

System Design Interview Preparation Checklist

Cover Every Critical Aspect With Confidence

1. Pre-Interview Preparation (5 items)

- Review common system design patterns
- Practice clarifying ambiguous requirements
- Study scaling strategies for distributed systems
- Prepare questions about company's technical challenges
- Rest well and arrive early

2. During Interview - Opening (5 items)

- Listen carefully to the problem statement
- Ask clarifying questions (types, scale, channels, latency)
- Confirm understanding before designing
- State assumptions explicitly
- Outline your approach briefly

3. Design Phase Checklist (8 items)

- State functional requirements clearly
- Define non-functional requirements (availability, scalability, latency)
- Draw high-level architecture with labeled components
- Explain purpose of each component
- Walk through end-to-end flow for one example
- Discuss failure scenarios and retry logic
- Address data model and persistence needs
- Explain scaling strategy for traffic spikes

4. Communication Checklist (6 items)

- Think out loud, externalize reasoning
- Explain trade-offs when making decisions
- Use specific numbers when discussing scale
- Draw diagrams to support explanations
- Acknowledge what you don't know honestly
- Invite interviewer questions throughout

5. Common Pitfalls to Avoid (5 items)

- Don't jump to tools before stating requirements
- Don't ignore failure scenarios
- Don't treat all use cases identically
- Don't forget observability and monitoring
- Don't get defensive when questioned