

Listing Agent Interview Questions

The 30+ questions contained in this list are to be used by you, the home seller, to interview prospective real estate agents. The intent is to use these questions to help you determine which agent is most competent and most suitable to list your home.

While using these questions to interview a single real estate agent is useful, the real benefit is derived by using these questions to interview more than one agent. Asking the same questions to multiple agents enables you to compare the depth and breadth of answers from the agents. The real insights into experience and competency are discovered by seeing how different agents approach the same home selling challenges. Ideally, after using these questions to interview multiple agents, one agent's answers will make you feel more comfortable about the home selling process, making the choice of real estate agent easier.

Should you ask *all* of the questions? Probably not. Ultimately you should only ask those questions you feel are necessary to make you feel good about your choice of agent. Five to six questions should be sufficient, but if you feel the need to ask more, by all means do so. The choice of real estate agent is a multi-thousand dollar decision and you should not feel as though you are offending the agent by asking a list of questions. Any agent that is insulted or put off by answering questions about their services should certainly not get the opportunity to list your home. After all, it is a job interview.

Each question in the list is accompanied by some guidance as to what constitutes a "good" answer. While technically there are no right or wrong answers, there are better ones than others. What makes for a good answer? One that indicates that the agent is truly on your side, looking out for your best interests and trying to help you keep more of your money.

Pre-listing questions:

1. What home staging mistakes do home sellers make with regard to unnecessary spending?

Making sure your home shows well is important. One way to do that is to keep spending money until everything looks perfect. But, what you do not want to do is to spend unnecessarily. Spending \$1000 on something that will not add at least \$1000 to the sale price of your home makes no sense. This question is to see if the agent is on your side and keeps you from wasting your money. You are looking for a list of things NOT to spend money on when preparing your home for sale. This will also demonstrate how in tune to the market they are: what impacts sale price and what does not.

2. Do you recommend I get a pre-listing home inspection, and why or why not?

This is basically a gotcha question. The correct answer is No. They are a waste of money and it is something the buyer should pay for, not the seller. An agent who is truly on your side, looking out for your best interests, will steer you clear of spending money unnecessarily, which includes a pre-listing home inspection.

Pricing questions:

3. Tell me about your pricing strategy in this market.

Agents may answer this question by saying "Price it right," but that is not very insightful. There are three pricing strategies when selling a home: price it low, price it at market, and price it a little above market. In a hot market with a lot of cash buyers, pricing it low and getting a bidding war may be the best approach. On the other hand, in a slow market where homes invariably sell at 2% below asking price, pricing it 2% above desired price may be the best approach. Make sure your agent has at least thought about the implications of your current market on the asking price.

4. Have you seen much cash buyer activity lately in my neighborhood?

Cash buyers have the ability to offer more than the appraised value of a home because they do not need to get loan approval. If there is a lot of cash buyer activity in your neighborhood, that might affect your pricing strategy. Make sure your agent has a feel for cash buying activity in your neighborhood.

5. How do you know when it is time to lower the asking price?

No matter how hard you try, you may misjudge the market price of your home. When that happens it is imperative to act intelligently to what the market is telling you about the price of your home. A good agent, who is in tune to the current market, should have a definite opinion about what to do with an overpriced listing and when to do it. Try to get specific recommendations, as opposed to generalities.

Marketing questions:

6. Do you recommend holding an Open House, and if so, why?

Some agents like open houses because it is a good source of new business for them. Some agents think they are a waste of time. Regardless of the agent's position, the most important part of this question is "why?" Make sure the justification for their answer makes sense to you, and more importantly, benefits you. Open Houses are effective if done right, so if the agent is against it, they should have a pretty good reason why.

7. What is your plan for maximizing foot traffic at an Open House?

Experienced agents should have some opinion about how to maximize foot traffic at an open house. Make sure the one you choose does. Here are some techniques they should know about—or at least have an opinion on.

- *Limit the Open House to only one day*
- *Limit the Open House to only a couple of hours*
- *Do not let any buyers in the home before the Open House*

8. Are there any drawbacks to listing the home on a lot (5 or more) of online sites?

It would seem that the more places you advertise your home the better. And since none of the online services charge to post a home for sale, there would be little reason why your agent would not want to list your home on as many of them as possible. But, they may not want to. If they don't, make sure you get a reasonable explanation why not, otherwise they may just be avoiding effort which benefits you.

9. Are there any places you recommend not posting online and why?

This is basically the same as question 8, only asked a different way.

10. Would you have any problem posting the listing manually to the real estate portals like Zillow and Trulia?

Posting the listing manually to portals is the ONLY way to control the content and timing of the listing. It does take a little extra work to do it. Make sure the agent is okay with that, otherwise you may be getting yourself a lazy agent.

11. What unique marketing techniques do you use, that other agents may not, to generate extra traffic?

Agents love to brag that their marketing is better than everyone else's. This is where they get to convince you. Make sure they give you details and results. And preferably those results are verifiable in some way.

12. Other than improper pricing, what is the biggest marketing mistake a home seller can make?

The most common answers here are poor staging and bad photos. But if an agent comes up with some other reason, an important one you may not have thought of, they will really be demonstrating their expertise, which benefits you.

13. What is your opinion of pocket listings?

This is another gotcha question. A pocket listing is when your agent keeps your home off the MLS so they can keep the buyer's agent's commission. The only acceptable answer here is "I would never harm my seller by doing a pocket listing."

Compensation questions:

14. If I told you that I intend to offer less-than-customary commission to the buyer's broker, would you:

- a) Support me 100%
- b) Try to convince me it is not in my best interest

This maybe the most important question as it gauges their enthusiasm and commitment to helping you keep more of your money. Most agents will NOT support you 100% because it makes their job more difficult and they risk alienating buyer's agents. If you can find a single agent that supports you 100%, that is an indication that they are progressive in their thinking and are really looking out for your best interests.

Negotiating Questions:

15. What is the biggest mistake seller's agents make when communicating with buyer's agents?

You can do everything right in the process of selling your home and lose it all to an agent that talks too much. You really want to get a feeling for how sensitive they are about what should and should not be communicated to the buyer's agent.

16. What kind of information do you promise to never relay to the buyer's agent?

This question puts them on notice that you understand how crucial their conversations are with buyer's agents. Make sure their answer to this question makes you comfortable with how sensitive they are to it.

17. If we had no offers and a buyer's agent asked you what kind of offers we had received, how would you respond?

How your agent responds to this can really ruin your negotiating position. The best answer will NOT let the buyer know that you have received no offers. It should be something along the lines of "The seller expects to make a decision soon. If your buyer is interested, I strongly suggest they submit an offer in the next 24 hours."

18. If a buyer's agents asks you what is the lowest price we will take, what will you tell them?

The correct answer is "the home is priced correctly so the seller fully expects to get their asking price."

19. If a buyer's agent asks you when do we have to be out of our home, what will you tell them?

The correct answer should mask any sense of urgency. The correct answer should be neutral, something along the lines of "the buyers are motivated by getting a fair price for their home, not time."

20. If a buyer's agent asks you why or where we are moving, what will you tell them?

Buyer's agents look for any piece of information they can get to gauge the seller's motivation so they can give their buyer some guidance what to offer. It is your agent's job to tell them nothing, in a nice way of course. The correct answer should be neutral and reveal nothing about why or where you are moving.

21. What is the most creative negotiating tactic you have used to help get your seller more money?

A experienced real estate agent probably has a few negotiation tricks up their sleeve that can get you more money for your home. Give them an opportunity to tell you about one of them.

Escrow questions:

22. What are some of the gotchas sellers need to be aware of at closing?

This is where the agent can demonstrate how they are going to keep you out of trouble, and possibly save you money, at closing. Experienced agents should have one or two really valuable tips in this area.

23. Do you use a digital transaction management system (like ZipForms or DocuSign) to manage documents during the escrow process or do use paper documents with scanning and faxing?

Using old fashioned paper documents during the escrow process is a pain. If all else is equal, it is preferably to choose an agent who uses readily available technology to make the escrow process painless.

Service questions:

24. What do you do service-wise that separates you from other agents?

Let them tell you how they differentiate themselves. The good news is that anything they declare in this answer they will feel obligated to provide for you.

25. What if I am not satisfied with your service? What recourse do I have?

If your agent is not doing all they promised to, you have every right to ask them to terminate the contract. The purpose of this question is more to send the message that you are a serious seller and you will not tolerate inferior service from your agent. How they answer the question may give your insight into how serious they are as an agent. If they offer to allow you to terminate the contract at any time, no questions asked, that would demonstrate a serious commitment on their part..

26. If I told you I am going to forbid dual agency, would you still be interested in my listing?

- a) Yes
- b) No

The only acceptable answer is Yes. Dual agency has so many conflicts of interest, it should really be illegal in every state, but it isn't.

27. What will you do to make sure I stay informed every step of the way?

Staying in daily communication once your home is for sale, and especially once it is in escrow, is critical. Make sure your agent acknowledges that by how they answer this question.

28. How often will you give me updates on the progress of my home sale?

Make sure you get a specific answer so you will not have unrealistic expectations. "Regularly" is not a good answer. "Once a day, minimum, by e-mail" is better. This is an important question because it forces the agent to establish a commitment to you. Whether they keep it or not is another story. But they are more likely to keep it if it is established ahead of time.

29. How quickly will you return my calls/e-mails?

"As soon as I can" is not a good answer. They should establish a specific level of service such as "within 2 hours." Make sure you are comfortable with their commitment and make sure they keep it.

30. Will you allow me to terminate the listing agreement if I am not completely satisfied?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Excellent agents will almost always answer Yes, because they know you will be satisfied with their service.

31. Will you have a backup for me to contact in the event you are unavailable?

- a. Yes
- b. No

This is a good question to get a Yes answer to.

32. How do you deal with buyer's agents that are unresponsive?

Unresponsive buyer's agents are more common than you might think. An experienced agent has probably dealt with them before. It is good to double check just to make sure they are prepared.