super^hired



A SUPERHIRED PRACTICAL GUIDE

Paid live work simulations

How to design, prepare and run a live exercise that shows you how someone works, before you make them an offer.

COMPANION TO THE FILM
HIRING A GROWTH STRATEGIST FOR YOUR AGENCY?

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SUPERHIRED

START HERE

They sound good. Can they actually do the job?

That's the question behind most hiring decisions in an agency. An interview tells you how someone talks about their work. A paid live work simulation lets you watch them do a piece of it, in a situation you built to look like the job.

This guide goes with our film on hiring a growth strategist. The film gives you the idea in nine minutes. This guide gives you the detail: the steps, the checklists, the questions to ask, the mistakes we see, and blank tools you can print and use on your next hire.

The example all the way through is a fictional agency, Apex Digital Marketing, hiring a senior growth strategist. Swap in your own role. The method is the same.

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THE ONE QUESTION

What would I need to see this person do before I actually trust them with it?

HOW TO READ THIS

Short on time? Read page 3, then use the tools at the back. Each part ends with a stage box: who owns it, what to do, how you know it's done, and what to do if you get stuck.

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

Apex Digital, its client and every figure in the example are made up for teaching. They are not a client case or a real candidate.

THE WHOLE PROCESS ON ONE PAGE

Three parts, then the decision

Decide what you need to see. Prepare the exercise. Watch them work. Then connect what you saw to what you agreed to look for.

1
Decide what you need to see
Pick one important part of the job. Write the technical and behaviour criteria down.

▶

2
Prepare the exercise
Build and send the SIM task deck. Agree pay, data access and AI use. Do a dry run.

▶

3
Watch them work
Run the live session. Ask open questions. Introduce a change. Record evidence and help given.

▶

4
Review and close out
Match evidence to criteria. Pay them, remove access, tell them the outcome.

Who does what

Role	1 · Decide	2 · Prepare	3 · Watch	4 · Close out
Hiring manager	■ Owns the criteria. Signs them off.	■ Builds or signs off the deck. Agrees the pay.	May facilitate.	■ Makes the call. Makes sure they're paid and told.
Facilitator expert in the work	■ Helps write what good looks like.	■ Dry-runs the task.	■ Runs the session and asks the questions.	■ Writes up evidence against each criterion.
Note-taker or a recording	-	■ Gets permission to record, or is booked.	■ Captures what they say and the help given.	-
Data owner	-	■ Authorises any real data, read-only.	-	■ Removes access the same day.
Candidate	-	■ Reads the deck, preps, agrees terms.	■ Investigates and talks it through.	■ Gets paid. Hears the outcome.

In a small agency one person often wears two of these hats. That's fine. What matters is that someone on the call knows the work well, and someone is writing things down.

Rough timing

Decide	Prepare	Send the deck	Live session	Write-up	Close out
an hour or two, once per role	half a day, plus a dry run	a few days before	about an hour	same day	by the date you promised

Prep and write-up times are our rough guide, not a rule. The session length is from the film: about an hour, and we've seen 30 to 90 minutes work depending on the role.

BEFORE THE THREE PARTS

Why live beats take-home

Hiring is matchmaking. You need to see how someone works in the specific situation you're hiring them for.



A take-home or asynchronous task does give you something to review. It's better than nothing. But you only see the finished answer. You don't see how they got there.

When you're there live while they investigate a problem, you can ask why they looked there, what they understand about it, and what they'd do next. That's where you start to tease out their behaviours, how they think, and how much they really understand.

TAKE-HOME TASK	LIVE WORK SIMULATION
You see the final answer	You see where they look first
You guess at how they got there	You hear why they check what they check
You can't ask a follow-up in the moment	You can change the situation and watch them adjust
You can't ask them to explain or check what they handed in	You can ask them to explain any output they rely on

What "paid live work simulation" means



Paid. It's real work and it takes real time, so you pay for it. You agree the amount before they start.

Live. You're on the call while they do it. That's the point. The questions you ask in the moment are where most of the evidence comes from.

Work simulation. A purpose-built piece of the actual job, in the context they'll be stepping into. Not a puzzle, not a personality test, not free consulting.

We call it a SIM task for short. The briefing document you send beforehand is the SIM task deck.

> *Now at least you're discussing what someone actually understood and did, in a relevant situation you purpose-built for the role they're stepping into.*
>
> FROM THE FILM

What it is not

- **Not a full verdict on a person.** One SIM task won't tell you everything you need to know. It gives you specific evidence on the parts you designed it to test.
- **Not a trap.** You give them the information they need to take part properly. You're testing how they work, not how well they guess what you wanted.
- **Not unpaid work for your clients.** It's an assessment exercise built for hiring, paid for its time, with any real data used only under permission.

BEFORE YOU START

Use a SIM task for the roles where judgement is the job: strategists, account leads, senior specialists. For simpler roles a shorter practical check may be enough. Match the effort to the decision.

1

Decide what you need to see

Before you build anything, write down exactly what you want to watch them do.



1.1 Start from a real situation in the job

Pick one important part of the job, then describe a situation where it matters. In our example, a client's sales have gone from $100,000 to $130,000, but their profit is still $20,000. You're hiring the strategist who needs to understand what's happening before advising that client to spend more on advertising. FICTIONAL EXAMPLE

1.2 Assess two things

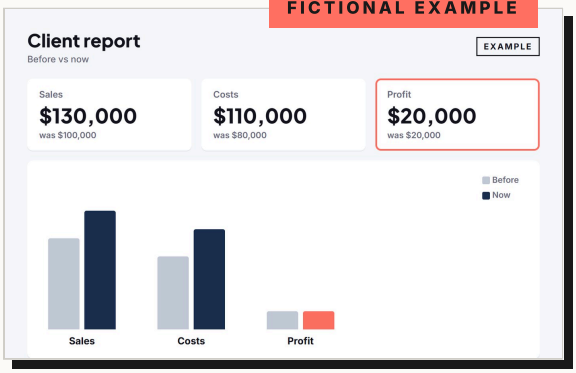
THE TECHNICAL PART

Do they understand the numbers? Can they read revenue, costs, profit and other unit economics (what each sale earns and costs you), and use the information available to explain what's changed?

THE BEHAVIOUR

What do they do when the numbers need explaining? Do they investigate, ask for what's missing, and hold off on a recommendation until they can back it?

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE



THE TRAP IN THIS EXAMPLE

Sales are up 30%. Costs rose too. Profit hasn't moved. Someone who only reads the top line might recommend spending more. That's the moment you want to watch.

1.3 Write behaviour statements you can observe

When you're analysing behaviours in a SIM task, you need to be more specific than "are they a good strategic thinker?" You can't watch someone being a good strategic thinker. You can watch what they do when a particular thing happens.

I like to structure it like this. A behaviour statement starts with a **trigger**, such as a time, an event or a place. It leads into an **action** taken as a result. And it names the **impact** you're looking for.

TRIGGER	ACTION	IMPACT
When does it happen?	**What do they do?**	**Why does it matter?**
When sales increase but profit doesn't.	*They investigate the costs and ask for missing information before recommending more ad spend.*	*The client makes a spending decision based on more than sales alone.*

An oversimplified example on purpose. Real statements are specific to your agency, your clients and the role.

Now you've got something you can actually observe in a SIM task. Here's how the same statement looks once it's written up as a criterion:

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE



The criteria sheet from the film.

1.4 Not sure what good looks like? Ask your best people

Some people struggle to put these behaviours into words. If that's you, talk to the people in your agency who already do this work really well.

Think about the triggers that cause a lot of friction in your business, the ones you need this hire to handle well. Then find the people already taking the right action in those moments. Study them, have a conversation with them, and understand how they think.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THEM

- Tell me about the last time this happened. What did you notice first?
- What did you check before you said anything to the client?
- What would someone newer get wrong here?
- How did you know you had enough to make a call?

1.5 Write it down. Use it for every candidate.

Once you have the criteria, be disciplined. Write them down before the first session and use them as a consistent form of assessment between candidates. Apples for apples. If each person is judged on whatever stood out on the day, you're comparing impressions, not evidence.

GOTCHAS

- **Too vague to watch.** "Strategic", "proactive" or "good with clients" can't be observed. Rewrite as trigger, action, impact.
- **Too many criteria for one session.** In an hour you can watch a few things well, not ten things badly. Pick the ones that matter most for this hire.
- **Criteria that drift.** Changing what you're looking for halfway through your candidates makes the comparison unfair. If you must change, record it.

STAGE 1 Decide what you need to see

OWNER	WHEN
Hiring manager, with the facilitator	Before you build the task

- [ ] One important part of the job chosen, with a realistic situation
- [ ] Technical criteria written: what they need to understand
- [ ] Behaviour criteria written as trigger, action, impact
- [ ] Checked with someone who does the work well, if you're unsure what good looks like

COMPLETE WHEN	The criteria are written down and the hiring manager has agreed them.
HAND OFF TO	Whoever builds the SIM task deck, with the criteria sheet.
IF BLOCKED	Can't agree the criteria? Talk to someone who does the work well (1.4). Don't build the task yet.

2

Prepare the exercise

Give people enough information to take part properly. There should be no guessing about how it works.



2.1 Send a SIM task deck beforehand

The SIM task deck is a briefing document. You don't need to make it complicated, but you do need to give people enough information to participate properly.

For our growth strategist, I'd explain the business, give them all the sales and cost information, and ask them to investigate why profit hasn't increased. I'd tell them they'll talk through what they notice, what they'd check next, and what they'd recommend to the client. Then I'd explain all the practical stuff.

A
The business
Who they are, what they do, the problem in one line.

B
The numbers
All the information they need to investigate.

C
The task
One clear question, and what they'll talk you through.

D
The practical stuff
People, time, prep, tools, criteria, pay, next steps.

WHEN TO SEND IT

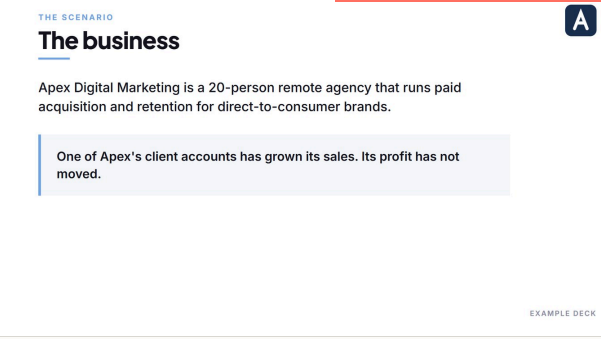
A few days before the session. Long enough to read it and check every file opens, short enough that the prep doesn't grow. Invite questions about the logistics before the day.



INSIDE THE EXAMPLE DECK

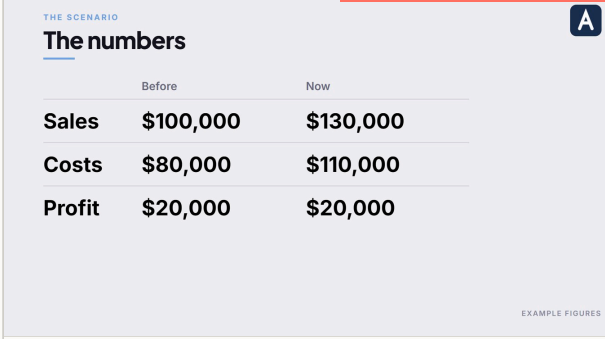
Four pages are enough

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE



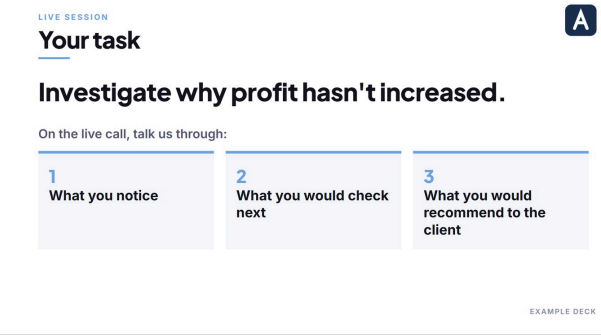
A · The business. A 20-person remote agency. One client account has grown its sales, but profit has not moved.

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE



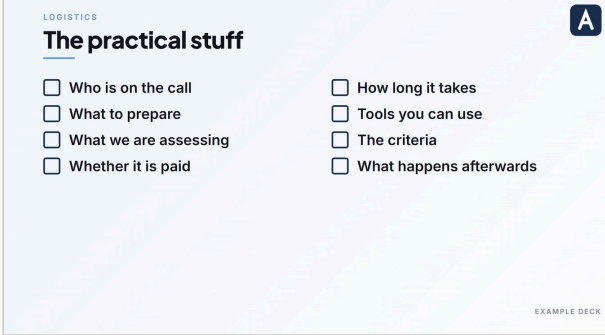
B · The numbers. Sales, costs and profit, before and now. Everything they need to spot the problem.

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE



C · The task. Investigate why profit hasn't increased. Talk us through what you notice, check and recommend.

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE



D · The practical stuff. Every question a candidate would otherwise have to guess at.

TIP

Tell them they're not expected to invent missing information. Ask them to request it and explain how it would change their recommendation. Asking for the right missing information is often the behaviour you're looking for.

2.2 Answer the practical questions up front

There should be no guessing about how the assessment works or what happens afterwards. Your deck should answer all of these:

- [ ] Who's going to be on the call?
- [ ] How long is it going to take?
- [ ] Do they need to prep anything?
- [ ] What tools can they use?
- [ ] What are you assessing?
- [ ] What are the actual criteria?
- [ ] Will they be paid, and how much?
- [ ] What happens afterwards, and when?

Sharing the criteria names doesn't give the game away. It tells people what you care about, so you see their real work instead of their guesses about what you want.

2.3 Pay them

For meaningful work like this, I think you should pay people. We usually work from an equivalent hourly rate and agree the amount beforehand.

What's important is that you're clear about the **total time** you're asking for, including preparation. If the deck takes an hour to read and the session runs for an hour, you're asking for two hours, not one.



GOTCHAS

- **Prep that creeps.** A deck that needs half a day of analysis is unpaid work unless you've counted it. Keep the prep small, or pay for it.
- **Pay agreed after the fact.** Agree the amount and when it's paid before they accept. Then pay promptly, whatever you decide about the hire.

2.4 Use real information where you're allowed to

One caveat I'd stress. If you have the ability and the permission, use real business information as much as possible. For example, read-only access to an account, so the candidate is actually stepping into a client account.

But permission comes first. Confidentiality needs to be agreed beforehand, and the people who own the data need to authorise that access before the candidate gets it.

Has the data owner authorised the candidate to see this information?

YES

Agree confidentiality first. Give **read-only** access, limited to what the task needs, and test it before the day. Use views that hide customers' personal details. Remove the access when the session ends.

NO, OR NOT SURE

Don't use it. Prepare a **realistic example** they can inspect safely, with the same shape of problem.

WATCH OUT

Signing an NDA doesn't give you permission to share someone else's data.

An NDA covers what the candidate does with information. It doesn't make you the owner of your client's data. If it isn't yours to share, you need the owner's permission, not just the candidate's signature.

This is practical guidance, not legal advice. Check your client contracts and your own privacy obligations before you share any real data.



NEVER PUT IN THE DECK OR NOTES

- Passwords, login codes or shared credentials
- Client names you haven't been cleared to share
- Customers' personal details: names, emails, addresses

2.5 Be clear about AI use

If AI is a tool they'll use in the role, and that's where most roles are going, it can be part of the exercise. I think it should be. Agree beforehand which tools they can use and what information can go into them.

> *They still need to understand, check and explain the output. That's a key thing people miss. And that's what you can do on the live call.*
>
> FROM THE FILM

- [ ] Which tools are allowed, named in the deck
- [ ] What information can and can't go into them, especially client data
- [ ] That they'll be asked to explain and check anything they rely on

2.6 How much direction should you give?

It's another question I usually get asked. It depends on what you're assessing, so it's pretty specific to each situation.

IF YOU WANT TO SEE HOW THEY...	...THEN GIVE THEM
Interpret a report	Just the report. Preferably a real one with real client data, if you have permission.
Decide where to investigate	The business problem, the tools and the access. Then let them choose where to look.
Explain a recommendation to a client	A clear question from the client, and time at the end to answer it as they would on a client call.

TIP

Work backwards from the behaviour you want to see. Too much direction and you only see whether they can follow instructions. Too little and you're testing whether they can read your mind. If you're unsure, the dry run will tell you.

2.7 Try it with someone first

You might find you've asked too much, or left out information they actually needed. So try it. Do a dry run with someone in the company who knows the role, ask for their feedback, and fix anything confusing.

A confusing task tells you about your task, not about the candidate. Catch it before a real candidate spends their time on it.

EXAMPLE IMPROVEMENT NOTE

Found in the dry run: the tester couldn't tell which period the costs referred to.

Change: added clear "Before" and "Now" labels and confirmed both use the same reporting basis.

Recorded: old version kept, change dated.

GOTCHAS

- **Hidden information.** If they need a number to do the task, put it in the deck. Don't test whether they can find something you forgot to give them.
- **No sign-off on data access.** Live account access without the data owner's authorisation is a problem, whatever the candidate has signed.
- **AI rules left unsaid.** If you don't say what's allowed, you can't fairly judge how they used it.
- **Changing the task between candidates.** Sometimes you have to. Record what changed and weigh it when you compare.

STAGE 2 Prepare the exercise

OWNER	WHEN
Hiring manager, or the facilitator if you hand it over	Deck sent a few days before the session

- [ ] Deck covers business, numbers, task, practical stuff
- [ ] Pay amount and total time agreed with the candidate
- [ ] Data owner authorisation, or a realistic example
- [ ] Confidentiality agreed before any access
- [ ] AI tools and data rules stated
- [ ] Dry run done, confusing parts fixed
- [ ] Facilitator and note-taker booked
- [ ] Permission to record asked for

COMPLETE WHEN	The candidate has the deck, has agreed the terms, and can open everything they need.
HAND OFF TO	The facilitator, with the criteria sheet, the deck and the planned change.
IF BLOCKED	No data-owner sign-off by deck day? Use the realistic example. Candidate won't agree the terms? Don't run the session.

3

Watch them work

Get on the call, stay present, and ask the questions that show you how they think.



3.1 Set up the session

- **Length.** We often allow around an hour. I've seen tasks run 30 minutes and some run an hour and a half. It depends on the role and what you're trying to tease out.
- **Who's on the call.** The facilitator needs to understand the work well enough to ask useful follow-up questions. That might be you, another strategist or the hiring manager, but someone on the call must be an expert in the field.
- **Recording.** Arrange permission to record the session, or use a note-taker, so you can stay present instead of typing. Ask in writing, say who will see the recording and when you'll delete it, and check the recording rules where you and the candidate are.

AN EXAMPLE RUNNING ORDER FOR A ONE-HOUR SESSION

0-5 Welcome	**5-30** They investigate and talk it through	**30-45** Your questions, then the change	**45-55** Feedback	**55-60** Next steps

One way to split the hour, not a rule. Adjust it to what you're assessing.

3.2 Open with a quick check

Before the clock really starts, check they can open everything, understand the task and know which tools they can use. Confirm the recording or note-taking arrangement. Five minutes here saves a wasted session.

3.3 Ask questions that connect what they see to what they propose

QUESTIONS THAT OPEN THEM UP

1. *What do those numbers tell you?*
2. *What does that specific number tell you?*
3. *Why would you check that next?*
4. *What information are you missing?*
5. *What would you need to check before recommending more spend?*

Watch first, then ask. Notice where they look, what they compare, what they calculate, and what they say is missing.

Your questions should make them link the evidence in front of them to the advice they're giving. That link is the thing you're assessing.

3.4 Don't hand them the conclusion

Be careful not to ask a question that gives them a conclusion to agree with.

LEADING

~~*Do you think the ads are wasting money?*~~

OPEN

What would you need to check before recommending more spend?

The second one gives them room to explain their reasoning. That's the whole purpose of being live.

3.5 Introduce a relevant change

Another thing that works well is to change the situation partway through. Say I've asked what they'd need to check before recommending more spend, and they've listed a few things. Then I'd say:

> *"OK, the client wants to double their ad spend next month. What would you say to them?"*
>
> THE PLANNED CHANGE **FICTIONAL EXAMPLE**

WHEN YOU INTRODUCE THE CHANGE, WATCH FOR

a
Do they ask for more information before answering?

b
Do they explain the uncertainty?

c
Do they give the client a useful next step?

Plan the change before the session and use the same one for every candidate, so the comparison stays fair.

3.6 Give feedback, and watch what they do with it

It's good practice to give candidates feedback during the session too. Say you point out a cost they missed. Do they check it and update the recommendation? Can they explain what changes?

Record the feedback, and record the help you gave. Afterwards you need to tell apart what they noticed themselves from what they did after a prompt. Both matter. They're not the same evidence.

NOTICED ALONE

Shows what they see without help.

AFTER A PROMPT

Shows how they take feedback and update their thinking.

3.7 Write evidence, not impressions

Instead of writing "she was good with numbers", write what they did. Then connect each observation to the criterion you agreed at the start.

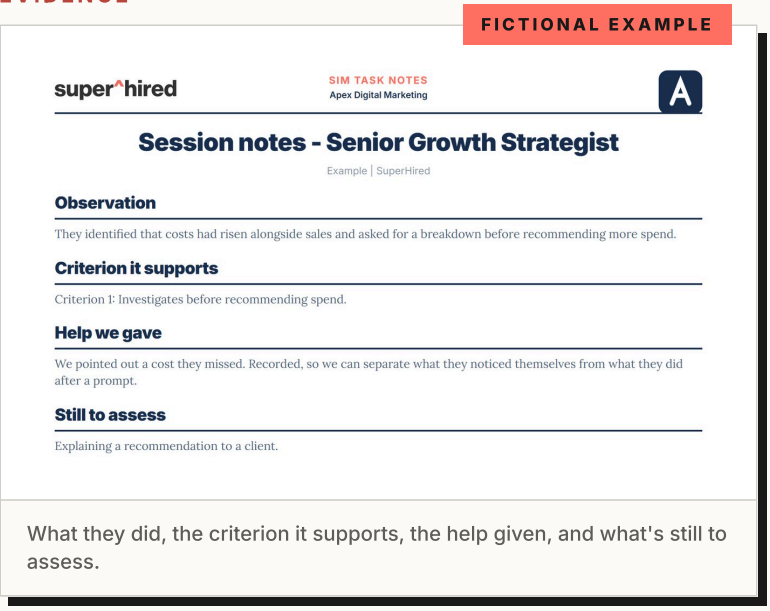
IMPRESSION



Tells you how the facilitator felt. Can't be compared.

EVIDENCE

FICTIONAL EXAMPLE



What they did, the criterion it supports, the help given, and what's still to assess.

STAGE 3 **Watch them work**

OWNER	WHEN
Facilitator, with the note-taker	The live session, about an hour

- [ ] Access and understanding checked at the start
- [ ] Open questions, no leading ones
- [ ] The planned change introduced
- [ ] Feedback given, their update noted
- [ ] Help given recorded, and when it was given
- [ ] Next steps explained before they leave

COMPLETE WHEN	Notes for every criterion are written up the same day, as observations, with help given marked.
HAND OFF TO	The hiring manager, with the notes and anything still to assess.
IF BLOCKED	See "When things go wrong" on page 20.

STEP 4 · REVIEW AND CLOSE OUT

Know what you're confident about, and what you still need to check

You should be able to explain why you're confident about one part of their ability, and what you still need to check.

1
Match
Connect each observation to the criterion you agreed at the start.

▶

2
Separate
Mark what they noticed alone and what came after a prompt.

▶

3
Name the gaps
List what you haven't seen yet. Plan to assess it next.

▶

4
Close out
Pay them, remove any access, tell them the outcome.

Missing evidence is a gap, not a fail

If you haven't seen them explain a recommendation to a client, write that down as something you still need to assess. Not seeing it isn't proof they can't do it. If something technical or behavioural is missing, that's usually when you pick it up again in a second interview.

If the task changed, say so

If you changed the task between candidates, record what changed and consider it when you compare them. A clearer deck for candidate three isn't a fair comparison with a confusing one for candidate one.

CLOSE THE LOOP

Tell the candidate the outcome by the date you promised: next stage, an offer, or not this time. Include a line on what you saw. Pay on time, whatever you decide. Remove any account access the same day. How you treat people in a SIM task is part of how they decide whether to work with you.

STAGE 4 Review and close out

OWNER	WHEN
Hiring manager	Write-up the same day. Decision by the date you gave the candidate.

- [ ] Each observation matched to a criterion
- [ ] Noticed alone and after a prompt kept apart
- [ ] Gaps listed for a second interview
- [ ] Any task changes weighed in the comparison
- [ ] Decision made
- [ ] Candidate told the outcome on the promised date
- [ ] Payment sent
- [ ] Access removed, data owner told
- [ ] Recording deleted when you said you would

COMPLETE WHEN	The candidate has the outcome and the payment, and nobody outside the team still has access to anything.
HAND OFF TO	Next stage owner, with the gaps to assess, if they're going forward.
IF BLOCKED	Decision held up? Tell the candidate before the promised date and give a new one.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

What to do if it doesn't go to plan

WHAT HAPPENS	WHAT TO DO	WHO
The data owner says no, or hasn't replied by deck day	Use the realistic example. Don't delay the process waiting for it.	Hiring manager
They don't want to be recorded	Use a note-taker instead. It's not a mark against them.	Facilitator
They can't open the data or the account	Pause. Fix access if it's quick. If not, switch to the realistic example. Note the delay, and that this candidate used the example, and weigh it when you compare.	Facilitator
The session runs long	Stop at the agreed time. Note what you didn't get to see and assess it later. Don't ask for more time than you agreed to pay for.	Facilitator
Nobody on the call knows the work well	Reschedule. Without an expert you can't ask useful follow-ups, and that's most of the evidence.	Hiring manager
They rely on AI output they can't explain	Ask them to walk you through it and check it. Record what they could and couldn't explain.	Facilitator
They ask for information you didn't plan for	Often that's the behaviour you want. Answer if you can, and note what they asked for and why.	Facilitator
You forgot to note the help you gave	Write it down straight after while it's fresh. Mark those observations as possibly prompted.	Note-taker
A criterion never came up	Mark it "still to assess". Pick it up in a second interview. Don't guess.	Hiring manager
You had to change the task midway through your candidates	Keep the old version. Record what changed and when. Weigh it when you compare.	Hiring manager
They cancel after starting the prep	Offer one new time. Pay for the prep time you agreed if they've done it.	Hiring manager
They don't turn up	Follow up once, kindly. Things happen. Offer one new time if you're still keen.	Hiring manager
Access is still live after the session	Remove it now and tell the data owner.	Data owner

TOOL 1 · BEHAVIOUR STATEMENT WORKSHEET

What do I need to see?

ROLE

ONE IMPORTANT PART OF THE JOB

What would I need to see this person do before I trust them with it?

TECHNICAL: WHAT DO THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND?

BEHAVIOUR STATEMENTS

	Trigger · when...	Action · they...	Impact · so that...
1			
2			
3			

WHO ALREADY DOES THIS WELL? WHO WILL I ASK?

AGREED BY (HIRING MANAGER) AND DATE

TOOL 2 · SIM TASK DECK CHECKLIST

Before you send the deck

CONTENT

- [ ] The business, in a few lines
- [ ] All the information they need
- [ ] One clear task question
- [ ] What they'll talk you through
- [ ] "Ask for what's missing" stated
- [ ] Fictional or real data, and on what permission
- [ ] Real data: confidentiality agreed, read-only access tested

PRACTICAL

- [ ] Who's on the call
- [ ] Session length and prep time
- [ ] Tools allowed, AI rules
- [ ] Criteria names
- [ ] Pay amount and when it's paid
- [ ] Who to contact with questions
- [ ] Recording or note-taker
- [ ] What happens afterwards, and when

TOOL 3 · FACILITATOR QUESTION CARD

ASK

1. *What do those numbers tell you?*
2. *Why would you check that next?*
3. *What information are you missing?*
4. *What would you need to check before recommending ...?*
5. *What changes now that you know ...?*

THE PLANNED CHANGE

AVOID

Questions that hand them a conclusion. "Do you think X is the problem?"

TOOL 4 · SESSION NOTES

One sheet per criterion

CANDIDATE

DATE · TASK VERSION

CRITERION

OBSERVATION

What they did and said. Not how it felt.

PLANNED CHANGE

What they said and what they asked for.

HELP WE GAVE

What we pointed out, when, and what they did next.

NOTICED ALONE, OR AFTER A PROMPT?

STILL TO ASSESS

CLOSE-OUT

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BEFORE YOUR NEXT HIRE

Pick one important part of the job.

Ask yourself what you'd need to see this person do before you actually trust them with it. Write that down, agree the criteria, and design the exercise around it.

super^hired

Growth is a people decision.