

High-Level Design Communication Checklist

A step-by-step guide to presenting architecture clearly

Section 1: Before You Draw

- Requirements clarified (core use cases + non-goals)?
- Context stated (scale, traffic pattern, constraints)?
- Interviewer aligned on scope and ready for a high-level sketch?

Section 2: The Minimal Design

- Draw only 3-6 boxes to start (keep it minimal).
- Label each component with its job (e.g., API, DB, cache, queue).
- Connect boxes with simple arrows showing direction of data flow.

Section 3: Narrate the Core Flow

- Use present tense: "A request comes in... we validate... we write/read...".
- Tell a story, not specifications (one path end-to-end).
- Walk one use case at a time (write path, then read path).

Section 4: State What's Missing

- Call out obvious gaps you have not covered yet (auth, rate limits, retries, monitoring).
- Preview what you would add next (caching, sharding, queues, replication).
- Ask for feedback: "Should I go deeper on performance, reliability, or scaling first?"

Section 5: Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Don't design and explain simultaneously (sketch first, then narrate).
- Don't add complexity too early (earn it with a constraint).
- Don't skip verbal narration (clarity matters as much as correctness).