INTERVIEW ESSENTIALS — 03

Smart Questions to Ask the Interviewer

03

The questions that make interviewers take you seriously — built for the Gulf market, tailored to your sector.

Why Your Questions Matter

The interview ends, the hiring manager says "Any questions for me?" and you ask "What does a typical day look like?" You've just signalled three things: you didn't prepare, you could be interviewing anywhere, and you're not particularly thoughtful about this specific role.

Your questions reveal whether you've done your homework, understand the business, and are thinking strategically about this decision. A sharp question makes an interviewer lean forward. A weak question makes them lean back.

This guide teaches you to ask questions that make you sound commercially aware, thoughtful, and selective. Not rehearsed. Not desperate. Not reading off a list you found online at 11pm last night.

How to Use This Guide

Pick 2-3 questions per interview depending on where you are in the process. Start with the stage-based questions below, then go to the sector-specific banks further down. Tailor based on who you're speaking with and what you actually heard in the conversation. The best questions come from listening, not from a list. Use these as starting points, then adapt in real time.

These questions work across company sizes, but adjust for context. A Series A startup won't have a formal investment committee process. A government-backed holding company won't move fast on hiring decisions. Match your questions to the stage of the company, not just the stage of the interview.

What Strong Questions Signal

Weak questions

reveal you weren't listening. "What does the company do?" is a Googling failure. "Do you like working here?" assumes the interviewer wants to be your buddy. These make you forgettable.

Generic questions

could fit any company, any role, any industry. "What skills do you think I need?" is something you should have figured out before applying. "What's the dress code?" signals you're not thinking about the work. These make you replaceable.

Sharp questions

show you understand the business, have done your research, and are thinking like someone who's already in the role. "You mentioned you're expanding the enterprise segment — what's the biggest competitive risk to that strategy?" or "How does your compliance framework handle the regulatory differences between DIFC and onshore Dubai?" These make you memorable and show you understand how the business actually works.

Questions That Fit the Stage

Recruiter Screen

Your goal: understand the role, the process, and whether this is worth your serious time.

- What does the company currently see as the biggest challenge for this role? *(Cuts through the job description to the actual problem they're hiring to solve.)*
- What does the interview process look like, and what are you looking for at each stage? *(Lets you prepare specifically. Vague answers suggest a disorganised process — useful intel.)*
- Can you walk me through the team structure — who does this role report to, and who reports into this role? *(Org structure determines your real authority. A VP title that reports to a mid-level manager is a different job than a VP reporting to the CEO.)*
- What's the scope of the role in the first 6 months — is this about stabilising something or building something new? *(Tells you whether you're inheriting a mess or creating from scratch. Both are fine. Not knowing which you're walking into is not.)*
- What's the timeline for a decision? *(Tells you how serious they are. "We're moving quickly" with no date means they're not.)*

Hiring Manager Interview

Your goal: understand expectations, what success looks like, and what it's like to work with this person.

- What would someone need to accomplish in the first 90 days for you to feel confident about the hire? *(This is the most important question in any interview. The answer tells you what they actually care about, not what HR wrote in the job spec.)*
- You mentioned [specific challenge they raised] — what's been tried already, and what's not working? *(Shows you were listening. Also reveals whether you're being brought in to fix something that's already failed twice.)*
- How do you typically give feedback? When is feedback most useful — regularly or at certain checkpoints? *(Some managers give feedback weekly. Others go silent for six months then blindside you in a review. This question surfaces which type you're dealing with.)*

- What's the biggest disagreement you've had with someone in this role or on this team recently, and how did it get resolved? *(Tests whether they're defensive or thoughtful about conflict. The answer matters more than the content.)*
- What's one thing about this role or team that you'd want a new hire to know that doesn't show up in the job description? *(Invites honesty. If they dodge it, that's a signal too.)*

Final Round / Executive Interview

Your goal: understand strategy, business priorities, and where the company is headed.

- What's the biggest opportunity the company is pursuing in the next 18 months? *(Shows whether leadership has a clear direction or is reacting to whatever's in front of them.)*
- You mentioned [strategic shift or challenge] — how is that shaping hiring priorities across the business? *(Connects the dots between strategy and people. Executives notice when candidates think at this level.)*
- Where do you see this function becoming most critical to the business in the next two years? *(Tells you whether you're joining a function that's ascending or one that's tolerated.)*
- What's changed most about working here in the last 18 months? *(Reveals whether the company is stable, growing, reorganising, or in quiet crisis.)*
- What would need to be true for this company to be in a fundamentally stronger position two years from now? *(Better than "what's your five-year plan." Forces them to think about the real constraints, not the investor pitch.)*
- How do you think the regulatory environment will shift in the next two years for your sector, and how is the company preparing? *(Works across every sector in the Gulf. Regulation is moving fast on financial services, data protection, ESG, and labour law. This question shows you're thinking beyond the current quarter.)*

Sector-Specific Question Banks

A candidate who asks about deal flow at a bank, system architecture at a tech company, or matter origination at a law firm signals they understand how that specific business works. Generic questions don't. These questions are organised by sector cluster. Pick the bank that matches your target role.

Finance and Professional Services

Investment Banking, PE and Asset Management, Banking, Consulting and Strategy

For investment banking and capital markets roles:

- How is deal flow structured across the team — by sector, by product, or by geography? And how much client-facing work would I have in the first year? *(Shows you understand that IB is a client coverage business, not just a modeling business. The allocation between execution and origination defines the job.)*
- What's the typical deal lifecycle here from mandate to close, and where does this role sit in that process? *(Reveals whether you're running models in a back room or sitting in client meetings. Both are valid. You should know which one.)*
- How has the regional M&A pipeline shifted with the Vision 2030 mandates and sovereign wealth fund activity? *(GCC-native question. Shows you understand the market dynamics driving deal flow in the Gulf specifically.)*
- What's the team's approach to cross-border transactions — do you typically partner with international offices, or does the regional team lead? *(Matters for career development. If every major deal gets staffed from London, your exposure ceiling is lower.)*

For PE and asset management roles:

- What does the investment committee process look like — how many stages from sourcing to IC approval, and where does this role contribute? *(Best for mid-to-senior candidates.) (PE is a gate-driven process. This question shows you know where you'd sit in that process and where the real autonomy is.)*
- How does the portfolio monitoring function work here — is it separate from the deal team, or does the deal team stay involved post-close? *(Tells you whether you'll see the full lifecycle or just the front end of transactions.)*
- What's the fund's current deployment pace relative to the fund lifecycle, and how does that affect the type of deals you're pursuing? *(Senior candidates only.) (A fund in Year 2 with 20% deployed behaves differently from a fund in Year 5 with 70% deployed. This question shows you understand fund dynamics, not just deal mechanics.)*

For banking roles (retail, corporate, commercial):

- How does the bank think about the balance between digital transformation and relationship-led banking in this market? *(Every Gulf bank is navigating this tension. The answer reveals whether digital is real or cosmetic.)*
- What's the regulatory environment looking like for this business unit — are there upcoming Central Bank requirements that are shaping strategy? *(Shows you understand that banking is a regulated industry and that compliance isn't just a back-office concern.)*
- How does the Emiratisation/Saudisation programme work within this team — what targets are you working toward, and how does that shape hiring? *(Direct, specific, and relevant. Matters for nationals (career ceiling and progression) and expats (team composition and role stability).)*

For consulting and strategy roles:

- Can you walk me through the typical project lifecycle — how long are engagements, how are teams staffed, and how much client interaction does someone at my level get? *(The bread and butter of consulting. Shows you're thinking about the actual work, not the brand.)*
- What's the split between public sector and private sector work in this office? And how has that shifted in the last two years? *(Consulting in the GCC is 50%+ government work: Vision 2030, NEOM, sovereign modernisation programmes. If the office is mostly public-sector, your career trajectory looks very different from commercial consulting.)*
- How does the firm handle the tension between local delivery and flying in teams from other offices? *(A real issue in Gulf consulting. Some firms staff major engagements from London or New York with a local wrapper. Others build deep regional capability. This affects your career trajectory.)*

Legal

Magic Circle, US Elite, Silver Circle, Regional GCC firms, In-House

For private practice roles:

- How is the practice structured here — by sector, by practice area, or by client relationship? And how does work get allocated across the team? *(Work allocation is the single biggest variable in a lawyer's early career. Structured allocation means predictable development. Partner-driven allocation means your career depends on who likes you.)*
- What's the balance between cross-border mandates and local law work in this office? *(In the Gulf, many Magic Circle and US Elite firms handle English-law or New York-law transactions that happen to involve Gulf entities. If you want local law experience, you need to ask.)*
- You mentioned the practice is growing — is that driven by new client wins, or expanding mandates from existing relationships? *(Shows you understand that law firm growth has different sources with different implications for your workload and development.)*
- How does the firm approach business development expectations at my level? Is there a formal BD target, or is it more organic? *(In the Gulf, BD culture varies dramatically between firms. Some expect associates to build relationships from day one. Others keep associates away from clients until they're senior enough.)*

For in-house roles:

- How does the legal function sit within the broader organisation — does General Counsel report to the CEO, the CFO, or the board? *(Reporting line defines the legal team's real influence. A GC who reports to the CFO has less strategic weight than one who reports to the CEO.)*
- What's the split between external counsel management and work done internally? And how do you decide what stays in-house? *(Reveals whether you'll be doing substantive legal work or mainly managing outside firms. Both are valid career paths. They're very different jobs.)*

- How does the legal team handle regulatory changes — is there a formal horizon-scanning process, or is it more reactive? *(In the Gulf, regulation is evolving rapidly across DIFC, ADGM, SAGIA, and onshore frameworks. If they don't have a formal process, they're reactive. That's useful to know before you join.)*

Tech and Engineering

Software, Infrastructure, Product, Data

- What does the engineering culture look like in terms of ownership — does each team own their service end-to-end, or is there a separate ops/SRE function? *(Ownership model defines your day-to-day. Full ownership means you ship and maintain. Separate ops means you hand off and move on. Both have tradeoffs.)*
- What's the deployment cadence — how often does code go to production, and what does the release process look like? *(Daily deploys with feature flags is a different engineering culture than quarterly releases with change advisory boards. This question reveals which you're joining.)*
- How does the team handle technical debt — is there dedicated time, or does it compete with feature work? *(Every engineering team has tech debt. The question is whether leadership acknowledges it and allocates time, or whether engineers fight for it in every sprint.)*
- What's the infrastructure setup — cloud provider, key services, anything that's particularly complex or that you'd want a new hire to understand early? *(Practical question that shows you're thinking about the actual work. Also reveals whether the stack is modern or legacy, which matters for your career development.)*
- How does the team approach AI tooling — is there a policy on code generation tools, and how is the team thinking about AI integration in the product?
- Is this role part of a regional tech hub strategy, or is the team primarily serving global products with a local presence? *(Gulf tech operates on a spectrum: some companies are building for MENA markets from Dubai or Riyadh, others are satellite offices for global products. The answer determines whether you're building something or maintaining something.)*
- How does the team think about data residency and compliance, given the different regulatory frameworks across GCC countries? *(Data localisation requirements are tightening across the Gulf. In Saudi, NDMO regulations are reshaping how companies handle citizen data. If the team hasn't thought about this, that's a signal about their maturity.)*

Operations, Commerce, and Corporate Functions

Operations and Supply Chain, Sales and Business Dev, Marketing and Comms, HR, Accounting and Audit

For sales and business development roles:

- How is the sales org structured — by vertical, by geography, by account size? And where does this role sit? *(Territory structure defines your earning potential and your competitive dynamics with colleagues.)*
- What does the ramp look like — how long until someone in this role is expected to hit full quota, and what support exists during ramp? *(Ramp time is the difference between a supportive environment and one that burns new hires who can't produce immediately.)*
- What's the current pipeline health — is the team ahead of target, behind, or rebuilding? *(Direct question that reveals the real state of the business. If they dodge it, that's your answer.)*
- How does the company handle the relationship between business development in the Gulf and the global sales organisation? *(In the GCC, many companies run regional sales through a global structure. This means your commission, your accounts, and your career path may be controlled by someone in London or New York.)*

For operations and supply chain roles:

- What are the biggest operational bottlenecks right now, and where does this role have the most leverage to fix them? *(Shows you're thinking about impact, not just process.)*
- How does the supply chain operate across GCC borders — what are the customs, logistics, and regulatory complexities that shape operations here? *(GCC-specific and shows you understand that operations in the Gulf involves navigating six different regulatory environments.)*

For marketing and communications roles:

- What's the current marketing attribution model — how does the team measure what's working and what's not? *(Reveals whether marketing is data-driven or brand-driven. Neither is wrong, but you should know which culture you're joining.)*
- How does the brand positioning differ across GCC markets — is it one regional approach, or are there market-specific strategies? *(Shows you understand that marketing in the Gulf isn't monolithic. What works in the UAE doesn't automatically work in Saudi or Qatar.)*
- What's the approach to Arabic-language content and campaigns — is it a translation exercise, or does the team create Arabic-first content for specific markets? *(Reveals whether the team treats Arabic as an afterthought or a primary channel. In Saudi especially, Arabic-first content performs dramatically differently from translated English.)*
- How does the team navigate media and advertising regulations, particularly in Saudi and the UAE? Has that shaped your channel mix? *(Government media requirements and digital advertising restrictions vary across the Gulf. Some channels that work in Dubai are restricted or require different approaches in Riyadh.)*

For HR and people roles:

- How does the people function balance compliance (labour law, visa, localisation quotas) with strategic talent initiatives? *(In the Gulf, HR spends a disproportionate amount of time on visa processing, WPS compliance, and nationalisation reporting. This question shows you understand the operational reality.)*
- What's the current approach to Emiratisation/Saudisation — is it compliance-driven or strategically integrated into talent planning? *(Reveals whether localisation is treated as a checkbox or a genuine business priority.)*

For accounting and audit roles:

- How does the team handle multi-entity, multi-currency consolidation across GCC jurisdictions? *(Practical and specific. If they have entities in UAE, Saudi, and Bahrain, the consolidation challenge is real and ongoing.)*
- With VAT now implemented across most GCC countries, what's the biggest compliance challenge the team is currently managing? *(Shows you're current on Gulf tax developments and thinking about practical challenges, not textbook accounting.)*
- How does the firm approach inter-company reconciliation and foreign exchange exposure across GCC entities? *(Most Gulf organisations operate across multiple jurisdictions with multiple currencies. This is a daily operational challenge, not a quarterly exercise.)*
- What's the audit approach here: is there a focus on specific risk areas like revenue recognition, related-party transactions, or inventory, given the business model? *(Shows you're thinking about materiality and risk, not just process. The answer reveals where the real complexity sits.)*
- How is the team preparing for the evolving corporate tax landscape in the Gulf, particularly the UAE's corporate tax implementation? *(The UAE's corporate tax regime is still maturing. Teams that are proactive on this are better to work for than teams scrambling to comply.)*

Specialist and Regulated Sectors

Healthcare, Energy and Infrastructure, Government and Public Sector, Risk and Compliance, Real Estate

For healthcare roles:

- How does the organisation navigate the regulatory differences between DHA, HAAD, and MOH — is there a centralised compliance function, or does each facility manage its own? *(GCC healthcare regulation varies by emirate and by country. This question shows you understand the complexity.)*
- What's the biggest operational challenge in healthcare delivery here that wouldn't exist in a Western system? *(Gulf healthcare serves multi-national patient populations, navigates fragmented insurance schemes, and manages medical tourism flows. The answer reveals which complexity defines your day-to-day.)*

- How does the organisation handle the credentialing and licensing requirements for international medical professionals coming into the Gulf? *(Credentialing is a real bottleneck in GCC healthcare. If you're a clinician, this affects your start date. If you're in operations, this is one of your biggest workflow challenges.)*

For energy and infrastructure roles:

- How does the energy transition agenda — particularly in Saudi and UAE — shape the project pipeline and the skills the team is building? *(Shows you understand that Gulf energy is in active transformation, not just oil and gas legacy.)*
- What's the relationship between this organisation and the relevant government entity — is it a JV, a concessionaire model, or a direct government mandate? *(Governance structure in Gulf energy and infrastructure is often complex. Understanding it is table stakes.)*

For government and public sector roles:

- How does the organisation balance its transformation mandate with the pace of government decision-making? *(Diplomatic way of asking whether the bureaucracy will let you do your job. Essential question for anyone joining a government-linked entity.)*
- What does performance measurement look like in this role — are there KPIs, or is success defined differently in a public sector context? *(Shows you understand that government performance metrics work differently from private sector. If they have KPIs, great. If not, you need to know how your contribution gets recognised.)*

For risk and compliance roles:

- How does the compliance framework handle the regulatory differences between free zones and onshore entities — DIFC versus onshore Dubai, for example? *(Fundamental to compliance in the UAE. Free zone regulations operate under different legal frameworks, and any compliance professional working in the Gulf needs to navigate this.)*
- What's the biggest emerging regulatory risk the team is preparing for right now? *(Shows you're forward-looking, not just managing today's requirements. In the Gulf, regulation is evolving fast across financial services, data protection, and ESG.)*

For real estate roles:

- How does the company evaluate development opportunities — what's the decision framework from land acquisition through to project approval? *(Shows you understand that real estate is a process business with multiple gates, not just deal-making.)*
- How is the current market cycle affecting the project pipeline — are you accelerating, pausing, or repositioning? *(Direct question about market conditions. In Gulf real estate, cycles are pronounced and understanding where you are in the cycle is critical to understanding the job.)*

GCC-Specific Questions Worth Asking Anywhere

These work across all sectors and signal that you understand the Gulf market specifically.

- How does the organisation approach localisation requirements — Emiratisation, Saudisation, or the equivalent? Is it compliance-driven or built into the talent strategy? *(Relevant whether you're a national or an expat. Shows you understand the market dynamic.)*
- What's the visa sponsorship and residency process for this role — and how does the organisation handle visa transfers if I'm already in the country? *(Practical and necessary. In the Gulf, your employment and your right to live in the country are linked to your employer. Understanding the process is not optional.)*
- How does the team handle Ramadan scheduling and the associated shift in business pace? *(Shows cultural awareness. Business rhythm in the Gulf shifts significantly during Ramadan — shorter working hours, adjusted meeting schedules, and different energy levels across the team.)*
- What's the company's position on remote and hybrid work — and does that differ for employees based in different GCC countries? *(Post-COVID, GCC companies vary enormously on this. Some have returned to full office. Others are experimenting with hybrid models. If you're relocating, this shapes your entire lifestyle decision.)*

The Art of the Follow-Up Question

The best questions aren't pre-prepared. They come from listening.

When the interviewer says something that tells a story, ask the next question that reveals whether you understood it.

Interviewer

: "We're going through a lot of change right now."

Weak follow-up

: "What kind of change?"

Sharp follow-up

: "You mentioned the team is going through change — is that structural, strategic, or both? And how is the team responding?"

Interviewer

: "This role would report to our VP of Product."

Weak follow-up

: "What's the VP of Product like?"

Sharp follow-up

: "How would you characterise the relationship between this role and the VP of Product — is it collaborative, directive, or somewhere in between?"

Interviewer

: "We're scaling the team from 4 to 12 this year."

Weak follow-up

: "When will you hire the other people?"

Sharp follow-up

: "You're scaling from 4 to 12 — what's the biggest risk in that growth plan, and what's your approach to managing it?"

Interviewer

: "We just opened a Riyadh office."

Weak follow-up

: "How many people are in Riyadh?"

Sharp follow-up

: "How are you thinking about the split between what gets built in Riyadh versus your existing office — is it a full mirror, or are you specialising by location?"

Follow-ups show you heard them, you're thinking about implications, and you're the kind of person who digs into problems. These are the questions that stick.

When NOT to Ask a Question

Sometimes the interview ran rich and long. The hiring manager answered most of what you'd normally ask. Forcing a question feels performative and wastes time. It's fine to say:

"You've covered a lot of what I'd normally ask. I'll follow up by email if anything comes to mind once I've had time to think about what we discussed."

This signals you're listening, respectful of time, and thoughtful. Better than a forced question.

Common Mistakes

1. Asking questions you could have Googled

"What's your main product?" "Where are you headquartered?" "How many employees do you have?" These are interview disqualifiers. Spend 15 minutes on the company's website, LinkedIn page, and recent press. There's no excuse.

2. Asking about salary or benefits too early (but not too late)

Recruiter screen is the right place to clarify range and understand benefits structure. In the GCC, ask early whether expatriate entitlements are bundled in base or separate, what the bonus currency and timing look like, and whether visa/accommodation costs are covered. These are structural questions, not greedy ones. But save them for the recruiter, not the hiring manager. Asking "What's the benefits package?" in a first-round interview before they've indicated you're a finalist wastes everyone's time.

3. Asking questions that sound like you're testing the interviewer

"What would you do differently if you were running this company?" or "What do you think the company should fix?" makes you sound arrogant or like you're interviewing them. You are not their peer yet. Frame the same curiosity more constructively: "What's one area you think the team could improve on?"

4. Asking too many questions

Pick 2-3 and leave space for the conversation to breathe. Firing off a list of six questions is exhausting and signals you didn't prepare well enough to prioritise.

5. Asking nothing at all

Saying "No questions" signals you're not serious, didn't think ahead, or aren't actually interested. Always have 2-3 questions ready, even if you only ask one.

6. Asking about things that reveal you didn't listen

If they just spent 10 minutes explaining the team structure and you ask "How big is the team?" you've flagged that you weren't paying attention.

7. Using the same questions at every interview stage

The recruiter doesn't care about your strategic market observation. The CEO doesn't want to explain the interview process. Match the question to the person and the stage. Your recruiter screen questions should be about process and fit. Your executive round questions should be about strategy and direction.

8. Asking "gotcha" questions about GCC-specific topics

"What's your staff turnover rate?" or "How many people have you fired this year?" — these feel adversarial, even if you're trying to assess stability. Frame the same inquiry constructively: "What's the tenure of the team — how long have most people been here?"

How to Get the Most Out of This

Review the sector bank that matches your target role. Pick 1-2 sector questions and 1-2 stage questions for each interview. Adapt them to what you actually hear in the conversation. The goal isn't to deliver your pre-written question — it's to ask something thoughtful that reveals you're selective, well-prepared, and thinking strategically about this specific role, at this specific company, in this specific market.

Strong questions make you memorable. Pair them with Tenure's salary data so your compensation questions are backed by real market intelligence, not guesswork.