THE HOMEOWNER'S PAINTER VETTING CHECKLIST

7 Questions to Ask on Your First Call: So You Can Quickly Separate the Professionals from Everyone Else

Most homeowners call a painter and ask two things: *Are you available?* and *Can you give me a price?* Then they wait for the estimate and hope for the best. But by the time a low-quality contractor shows up to start work, it is too late to ask the questions that actually matter.

This checklist gives you 7 smart questions to use on your very first phone call. Each one is designed to help you hear the difference between a true professional and someone who just sounds like one. Use it on every call. Take notes. Then compare what you heard.

QUESTION 1

"Are you licensed, insured, and do you carry workers' compensation coverage?"

WHY THIS MATTERS

This is your baseline. A legitimate contractor should carry general liability insurance to protect your property and workers' comp to cover any injuries on your jobsite. If they are not properly covered, you could be financially responsible for accidents that happen at your home.

✔ STRONG ANSWER

They answer confidently and offer to send you proof before the estimate. They know their policy details without hesitating.

✘ RED FLAG ANSWER

They get vague, say insurance "is not really an issue," promise to send paperwork later but never do, or only carry basic liability with no workers' comp.

QUESTION 2

"Can you walk me through how your crew handles surface prep before painting?"

WHY THIS MATTERS

Prep is everything. Poor preparation (skipping cleaning, sanding, or priming) is the single biggest reason paint peels, chips, or fades early. A professional will have a clear, detailed process and will not be shy about explaining it.

✔ STRONG ANSWER

They walk through specific steps: washing surfaces, scraping loose paint, sanding rough areas, caulking gaps, priming bare wood or stained surfaces. They treat prep as the foundation of quality work.

✘ RED FLAG ANSWER

They give vague answers like "we take care of everything" without specifics, rush past the prep question, or suggest they can skip priming to save time.

QUESTION 3

"Who will be doing the work, and who is accountable for them?"

WHY THIS MATTERS

Some contractors use only their own crews; others bring in licensed subcontractors for parts of the job. Either can work. What matters is that one company stays responsible for the quality of the work and the conduct of everyone on your property, and that every worker is properly licensed and insured.

✔ STRONG ANSWER

They tell you who will be on site, whether any work goes to a subcontractor, how those companies are licensed, insured and vetted, and who you call if anything about the crew concerns you.

✘ RED FLAG ANSWER

They get evasive about who will show up, cannot say whether subcontractors carry their own license and insurance, or treat the crew's conduct as someone else's problem.

QUESTION 4

"What paint products and brands do you typically use, and why?"

WHY THIS MATTERS

Professional painters have strong opinions about paint quality because they have seen the difference firsthand. A knowledgeable contractor will recommend proven, high-quality products and be able to explain why they use them. Cheap paint applied by even a skilled painter will not last.

✔ STRONG ANSWER

They name specific brands and product lines (such as Sherwin-Williams Duration, Benjamin Moore Aura, or similar professional-grade options) and explain why those products hold up better over time.

✘ RED FLAG ANSWER

They say they use "whatever the homeowner wants" without any guidance, mention unfamiliar discount brands, or do not seem to know or care much about paint quality.

QUESTION 5

"What does your written estimate include, and are there any costs that might come up after you start?"

WHY THIS MATTERS

Vague estimates lead to surprise charges. A professional will give you a detailed written scope of work, not just a single number, and will be upfront about anything that might change pricing once work begins.

✔ STRONG ANSWER

They describe a detailed written proposal covering labor, materials, surfaces included, number of coats, and any conditions that could affect the final price. They are transparent about how they handle unexpected issues.

✘ RED FLAG ANSWER

They offer a quick verbal quote without any written detail, are evasive about what is included, or leave you feeling like the number could change at any point.

QUESTION 6

"How do you protect my floors, furniture, and landscaping while working?"

WHY THIS MATTERS

Painting is a messy trade when done carelessly. A professional crew has a consistent routine for protecting your property, and they execute it every time without being reminded. This tells you a lot about how much they respect the homes they work in.

✔ STRONG ANSWER

They describe specific protection methods: drop cloths, plastic sheeting, painter's tape on trim and hardware, moving or covering furniture, and being careful around plants, fixtures, and landscaping.

✘ RED FLAG ANSWER

They treat this as a minor question, say "we are always careful" without describing any specific process, or suggest that protection steps slow things down.

QUESTION 7

"If a problem shows up after the job is done, what happens?"

WHY THIS MATTERS

Peeling, cracking or missed spots can appear weeks or months after the crew leaves. A professional has a clear practice for handling them. Some put it in a written warranty; others follow a stated callback process. Either way, the answer should be specific.

✔ STRONG ANSWER

They tell you who to call, how quickly they respond, and what kinds of problems they come back to fix. They can name past customers who will confirm it.

✘ RED FLAG ANSWER

A vague "we'll take care of it," no named process, or discomfort when you ask for specifics or references.

Now That You've Made Your Calls: Here Is What to Do Next

- **Compare your notes, not just your quotes.** Price matters, but it is not the whole picture. A contractor who answered every question clearly, described a thorough prep process, and gave a specific answer about problems after the job is worth paying a little more for. A low bid from someone who stumbled through your questions is not a bargain.

- **Trust what the conversation felt like.** Did they listen? Were they patient with your questions? Did they speak to you like a professional who takes their work seriously? How a contractor communicates during the first call is often how they communicate throughout the project.

- **Ask for references and check reviews.** Before signing anything, ask for two or three references from recent, similar jobs. Read their reviews on Google. Look for patterns: both the praise and the complaints.

- **Get everything in writing.** A professional contractor will provide a detailed written proposal before work begins. If someone pushes back on putting things in writing, that is your answer.

- **Go with the contractor who earned your trust.** You will be inviting this team into your home. The right choice feels clear once you know what to listen for.

You now know exactly what to ask. The right painter is out there, and this checklist helps you find them.

© Painting By Ken · paintingbyken.com · (925) 766-1701 · CSLB #603312
Free to share with any homeowner preparing to hire a painter. · v5 · Oct 2026
See our reviews, photos and directions on Google