

INTERVIEW GUIDE

3-Step Interview Guide for Physical Security

A practical framework for interviewing security systems installer and integrator candidates — technical fit, motivational fit, and culture fit, with real questions for each of the 10 roles we recruit for.

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 physical security 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.

NOT A GUARD INTERVIEW

Screening an installer or integrator is a different conversation than screening a guard.

Because "physical security" hiring content is so often written for guard staffing, it's worth stating up front: this guide is for interviewing the people who install, wire, and integrate the systems — not the people who staff a post once the systems are live. The technical bar is different, the credentials are different, and the questions below reflect that.

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

Most interviews for this trade go straight to "tell me about your experience" and never verify anything concrete. 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: verify certifications and platform experience, ask about both the electrical and networking side of the job.

Step 2 — Motivational fit: understand why they're moving and how they handle a job that doesn't go to plan.

Step 3 — Culture fit: how they work with a crew, and how they handle a client walkthrough.

STEP 1

Technical fit — verify both halves of the job.

Before the interview: confirm NICET level and/or ESA certification status directly rather than taking a resume line at face value. This takes minutes and eliminates one of the most common bad-hire causes in this trade.

Ask in the room:

- "What camera/NVR/VMS brands, access-control software, or alarm panel manufacturers have you actually worked on?" (Certification or comfort on one platform doesn't transfer automatically to another.)
- "How comfortable are you with the networking side — IP addressing, VLANs, PoE?" (This comes up on nearly every modern install.)
- "Walk me through a job where you had to get two different vendors' systems talking to each other." (Listen for the specific technical snag they hit, not just "it worked.")
- "What's the most complex integration job you've run start to finish?"
- For estimators and PMs specifically: "Walk me through how you scope a security-systems bid from a set of drawings."

STEP 2

Motivational fit — why now, and how do they handle friction.

- "What made you start looking?" (Vague answers here are a bigger flag than an honest "the pay wasn't matching the work.")
- "Do you prefer install work, service/warranty calls, or a mix — and why?"
- "Tell me about a job that 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 handle a failed commissioning test, a schedule slip, or a difficult client walkthrough tend to be far more reliable hires than candidates who only talk in generalities about "hard work."

STEP 3

Culture fit — crew dynamics and client-facing presence.

- "Tell me about a time you had to explain a technical issue to a non-technical client or building manager. How'd you handle it?"
- "How do you handle it when a crewmate isn't pulling their weight?"
- "What's your take on following the client's access/security protocols on a jobsite, even when they slow you down?"
- "How do you like to receive feedback from a foreman or PM?"

Red flags checklist

- Can't name specific platforms, brands, or protocols when pressed — only generic terms
- Certification can't be verified with NICET or ESA, or claims a level that doesn't check out
- Can describe wiring work but goes vague the moment networking comes up (or vice versa)
- Blames every past employer for every problem, with no self-reflection

Score every candidate on the same four dimensions.

DIMENSION	1-2	3	4-5
Technical skill	Can't confirm platform experience or networking basics	Confirms basics, vague on complex jobs	Specific on platforms, protocols, and largest job run
Dual-skill coverage	Strong on wiring OR networking, not both	Workable on both, stronger on one	Genuinely fluent on both the electrical and IT side
Culture fit	Dismisses client protocols, blames others	Says the right things generically	Specific client-facing story, owns mistakes
Trajectory	No interest in certification growth	Open to it, no plan	Actively pursuing NICET/ESA progression or integration-level work

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 this trade.

Security Systems Installer / Technician & Access Control Technician.

Installer/Technician: "What's the most complex system you've installed and commissioned end to end?" · "How do you handle a run where the cable path doesn't match the drawings?"

Access Control Technician: "Which access-control software platforms have you configured, not just installed?" · "Walk me through setting up a credential-management schedule for a multi-tenant building."

CCTV / Video Surveillance Technician & Low-Voltage Electrician (Security Specialty).

CCTV Technician: "What NVR/VMS platforms have you worked with?" · "How do you approach camera placement to avoid blind spots on a real jobsite, not a spec sheet?"

Low-Voltage Electrician: "How does security wiring work differ from general low-voltage work you've done?" · "Walk me through how you handle code compliance on a security-specific run."

Alarm Systems Technician & Field Service Technician.

Alarm Systems Technician: "What alarm panel manufacturers have you worked on?" · "Walk me through troubleshooting a system reporting false alarms."

Field Service Technician: "Tell me about a service call where the issue wasn't what the client described." · "How do you prioritize an after-hours warranty call queue?"

Integration Engineer / Systems Integrator & Security Systems Project Manager.

Integration Engineer: "Walk me through integrating two different vendors' systems on the same job — what broke, and how'd you fix it?" · "How comfortable are you writing or reading network diagrams for a security system?"

Project Manager: "Tell me about a bid-to-build job where the schedule slipped. What did you do?" · "How do you coordinate install scope with integration/commissioning scope on a live project?"

Security Systems Estimator & Security Systems Foreman / Crew Lead.

Estimator: "Walk me through a takeoff on a multi-building access-control package." · "Tell me about a bid you lost and what you learned from the debrief."

Foreman/Crew Lead: "How do you sequence a crew across install, wiring, and commissioning on the same job?" · "Tell me about a time you had to pull a tech off a job for quality reasons."

Move fast once verification is done — this market doesn't wait.

Once you've verified certifications and confirmed the candidate covers both halves of the job, don't let the offer sit. With only about 85,900 workers nationally in the core occupation and demand growing much faster than average, a strong candidate who scored well in your process is very likely in someone else's process too.

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

COMMON INTERVIEW MISTAKES

Four ways this interview goes wrong before it starts.

- **Treating this as a guard interview.** The technical bar, the credentials, and the questions are all different from guard staffing — using a guard-hiring checklist will screen for the wrong thing entirely.
- **Taking "certified" at face value.** Verify NICET/ESA status before the interview, not after the offer.
- **Testing only one half of the job.** A candidate who nails the wiring questions but has never touched a VLAN — or vice versa — isn't fully qualified for a modern install.
- **Making the offer slowly.** In a labor pool this small, a strong candidate rarely stays uncontacted for long. Compress the time between a passing scorecard and an offer.

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

What platforms — camera/NVR/VMS, access-control software, alarm panels — have you actually worked on?

How comfortable are you with the networking side of a modern install?

Walk me through a job where two vendors' systems had to talk to each other.

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

What made you start looking for something new?

Tell me about a time a job didn't go as planned.

How do you handle a client's on-site security protocols when they slow you down?

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



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