



CONSUMER GUIDE TO HIRING A HOUSE PAINTER

ASK THESE QUESTIONS TO ASSURE
YOUR JOB GETS DONE RIGHT, ON TIME
AND ON BUDGET



Dear Homeowner,

We do something very unusual in the painting industry.

We believe your home is a very special place, so it's our responsibility to explain to you in advance how to make sure you have a great experience with whoever you hire to paint your home, get a good quality job, done on time and at a good price.

Our research has shown that most people have five primary areas of concern when it comes to having their home painted – inside or outside.

Those concerns are:

- 1. Getting the job done right**
- 2. Getting the job done on time**
- 3. Not being overcharged**
- 4. Assuring good communication with painters who are polite and courteous**
- 5. Getting a written guarantee and understanding any legal issues**

If you're not a professional contractor yourself, you probably have no idea how to tell if a painter is any good. Everyone wants a quality job at a good price and no one wants to have to paint their home again next year due to a poor job being done this year.

Since anyone with a paint brush and a pick-up truck can call themselves a painter, how do you know who to choose?

This guide gives you all the questions you need to ask to make sure all these criteria are met, explains the most common scams, and gives you a convenient checklist you can use to compare bids.

The questions to ask are grouped into three categories, questions about the company, questions about your job and questions about the guarantee and legal matters.



Questions About The Painting Company:

How long have they been in business?

Most contractors that go out of business fail in the first 5 years so longevity is an indication of being a solid company. What good is a guarantee if the painter is out of business when you need it?

Are they a member of the BBB and do they have any complaints?

A good contractor cleans up after themselves each day, does not leave hazardous materials around, uses the proper techniques for surface preparation and uses good quality paint. Since anyone can claim to do all these things and you might not know they lied until it's too late, a good check is to see if they are members of the BBB and check their record. A contractor who does shoddy work, doesn't come back for necessary touch ups or leaves your house or yard a mess will get complaints with the BBB.



Are they a local company with a presence in the community?

You don't want someone just passing through or someone without a presence in the community because they will not be around to honor any guarantees.

What credible proof, experience or documentation do they have that shows they are qualified?

How do I know the painters on my job aren't going to be rude, messy or scary-looking?

Contractors who hire cheap and unskilled labor are concerned more about profit than they are about your safety and security. Be sure to check if the contractor has written policies regarding how their employees behave and what appearance and precautions they will take to protect your home.

Look for a company who takes your comfort and safety very seriously. Your paint crew should have a presentable appearance and be people your family can feel safe with. Get assurance your painters will not smoke in your home, play loud music, use bad language, or leave a mess in your home or in your yard.



***Do they have a written safety program and follow safe work practices?
Ask to see the documentation.***

The best safe work practice is to avoid accidents altogether, so insurance does not come into play. You can end up being personally liable if there are accidents and the proper insurance is not in place.



Do they have letters of reference from past customers that you can contact?

One way to check a company's performance is to ask past customers what their experience was like. If they can't or won't provide customer references, beware. Get at least three references and call them. Ask if they would hire them again.

Will work be performed by full time employees?

The competency of the personnel and the quality of work can be questionable with part time or subcontracted workers.

Questions About Your Painting Job

Will you be providing me with a written guarantee, not to exceed price?

Many surveys have shown the home improvement industry gets the most complaints related to contractor's unfair billing practices. Typically this happens when an un-established contractor offers to do your job for a very low price with some money down.

After they get your deposit, they end up using the cheapest material and labor they can find, doing a sloppy job or don't even complete your job at all, and at the end, completely cutting off contact with you.



Are upfront payments required?

A sign of competence is that a financially strong company with good workmanship will not ask for up-front payments. Established contractors have credit accounts with their paint suppliers, but a non-professional may ask you to pay for his materials before he starts working. We never ask for payment until the job is completed and you're satisfied.

Do they accept major credit cards for payment?

Not just for your convenience, but for your legal protection... If you pay with a credit card you can always protest poor workmanship or incomplete work with your credit card company and potentially have some or all of your money refunded. You can never do that if you pay by check or cash. A business that accepts credit cards for payments can also be seen as more credible.



When can you start work and how long will it take?

Many painters require a long lead-time in order to schedule their painters. From the time you first call to get a quote, it could be five to seven weeks before they're actually on your job. If they cannot provide you with a time frame over the phone, make sure to get one before you give them the job.

After your job has begun, make sure your contractor will work on it continuously until it is completely done. Living in the midst of a half finished job waiting for a painter who is off on other projects makes the whole experience much harder than it needs to be. Verify the contractor you hire will show up reliably every day until your project is done.

Who will supervise my project?

If the person giving you the estimate will not be the person supervising your job, you may want to ask to meet that person beforehand and find out how much experience they have to ensure you are comfortable with them.

What kind of paint do you use?

Paint quality can vary, so it's important to know the brand and type of paint that will be used on your property. Good painters will usually recommend quality paint, but don't hesitate to ask for options and make sure your contractor can explain what benefits a more expensive paint has to offer over a less pricy one.

What will you do for surface preparation before you start painting?

Many contractors don't have established systems they train their employees on and insist they follow to make sure your job is done right. Ask what their process is for preparation before painting. What areas will be caulked or primed before painting? Without proper prep work, even the best paint will flake off and the job will not last.



Make sure to get all these covered in writing in your bid

- how many coats of paint are included and what paint will be used?
- what is the area to be painted?
- what surface prep will be done?
- what clean up will be done after the job is complete?
- what is their guarantee?

How to get a bid

If you have a large-scale painting project, make sure to get a quote or proposal written on the letterhead of an established local company detailing what is to be done and for how much. An official, written quote establishes a firm price and won't allow you to be overcharged at the end.

When asking a painting contractor for a quote for your job, make sure to get in writing what exactly is included and how firm that price is. There's nothing worse than choosing a contractor with a good price and then having them come back to you later with additional charges.

Make sure your quote specifies the areas to be painted, the number of coats, the materials to be used, labor and how long the job will take. Be sure to ask if there are any additional fees or expenses that might be involved. The more specifics included in your quote, the easier it will be to compare costs between bids.

How will you protect non-painted surfaces?

Make sure your painter has a clear plan for protecting nearby areas from paint splatters and spills. Your roof, driveway, planters, furniture, floors or windows may all need to be protected and any paint that gets on non-painted surfaces needs to be removed.

What guarantee do you provide that you will show up on time?

How do you know they'll be on time and won't cause you to miss work or sit around for hours waiting for them to show up? Home repair contractors are notorious for arriving late... and sometimes a lot late.

Everybody knows that a very small contractor with only 1 paint crew could easily get behind and then be late for their next job. Since we're sure you have better things to do than



wait around 4 – 5 hours for a painter who's late, ask what guarantee they have that they will be on time.

How will you communicate with me?

Lack of communication between customers and contractors ranks high on customer surveys. Often times when you are trying to contact your contractor you end up getting voice mail and are in the dark about the status of your job.



When will the painter be in your home? For how long? And when is the painter coming back? How will I communicate with you and also my paint crew before, during and after the job?

What can I expect regarding clean up after the job is done?

Nobody wants to spend a lot of money on a paint job only to find themselves spending hours cleaning up after the painter. Find out beforehand what clean-up is included and how they plan to leave your property after the job is finished.

Will you return to fix any problems with your work that occur after you're finished? For how long?

Does the contractor comply with environmental regulations (EPA)?

You don't want to be liable for improper handling or disposal of materials, that's their job.

Questions About The Painting Company Guarantee & Legal Issues

What written guarantee do you have?

Many home improvement individuals and companies do not have any guarantees other than they will cash your check. The only guarantees that mean anything are written. Verbal guarantees are worthless, get it in writing!

Do you have a current business license and/or contractor license?

If they don't, watch out. A valid business license is a critical item for any business. If the service provider you're considering isn't licensed, you may never be able to find them again if there are any problems!

More about licensed versus unlicensed workers

Your next door neighbor has just hired a few college kids to paint his house, and it looks great. Better yet, these kids work for half of what licensed contractors charge. Why not hire the unlicensed crew? Keep in mind that all freshly applied paint looks good in the beginning.

Licensed contractors compete on a narrow profit margin, so if someone is willing to do the job for half-price, you need to ask what you are not getting.

About 25 percent of a licensed painting contractor's price is overhead, including taxes, fees and insurances required to be in business legitimately. If you hire an unlicensed contractor and he or someone in his employ on the job site gets injured while working on your home, you will be responsible to pay for their medical and possibly even rehabilitation bills!

If an unlicensed contractor just paints in the summer to make extra cash, he probably doesn't invest in his own quality power washing or painting equipment as full-time licensed painting contractors do.

If an unlicensed contractor runs into unexpected problems on the job and lacks the experience or ability to solve them, nothing prevents him from walking away from a mess with your money. Even if he intends to be fair, his cheap prices won't allow for any warranty work months or a year from now, if you can even find him.

Finally, you have to consider a painter's costs. Since all painters pay about the same for paint, does the lower cost reflect use of thinner or fewer coats or a lower quality or watered-down paint?

Most likely, the difference reflects labor costs. A cheaper job can mean he won't do all the necessary prep work. New paint is only as stable as the deteriorating wood or flaking paint it covers. It is only a matter of time until that starts flaking and peeling and looking worse than before you had it repainted.

You may have to pay another contractor even more to redo the job next year than you would have paid to have it done right the first time. Unlicensed contractors who only work in the summer to make extra cash can't invest as much in quality equipment that full time contractors do.

Established contractors have credit accounts with their suppliers, but a non-professional may ask you to pay for materials before starting work.

If a contractor does not pay a supplier, that supplier could come after you for payment. Unlicensed contractors who run into problems on the job may not be experienced enough to solve them. Nothing stops them from walking away from a mess with your money.

Even if they intend to be fair, cheap prices won't allow for any warranty work months or a year from now.

Did you know that, even if you pay your contractor, if they don't pay their suppliers, they can put a lien on your home! **Then you can be forced to pay for the job twice!**

If your contractor doesn't provide a lien waiver when the job is completed, you will need to make sure that all suppliers and workers have been paid before you pay the contractor.

What background checks do you do before hiring someone?

There are drug and alcohol abuse problems in the painting industry and many companies do not screen their employees before hiring on these issues or they wouldn't have any employees at all!

In addition to our employees being held to customer service standards, we do drug, alcohol and criminal record checking before we will hire anyone. All our painters have a clean cut appearance and are people your wife & kids can feel safe with.

Even though we know our employees don't have those serious problems, we also train them on customer service and you see that our employees will not ever:

- Play loud music
- Smoke in your house
- Use foul language
- Leave a mess in your yard
- Leave your bathrooms or house dirty

Can they show you proof of insurance?

If you hire an uninsured contractor and he or she gets injured while working on your property, you can be sued and be required to pay all their medical and possible rehabilitation expenses. A legitimate



contractor should be able to show you their current workman's comp policy, their liability insurance and a dishonesty bond that covers you if someone steals anything from your home.

Understand that If they show you a "lien waiver", that does NOT replace insurance or remove your liability in case of an accident. If you hire a company that uses independent contractors, each one should have liability insurance, otherwise you might still be personally liable.

Do they have letters of reference from their bank and suppliers?

You want to know that they pay their bills and are in good financial standing? Why? Because, if a contractor goes out of business during your job or doesn't pay their suppliers, those suppliers could put a lien on your home and force you to pay them. You could end up paying twice for work that may not have even been completed. For your protection, demand a "lien release waiver" at the end of the job.

They should be able to show you letters from their suppliers stating that they are current paying their bills. You don't want their suppliers to put a lien on your house for their unpaid bills even if you already paid the painter It can happen if they are in poor financial condition.

If your contractor doesn't provide this, make sure after the work is completed that all suppliers and workers have been paid before you pay the contractor. If you pay your contractor and he does not pay the suppliers or workers, they can put a lien on your property and you will have to pay for it twice.

Will they provide a "lien release waiver" at the end of the job?

Watch Out For These Common Scams

Scam # 1:

They give you a low-ball price to get the job and then do a poor job, use poor quality materials, or after getting your deposit, skip town and don't do it at all. *(You know a company with a BBB listing and a yellow pages ad, isn't going to skip town with your money....)*



Scam # 2:

For those who actually do the work, another common scam is to dilute the paint to reduce the contractor's cost or to put cheap paint in a paint can with a quality paint label on the can.

Scam # 3:

Yet another common one is to quote you on 1 coat when they know perfectly well that 2 coats for a brush & roll finish are required to do it right. Their bid will be less that way and once they have completed the first coat and it's obvious a second is needed, you'll get a substantial up-charge for that second coat.

You will usually end up paying much more this way than the honest painter who quoted you 2 coats up front. Make sure the number of coats is in writing on the bid.

Scam # 4:

Don't ever go with someone who comes to your door offering you a "deal" because they had a job cancellation or available time in their schedule they need to fill. They could be one of those operations that makes you give them an upfront deposit and then disappears altogether. If they do paint the outside of your house, it may come off the first time it rains and they are nowhere to be found!

So how do you protect yourself without being an expert yourself?

Make sure you get a itemized quote in writing specifying exactly what will and will not be done, get a written guarantee of performance and get a guarantee the final price will not exceed the bid. You should also be shown references and testimonials from former customers so you can do further checking yourself.

Your Painting Company Evaluation Checklist

Here is a summary checklist of all the questions in one place to make it easier for you to protect yourself while comparing bids.

Company

Question	# 1	# 2	# 3
1. How long have they been in business?			
2. Current business registration?			
3. BBB member – any complaints?			
4. Local company?			
5. Proof of competency?			
6. Standards for employee conduct?			
7. Written safety program?			
8. Prior customer references?			
9. Full time employees?			
10. Firm quote in writing?			
11. Upfront payments required?			
12. Take credit cards?			
13. When start? How long will it take?			
14. Who will supervise my job?			
15. Quality and brand of paint used?			
16. What surface prep will be done?			
17. How to protect areas not to be painted?			
18. On time guarantee?			
19. How do I communicate with you?			
20. How do I communicate with paint crew?			
21. Clean-up after job done?			
22. Return at no cost to fix problems you're your work after you leave? For how long?			
22. Proper disposal of hazardous materials?			
23. Written guarantees?			
24. Background checks on employees?			
25. Proof of insurance?			
26. Reference letters from bank & suppliers?			
27. Will "lien release waiver" be supplied?			
Bid Price			