



SQL Server DBA Phone Interview Questions

By: [Jeremy Kadlec \(/sqlserverauthor/38/jeremy-kadlec/\)](#) | Updated: 2016-02-01 | [Comments \(14\)](#) | Related: [More \(/sql-server-professional-development-resources/\)](#) > [Professional Development Interview Questions DBA \(/sql-server-tip-category/46/professional-development-interview-questions-dba/\)](#)

Problem

The phone interview. It has tales of bringing normally rationale people to a terrified state. I have even heard of a DBA that was so worried about a SQL Server phone interview that 'they just happened to be in the office park' where the company was located and actually wanted the interview face to face. The reality is, just about all organizations that I work with, have a phone interview as a 'rite of first passage' in the process. The employer wants to quickly determine if the DBA candidate could be qualified for the position from a technical perspective and if they could fit into the team. As a DBA, what sorts of things should you be on the lookout for during a phone interview? What do you think the employer is expecting? Is this the technical interview or not? Should you try to avoid the phone interview all together and just 'pop-in' for a face to face interview?

Solution

Let's address the last question first; that being should you just 'pop-in' to the office rather than having a phone interview? Phone interviews are setup for a reason. They are intended as a simple means to determine if someone is worth going through the entire interview process. Some organizations have a fairly structured process and follow it closely while other organizations really conduct interviews over lunch or based on a personal network. You need to be the judge and assess the situation for yourself and make the call. In the story I was told about, the results were not positive from either the employer or DBA perspective. So keep that in mind.

With that behind us, let's get into the employer and DBA views of the phone interview as well as some potential questions you should be ready to answer.



ects, employers handle phone interviews in such a manner that they use the same questions to assess the skills of the [MENU](#)
(1) a means to compare and contrast their skills to determine a 'candidate ranking'. By this I mean candidates are ranked in
terms of best to worst skill set as well as determine who should progress to the next step in the process, the on-site interview.

From an employer's perspective, they are trying to determine a few different items during the phone interview:

- Communication skills
- Personality
- Technical experience and background
- Leadership qualities
- How they could fit into the team

DBA Perspective for a Phone Interview

Here are some thoughts from a DBA perspective when it comes to a phone interview:

- First, be ready for the phone interview and expect it as a portion of the interview process.
- Prepare for the phone interview just like you would the on-site interview. Remember if you do not make a good impression with the phone interview that the on-site interview may not be a reality.
- Remember the phone interview is a rite of passage, so first impressions can mean a great deal. Make sure your first impressions are what you want them to be. Simple items like stuttering, stumbling over your words, smoking during the call, chewing gum, etc. may turn off the interviewer quickly.
- Next, figure out your 30 second elevator pitch and make sure you outline your most important experience and skills as well as how you are going to help the organization.
- Just like with your resume, be sure you do not lie. If you do not know the answer to a question, just say you do not know.
- Be prepared for technical questions from either a technical or non-technical interviewer. Be sure to respond in a way that they can understand the response. The interviewer may be looking for just buzz words or may be not. A good technical interview, from a knowledgeable DBA, can really dig into the details to make sure you truly understand the technology.
- As much as the interview process is about the employer selecting the right employee, also keep in mind that the candidate should select the right organization for themselves. As such, use the phone interview as a means to learn about the organization. If you are give the opportunity, ask the questions you have prepared.
- The topic of salary and compensation may be discussed. Be prepared for the question. Historically, the response has been to push off the salary figures to as late in the process as possible. As an employer and employee, I disagree. I think it only makes sense to state a range to make sure one party does not have different expectations than the other. If the figures are not even close, it might make sense for either party to stop the process rather than spending a significant amount of time only to be disappointed at the end. Just something to consider.

SQL Server DBA Phone Interview Questions

Although no two phone interviews are the same, below outlines some potential questions to keep in mind as you prepare for a SQL Server DBA phone interview:

- Can you explain your skill set?
 - Employers look for the following:
 - DBA (Maintenance, Security, Upgrades, Performance Tuning, etc.)
 - Database developer (T-SQL, SSIS, Analysis Services, Reporting Services, Crystal Reports, Service Broker, etc.)
 - Communication skills (oral and written)
 - DBA's opportunity
 - This is your 30 second elevator pitch outlining your technical expertise and how you can benefit the organization
- Can you explain the environments you have worked in related to the following items:
 - SQL Server versions
 - SQL Server technologies
 - Relational engine, Reporting Services, Analysis Services, Integration Services



- Number of databases
- Range of size of databases
- Number of DBAs
- Number of Developers
- Hardware specs (CPU's, memory, 64 bit, SANs)
- What are the tasks that you perform on a daily basis and how have you automated them?
 - For example, daily checks could include:
 - Check for failed processes
 - Research errors
 - Validate disk space is not low
 - Validate none of the databases are offline or corrupt
 - Perform database maintenance as available to do so
 - For example, automation could include:
 - Setup custom scripts to query for particular issues and email the team
 - Write error messages centrally in the application and review that data
 - Setup Operators and Alerts on SQL Server Agent Jobs for automated job notification
- How do you re-architect a process?
 - Review the current process to understand what is occurring
 - Backup the current code for rollback purposes
 - Determine what the business and technical problems are with the process
 - Document the requirements for the new process
 - Research options to address the overall business and technology needs
 - For example, these could include:
 - Views
 - Synonyms
 - Service Broker
 - SSIS
 - Migrate to a new platform
 - Upgrade in place
 - Design and develop a new solution
 - Conduct testing (functional, load, regression, unit, etc.)
 - Run the systems in parallel
 - Sunset the existing system
 - Promote the new system
 - Additional information - [Checklist to Re-Architect a SQL Server Database \(/sqlservtip/1403/checklist-to-re-architect-a-sql-server-database/\)](#)
- What is your experience with third party applications and why would you use them?
 - Experience
 - Backup tools
 - Performance tools
 - Code or data synchronization
 - Disaster recovery\high availability
 - Why
 - Need to improve upon the functionality that SQL Server offers natively
 - Save time, save money, better information or notification
- How do you identify and correct a SQL Server performance issue?



ation - Use native tools like Profiler, Perfmon, system stored procedures, dynamic management views, custom stored procedures or third party tools MENU

- Analysis - Analyze the data to determine the core problems
- Testing - Test the various options to ensure they perform better and do not cause worse performance in other portions of the application
- Knowledge sharing - Share your experience with the team to ensure they understand the problem and solution, so the issue does not occur again
- Additional information - MSSQLTips.com Category: [Performance Tuning \(/sql-server-tip-category/9/performance-tuning/\)](http://sql-server-tip-category/9/performance-tuning/) and [Query Optimization \(/sql-server-tip-category/37/query-optimization/\)](http://sql-server-tip-category/37/query-optimization/)
- What are the dynamic management views and what value do they offer?
 - The DMV's are a set of system views new to SQL Server 2005 and beyond to gain insights into particular portions of the engine
 - Here are some of the DMV's and the associated value:
 - sys.dm_exec_query_stats and sys.dm_exec_sql_text - Buffered code in SQL Server
 - Additional Information: [Identifying the input buffer in SQL Server 2000 vs SQL Server 2005 \(/sqlservertip/1363/identifying-the-input-buffer-in-sql-server-2000-vs-sql-server-2005/\)](http://sqlservertip/1363/identifying-the-input-buffer-in-sql-server-2000-vs-sql-server-2005/)
 - sys.dm_os_buffer_descriptors
 - Additional Information: [Buffer Pool Space in SQL Server 2005 \(/sqlservertip/1187/buffer-pool-space-in-sql-server-2005/\)](http://sqlservertip/1187/buffer-pool-space-in-sql-server-2005/)
 - sys.dm_tran_locks - Locking and blocking
 - Additional Information: [Locking and Blocking Scripts in SQL Server 2000 vs SQL Server 2005 \(/sqlservertip/1359/locking-and-blocking-scripts-in-sql-server-2000-vs-sql-server-2005/\)](http://sqlservertip/1359/locking-and-blocking-scripts-in-sql-server-2000-vs-sql-server-2005/)
 - sys.dm_os_wait_stats - Wait stats
 - Additional Information: [Waitstats performance metrics in SQL Server 2000 vs SQL Server 2005 \(/sqlservertip/1031/waitstats-performance-metrics-in-sql-2000-vs-sql-server-2005/\)](http://sqlservertip/1031/waitstats-performance-metrics-in-sql-2000-vs-sql-server-2005/)
 - sys.dm_exec_requests and sys.dm_exec_sessions - Percentage complete for a process
 - Additional Information: [Finding a SQL Server process percentage complete with dynamic management views \(/sqlservertip/1338/finding-a-sql-server-process-percentage-complete-with-dmvs/\)](http://sqlservertip/1338/finding-a-sql-server-process-percentage-complete-with-dmvs/)
- What is the process to upgrade from DTS to SSIS packages?
 - You can follow the steps of the migration wizard but you may need to manually upgrade portions of the package that were not upgraded by the wizard
 - Additional Information: [Upgrade SQL Server DTS Packages to Integration Services Packages \(/sqlservertip/1224/upgrade-sql-server-dts-packages-to-integration-services-packages/\)](http://sqlservertip/1224/upgrade-sql-server-dts-packages-to-integration-services-packages/)
 - For script related tasks, these should be upgraded to new native components or VB.NET code
- What are some of the features of SQL Server 2012 that you are looking into and why are they of interest?
 - AlwaysON
 - Contained Databases
 - User Defined Server Roles
 - New date and time functions
 - New FORMAT and CONCAT functions
 - New IIF and CHOOSE functions
 - New paging features with OFFSET and FETCH
 - NOTE - Many more new features do exist, this is an abbreviated list.

Keep in mind that these questions are primarily related to the relational engine, so a BI DBA would have a whole different set of questions. In addition, the more you know about the organization and role should guide you down a path for the types of questions you should be prepared for during the phone interview.

Next Steps



are for your interviews, make sure you are prepared technically and have a good sense of what is going to be asked of you. In my opinion, the candidates that are nervous or stumble have not prepared, although that is not always the case. Some people are genuinely nervous about the job hunting process and are in fact great DBAs.

- Check out these [technical SQL Server interview \(/sql-server-tip-category/46/professional-development-interview-questions-dba/\)](/sql-server-tip-category/46/professional-development-interview-questions-dba/) question as you prepare for your interviews.
- Special thanks to John from the MSSQLTips.com community for recommending this tip.
- If you have your own phone interview tales or would like to add your two cents to this tip, please do so in the comments section for this tip.

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About the author



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