

Great that you asked this, Paresh — this is where many beginners get confused.
Let's make it **100% clear** with simple logic. ↗

⌚ WHERE city = 'NULL' — this is NOT a NULL check

When you write:

WHERE city = 'NULL';

SQL does **NOT** treat 'NULL' as the keyword NULL.

✓ 'NULL' (inside quotes) = a normal string

⌚ NULL (without quotes) = missing value

⌚ So what does city = 'NULL' actually do?

It searches for rows where the city **literally contains** the text:

NULL

Like this:

emp_id	city
21	NULL
5	null

✓ It works only if the data contains the word 'NULL' as text.

Most real datasets **do not** store "NULL" as a string.

They store **actual NULL** (empty / missing).

📌 Examples to understand the difference

⌚ Check wrong:

WHERE city = 'NULL' -- looking for a text string, not missing data

⌚ Check wrong:

WHERE city = NULL -- always false

✓ Correct check:

WHERE city IS NULL -- true NULL check

⌚ Simple Explanation (Remember This Line)

'NULL' is a string.

NULL is not a string — it's a missing value.

That's why we use IS NULL, not = 'NULL'.

⌚ Real Example to Understand

Suppose the table contains:

emp_id	city
1	Mumbai
2	NULL
3	'NULL'
4	Delhi

Query results:

Query:

WHERE city = 'NULL';

☞ Returns only row **3**

(Because it's a string)

Query:

WHERE city IS NULL;

☞ Returns only row **2**

(Because it's an actual NULL)



One-Line Interview Answer

'NULL' is a string. NULL is a missing value.

To compare strings we use `=`, but to check NULL we must use `IS NULL`.