

Cabinet Maker interview questions

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What to expect

Cabinet maker interviews mix trade knowledge with practical judgement. Employers want to see that you can read a drawing accurately, work safely with machinery, and handle the problems that come up once a job leaves the workshop and hits a real building. Interviewers often focus as much on reliability and finish quality as on raw technical range.

- **Process:** Walking through how you handle a job from drawings to finished install, checking your workflow and decision-making.
- **Technical:** Questions on joinery methods, materials and machinery to confirm trade knowledge and Certificate III grounding.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about mistakes, deadlines or teamwork, usually answered with a specific example.
- **Scenario:** On-site problem scenarios, such as a wall out of square or a measurement error, testing judgement under pressure.
- **Safety:** Questions on machinery safety, dust and manual handling given the hand and power tool work involved.
- **Client-facing:** Questions on managing client expectations and change requests mid-project.

Most interviews open with questions about your trade background and qualifications, move into technical and process questions about how you actually do the work, then shift to behavioural and scenario questions to test judgement. Some employers ask you to bring photos of past work or complete a short practical or measuring task. The interview usually closes with a chance to ask about workshop equipment, project types and site work expectations.

1. Walk me through how you'd approach a custom wardrobe job, from receiving the drawings to final install.

Why they ask

This checks whether you follow a sound, repeatable process and understand where errors typically creep in.

How to structure your answer

Walk through it in order: reading the drawing and specification, confirming measurements on-site, material selection, cutting and assembly, finishing, and installation, noting a check or quality point at each stage.

Example answer

"I start by going through the drawing and specification to confirm dimensions, material and any hardware requirements, then I check those measurements against the actual site rather than trusting the plan blindly, since walls are rarely perfectly square. From there I work out a cutting list and select the timber or panel material, then cut components on the table saw or CNC router depending on the complexity. I assemble frames, doors and drawers using the joinery method suited to the piece, sand and finish the surfaces, and only then move to install, where I check level, plumb and square and make adjustments on the spot if the site doesn't match the drawing exactly."

2. Tell me about a time you found an error in a piece partway through a job. What did you do?

Why they ask

Mistakes happen in cabinet making, and employers want to know you catch them early and handle them without hiding the problem.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the situation, the task at hand, the specific action you took to fix or flag it, and the result for the job and the client.

Example answer

"I was assembling a run of drawer boxes and noticed partway through that one panel had been cut to the wrong width, which would have thrown off the drawer alignment. I stopped, remeasured the whole batch against the cutting list to check it wasn't a wider problem, then recut the single panel rather than trying to force a fit. It added a bit of time to that stage, but the drawers all sat flush and the client never knew there'd been an issue."

3. You arrive on-site to install a cabinet and find the wall is noticeably out of square. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a common real-world problem, and it tests whether you can adapt a finished piece to an imperfect site without compromising the fit or finish.

How to structure your answer

Set out the judgement call: assess the extent of the problem, weigh the options available, explain the action you'd take and how you'd protect the finish and the timeline.

Example answer

"First I'd measure exactly how far out the wall is and where, since a small variance at one point is different to a wall that's out along its whole length. If it's minor, I'd scribe the cabinet's edge to follow the wall line and pack or trim as needed to keep the front face level and plumb. If the variance is significant enough that scribing would compromise the design, I'd stop and raise it with the site supervisor or client before making a permanent cut, rather than guessing and risking a poor fit."

4. What joinery methods do you use most often, and how do you decide which one suits a particular job?

Why they ask

This checks the depth of your trade knowledge beyond just naming techniques.

How to structure your answer

Technical knowledge check: name the methods you use, then explain the practical factors that drive the choice for a given job.

Example answer

"For carcass construction I mostly use dowel or biscuit joinery for speed and strength on repetitive runs, and I'll use mortise and tenon or dovetail joints where a piece needs more strength or is a feature item that will be seen, like a drawer front. The choice comes down to the load the joint needs to carry, whether it's visible in the finished piece, and how much time the job allows, since hand-cut joinery takes longer than machine methods."

5. How do you manage safety when working with table saws, routers and sanders through the day?

Why they ask

Cabinet making involves ongoing exposure to blade injuries, dust and noise, so employers want to see a genuine safety habit rather than a rehearsed answer.

How to structure your answer

Describe your specific, ongoing safety practices rather than a one-off example, covering equipment checks, PPE and workshop habits.

Example answer

"I check guards and blade condition before starting any machine, and I keep push sticks and featherboards on hand for the table saw rather than working freehand near the blade. For dust I run extraction on the sanders and CNC router and wear a properly fitted mask when that's not enough, and I use hearing protection for anything prolonged and loud. I also keep the workshop floor clear of offcuts, since trip hazards around moving machinery are an easy thing to overlook."

6. A client asks for a design change halfway through a job that's already been cut. How would you handle that conversation?

Why they ask

This tests whether you can manage client expectations and cost implications without damaging the relationship or the job's timeline.

How to structure your answer

Client-facing approach: explain how you'd assess the impact, communicate it clearly, and reach a workable outcome.

Example answer

"I'd first work out exactly what the change involves and whether any cut components can still be used or need to be redone, then I'd explain that clearly to the client along with any extra cost or time it adds. I try to give them options where possible, such as a smaller adjustment that achieves a similar look without scrapping finished work, but I'd rather have that conversation upfront than deliver something they're not happy with."