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Cursor Software Engineer Interview Guide

Learn how to prepare for the Cursor Software Engineer interview and get a job at Cursor with this in-depth guide.

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Cursor is a product created by the AI software and research company Anysphere. Their product started as a fork of VSCode, combining multiple LLM and AI models to help software developers write and debug code.

It's a startup with approximately 200 employees, but it's growing rapidly as demand for AI-assisted coding tools increases.

Cursor technical rounds are unique because **they allow open usage of GPT and Cursor!**

Below, we break down the complete SWE interview process at Cursor for junior and senior candidates.

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Interview process

Cursor's Software Engineer interview process goes through the following stages:

1. **Recruiter/manager screen:** Informal 45-minute interview with the recruiter or hiring manager to discuss your interest and goals
2. **Technical phone screen(s):** 1 to 3 60-minute assessments of technical skills
3. **Onsite assessment(s):** One or two 6-hour days of project-based assessment, as well as a cultural discussion with potential teammates for more senior roles

The screening stages will be completed remotely, but senior roles will be expected to complete the final rounds onsite at their New York or San Francisco offices.

Note

We created this guide with direct input from Cursor Software Engineers. It reflects current interview practices and evaluation criteria used by Cursor hiring teams.

Recruiter screen(s)

Depending on the recruitment path you took, you may be interviewed by a recruiter or the hiring manager. The 45-minute discussion will be informal and focused primarily on your interest in the role, Cursor, and in the AI and LLM space more generally.

The interviewer will also discuss key aspects of the role, such as their passion for the company, the significant workload, which sometimes results in six-day workweeks, and other factors that make Cursor unique.

Note

As a startup in a period of rapid growth, Cursor's recruitment and interview process is highly informal, and they don't always rely on recruiters. We've sourced the best available information on how the process currently works.

Technical phone screen(s)

You will be required to take up to three 60-minute assessments. Some candidates report only one, while others reported two to three.

These will center around an existing part of Cursor's codebase that you will be granted access to. Once you've cloned the relevant repository, you'll be tasked with building a common data structure on top of it, such as a hash tree.

What makes this step unique, beyond the utilization of an actual piece of Cursor's code, is that you are permitted to use AI tools such as ChatGPT, Google Search, and, of course, Cursor to aid targeted queries. Note that this means questions about syntax or other highly specific questions, not larger tasks.

Each interview takes place via a call with the hiring manager or another technical team member, and you will be able to ask whether the query you want to use is targeted enough.

Here are some example technical phone screen interview questions:

- Print the top view of nodes in a binary tree
- Find duplicate files in a file system
- Create a hash tree to organize the data in a repository

Onsite assessment(s)

Technical

The technical part of this assessment will last 8 hours, starting with an introductory meeting, a midday check-in, and ending with a presentation. The assessment is unique: you will have limited access to Cursor's tech stack and then be asked to design a feature, product, or service you think could be useful for Cursor.

The goal of the assessment is to measure your product sense, autonomy, and system design capabilities. You will have access to documentation and be allowed to use AI tools, but, because it is a startup, the documentation may be limited.

You will also be allowed to ask questions in a dedicated Slack channel or face-to-face. This should be considered part of the assessment, as collaboration is important at Cursor. However, you should be careful to only ask about niche topics and avoid broader questions.

At the end of the day, you will have the opportunity to present your work. While they aren't necessarily expecting a finished product, you should have a functional understanding of the system design and be well-prepared to discuss the trade-offs and processes behind your decisions.

Technical Onsite Task Ideas:

Brainstorm a product idea with the help of AI

Design an agentic AI system that can autonomously adapt to new tasks

How would you handle hallucinations in a generative AI model deployed to users?

Culture fit

More senior roles who succeed in the prior round will be asked to return for more informal discussions with the Cursor team. Usually, this involves a meal or conversations with potential team members.

As a startup, Cursor has not dialed in on a formal interview process, so this step is more about helping you understand Cursor better and showing your interest in their vision and work style.

Cursor values dedication and passion for their projects and for AI, and they expect this passion to translate into a willingness to work outside traditional benchmarks, working hours, and to exceed industry standards.

You'll also be given opportunities to discuss past projects, even if they aren't directly related to AI or ML tools.

Culture fit onsite example questions and topics:

Tell me about a time when you made short-term sacrifices for long-term gains

Tell me about the most challenging situation you faced in your career and how you handled it

Tell me about your past projects

Describe a challenging project you worked on and what made it difficult

Common Mistakes

Even if you are a seasoned developer and expert in LLMs, you might have trouble interviewing at Cursor if you make these mistakes:

- Expecting Cursor to follow industry-standard work-life balance, goals, and expectations
- Failing to show product sense and imagination when discussing the potential of AI-powered developer tools
- Expecting and preparing for a predefined set of questions and tasks. Cursor's interviews are very loose and rarely involve recruiters.
- Not sharing Cursor's vision and enthusiasm for AI-powered coding tools
- Not researching or understanding the key challenges of AI-powered tools, particularly infrastructure, functionality, and efficiency
- Not being skilled with AI coding tools, showing unfamiliarity with prompts or other types of interaction
- Needing lots of input and supervision when working on a problem, not showing a capacity for autonomy, and a willingness to build

Interview Prep

Stay loose: A common mistake that SWE candidates make is over-indexing on particular practice problems and assuming that showing competency with common interview questions will necessarily help.

While keeping your skills sharp is important, it's also worth researching and practicing working directly with AI tools. Forking an open-source repository and building something under a time constraint can help you think beyond a single task or question.

Understand their product and goals: Cursor's approach to interviews is very much about putting you in the position of feeling like a Cursor employee and seeing how you handle the pressure to autonomously create.

Having a deeper knowledge of what they are working on and where they see the product going will save you time and effort, as it will be easier for you to come up with a useful system or feature to build during the onsite.

Buy into their vision: Cursor's approach isn't just to hire skilled SWEs, but to seek out the ones who are fully invested in the potential value of AI-powered tooling.

They're interested in maintaining a small core of driven team members rather than hiring a large number of contributors. Displaying your passion for automated coding tools and interest in pushing them beyond their current state is critical.

About the Role

What are the key characteristics of a SWE role at Cursor?

- **Flat organizational structure:** Cursor is not designed to support extensive hierarchy or slow decision-making. Their structure and culture are about supporting collaboration, debate, and enthusiasm. SWEs will be given lots of autonomy to research, build, and experiment in a rapidly changing environment.
- **The forefront of a growing industry:** Cursor's team is working on pushing the boundaries of one of the most revolutionary, dynamic and promoted industries. Their tools give you a chance to build tools that could greatly increase the efficiency of the entire software development world.
- **Speed:** Cursor's approach is to design, build, and ship on a compressed timeline, enabling them to keep pace with the rapidly changing AI ecosystem. If you value creativity and results over predictability and predefined processes, you might thrive as an SWE at Cursor.

Core Responsibilities

Responsibilities will vary depending on the type of SWE role you apply for, and they offer roles that range from analytics to infrastructure, as well as client- and product-focused positions. Generally, Cursor SWEs will be expected to:

- Work on aggressive timelines that will include working outside of the typical 8-hour workday and on weekends.
- Work cross-functionally to design, develop, and improve internal and client-facing services.
- Working to improve product reliability, system efficiency, and reduce compute costs from model providers.
- Be expected to roll with a dynamic, often-changing environment and to approach each project enthusiastically and autonomously.

Compensation

Cursor pays SWEs tier 1 for the industry. The number and breakdown will depend on the role's seniority. There's not super reliable compensation data out there for them yet, but trust you will have some of the best comp in the industry.

Job Requirements

Experience

Cursor SWEs are generally expected to have at least 4 years of experience, especially for roles such as analytics or infrastructure. However, their hiring methods and structure provide significant leeway, and they have been known to hire entry-level developers who meet their standards.

Although AI/ML work experience is helpful, Cursor does not list it as a requirement.

Education

They do not list any specific education requirements, but their team includes researchers and scientists with advanced degrees. Much like AI/ML experience, it seems to be valued but not essential.

Resources

- Cursor jobs page
- Cursor blog
- Cursor documentation
- Software Engineering Interview Prep
- Generative AI Interview Prep
- Software Engineer Interview Questions

FAQs

How long does a Cursor SWE interview process take?

Because there is no formal recruitment process, the time from application to offer can vary. However, the process itself is shorter than many comparable SWE interview processes, and Cursor prioritizes moving quickly, so it should take no more than 4 weeks.

How many rounds are in the Cursor SWE interview?

You'll conduct 3-5 interviews, though the final two are much longer and include an 8-hour technical project.

Does Cursor offer remote work?

No, Cursor requires its team to come to the office five days a week. They currently have offices in New York and San Francisco.

Do I need to have AI experience to work at Cursor?

No, you do not need AI experience to apply for an SWE role at Cursor. However, some experience using AI coding tools is essential for their success.

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