / Controller Tech: "What smart-controller platforms have you configured, not just installed?" · "Walk me through troubleshooting a controller that's over- or under-watering a zone."

Water Management Auditor: "Walk me through a CLIA-style field audit you've completed." · "How do you evaluate soil-plant relationships as part of an audit, and what do you check first?"

Move fast once verification is done — this market doesn't wait, especially in-season.

Once you've verified the exact credential a candidate holds and they score well across all four scorecard dimensions, don't let the offer sit. With hiring-intent search data showing this trade under real, active hiring pressure, a strong candidate who scored well in your process is very likely in someone else's process too — especially heading into peak season.

If you're building this pipeline continuously rather than per-opening, this is exactly the stage where a standing, credential-verified bench pays for itself — you're not starting the search from zero every time a seat opens.

Four ways this interview goes wrong before it starts.

- **Taking "certified" at face value.** Get the exact credential name — CIT, CIC, CID, CLIA, or ASSE 5110 — before the interview, not after the offer.
- **Treating every role as interchangeable.** A CIT-holding installer, a CID-credentialed designer, and an ASSE 5110-certified backflow tester are three different skill sets — interview each one for the credential the role actually requires.
- **Skipping the seasonal-schedule conversation.** A technically strong candidate who's never confirmed what off-season work looks like is a retention risk you're creating at the offer stage.
- **Making the offer slowly.** With hiring-intent search leading this trade's data, a strong candidate rarely stays uncontacted for long, especially in-season. Compress the time between a passing scorecard and an offer.

Interview and hire ahead of the season, not during the scramble.

Because commercial irrigation hiring pressure concentrates around the installation-to-winterization cycle, running your interview process in the off-season — rather than the week crews need to double in size — gives you first look at candidates before every other contractor in your market starts competing for the same shortlist. Building the scorecard and credential-verification habits in this guide into a year-round process, not a seasonal scramble, is the single highest-leverage change most contractors can make.

The eight questions to ask every candidate, regardless of role.

What specific credential do you hold — CIT, CIC, CID, CLIA, ASSE 5110, or none yet?

What system types have you worked on in production — drip, rotor, spray, smart-controller?

Walk me through your winterization and spring-startup process.

What's the largest or most complex job you've run start to finish?

What made you start looking for something new?

How do you think about the seasonal rhythm of this work?

Tell me about a time you caught a problem — a leak, a system inefficiency — before it got bigger.

How do you like to receive feedback from a foreman or property manager?



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