

Chimney Sweep interview questions

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What to expect

Chimney sweeping interviews are practical and safety focused. Employers want to know you can work confidently at heights, clean without making a mess, spot problems in a flue, and explain those problems to a homeowner without alarm or jargon.

- **Safety and working at heights:** Questions about roof access, weather, harness use, ladder placement and when to walk away.
- **Technical process:** Walk-throughs of sweeping, vacuuming, inspection and minor repairs.
- **Scenario and problem-solving:** Diagnosing smoke blowback, poor draw, blockages and creosote.
- **Customer-facing:** Explaining risks, quoting simple work and handling difficult conversations.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of unsafe findings, difficult customers, or jobs that did not go to plan.

A small business will often start with a phone or in-person chat about your experience and tickets, then move to a practical session at a workshop or on a real job. You may be asked to set up a ladder, assemble brushes, demonstrate camera use and talk through a mock flue inspection. Some employers include a paid trial day or a ride-along with a senior sweep before making an offer.

1. Walk me through how you sweep a typical open fireplace and flue, from arriving at the property to packing up.

Why they ask

This tests your process, safety awareness and clean work habits in one answer.

How to structure your answer

A chronological walk-through: arrival and setup, safety checks, sweeping, vacuuming, inspection, customer handover and clean-up.

Example answer

"I start by parking so the van does not block the driveway, then introduce myself and confirm which fireplace and flue are being swept. I lay drop sheets from the hearth to the door, put on PPE, and check the roof access before touching any gear. If I am going on the roof, I set the ladder at the correct angle, secure it, and use a roof ladder or harness as needed. I remove the cap or access panel, run the brush from the top down, then vacuum the hearth and firebox with the HEPA vacuum. I use the inspection camera to check for cracks, creosote and nesting material, and I take photos before I pack up. Finally I show the customer what I found, explain any follow-up work, and leave the room as clean as I found it."

2. You arrive at a two-storey home with a steep tiled roof and the tiles are wet. How do you decide whether it is safe to get on the roof?

Why they ask

This probes your judgement under pressure and your understanding of fall risk.

How to structure your answer

A risk assessment structure: identify hazards, assess likelihood and consequence, apply the hierarchy of controls, and communicate your decision.

Example answer

"I would not treat it as a simple yes or no. I check the pitch, the condition of the tiles, the weather, and whether there is a safer access point such as a valley, a flat section or an internal flue hatch. If the roof is wet and steep, I look at whether a roof ladder can be anchored safely or whether the job can be done from a platform or from inside. If I cannot control the fall risk, I stop and explain to the

customer that I will reschedule for drier conditions or bring in a second person. I would rather lose a job than take a fall."

3. A customer says their wood heater is smoking back into the room. What do you check?

Why they ask

This is a technical diagnosis question about flue draw, blockages and safe wood heating.

How to structure your answer

A systematic diagnosis: gather symptoms, check simple causes first, then move to camera inspection and draft testing.

Example answer

"I would start by asking when it happens: on start-up, when the door is opened, or all the time. Then I check the simple things first: is the flue blocked or partially blocked, is the cap damaged or blocked by a nest, and is the baffle or damper in the right position. I look at the wood being burned and how it is stacked, because wet wood and a cold flue cause poor draw. I also check the room ventilation and whether the house is too airtight, which can starve the heater of air. If I cannot find an obvious blockage, I use the inspection camera and a draft test to see how the flue is performing. I explain what I find and give the customer a clear next step."

4. Tell me about a time you found something unsafe that the customer did not want to hear.

Why they ask

This behavioural question tests integrity, communication and whether you will put safety ahead of an easy sale.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result. Focus on how you raised the issue and what changed.

Example answer

"At a rental property, I found a badly cracked flue liner and creosote built up in the upper section. The tenant did not want the disruption, and the landlord questioned whether it was really necessary. I took photos, showed them the crack and the creosote, and explained in plain terms what could happen if a chimney fire started. I put the findings in writing, gave them a simple option to have the liner replaced before the next winter, and noted that I could not sign off the sweep as safe until it was fixed. The landlord arranged the repair a few weeks later. It was uncomfortable, but the tenant and the property were safer for it."

5. How do you explain creosote build-up and the need for a sweep to a customer who thinks an annual clean is unnecessary?

Why they ask

This tests your customer-facing style and whether you can educate without pressure.

How to structure your answer

Plain language, evidence, risk and options: show what you found, explain why it matters, recommend a clear next step.

Example answer

"I do not lead with scare stories. I show them the creosote I removed, or the camera photo of what is still in the flue, and explain that creosote is fuel that can catch fire inside the chimney. I compare it to a grease build-up in a kitchen range hood: you might not see it day to day, but it is there and it builds up. I ask how often they use the heater and what they burn, then give a straight recommendation for their situation. If they choose not to book now, I leave them with the photos and a written note so they can make an informed decision."

6. What do you look for when inspecting a chimney for structural damage and animal nests?

Why they ask

This is a technical inspection question about thoroughness, camera use and record keeping.

How to structure your answer

A checklist and top-down inspection: roof level, flue internals, firebox, evidence of animals and written reporting.

Example answer

"I work from the top down where possible. From the roof I check the crown, the mortar, the flue tiles or liner, the cap and the flashing for cracks, movement or rust. I look for signs of animals: nesting material, feathers, droppings, or a strong ammonia smell. Inside, I check the firebox, the damper, the baffle and the visible section of flue, and I run the inspection camera up as far as it will go. I also look for creosote glazing and any gaps where smoke could escape into the roof space. I record everything with photos and a written summary, because a customer cannot see what I see up there, and the next person who works on the chimney needs that record."