

Crane Operator interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Crane operator interviews are heavily weighted toward safety and process, since a single lapse can put people and property at risk. Expect the panel, often a site supervisor or plant manager, to check your licence classes early and then spend most of the interview probing how you think through real lift scenarios.

- **Safety and compliance:** Questions on licensing, inspection routines and how you keep certification and safety knowledge current.
- **Process:** Step-by-step questions on how you actually carry out core tasks like load calculation or pre-shift checks.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations, often involving changing weather, ground conditions or communication breakdowns, to test judgement under pressure.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions asking you to describe how you handled a specific safety issue or team conflict.
- **Client and team communication:** Questions on how you coordinate with riggers, dogmen and supervisors during a lift.

Interviews usually open with licence and ticket verification, move into process and technical questions about lift planning and load calculations, then shift to scenario and behavioural questions to see how you handle pressure and communicate with the crew. Site-specific logistics and start dates are typically covered at the end.

1. Which High Risk Work Licence classes do you currently hold, and how do you stay on top of renewals and refresher training?

Why they ask

The employer needs to confirm you're legally able to operate the specific crane types on their site before going further, and wants evidence you take certification maintenance seriously rather than letting it lapse.

How to structure your answer

State your current licence classes clearly, then explain your system for tracking renewal dates and any refresher courses or toolbox talks you attend.

Example answer

"I hold a C2 licence for slewing mobile cranes and I'm working toward my C6 for tower cranes. I keep a note of my renewal date in my phone calendar with a three-month reminder, and I attend the toolbox talks my previous employer ran whenever WorkSafe updated guidance on crane operations, so I'm not caught out by changes to the code of practice."

2. Walk me through your pre-shift inspection process on a mobile crane.

Why they ask

This checks whether you have a genuine, repeatable routine rather than a vague sense of 'checking the crane over', since a missed fault is where most incidents start.

How to structure your answer

Describe the inspection in the order you actually perform it, from arrival to sign-off, naming the specific components and documentation involved.

Example answer

"I start with a walk-around checking tyres, outriggers and hydraulic lines for leaks, then inspect the wire rope for fraying or kinking and check the hook and safety latch. I test the load moment indicator and boom angle indicator, check the log book for any issues logged on the previous shift, and run the controls through their full range with no load before confirming it's safe to book on. Anything unusual gets written up in the log and reported to the supervisor before I lift anything."

3. Tell me about a time you identified a safety issue during a lift and how you responded.

Why they ask

The panel wants proof you'll act on a genuine safety concern rather than defer to schedule pressure, which is a common cause of crane incidents.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the specific task, the action you took, and the result, focusing on what you noticed and why you acted.

Example answer

"During a steel erection job, I noticed the ground had softened after overnight rain near one of my outrigger pads. The task was to lift a beam into position on a tight schedule, but I stopped the lift and asked the supervisor to get the ground checked and packed properly before I continued. It cost us about forty minutes, but it avoided the risk of outrigger settlement mid-lift. The supervisor backed the call and it became standard practice on site after wet weather."

4. You're mid-lift when wind speed picks up close to the crane's rated limit. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you'll prioritise safety over completing the lift, a core scenario in crane operation.

How to structure your answer

Talk through your decision-making step by step: what you'd check, who you'd communicate with, and the threshold that would make you stop.

Example answer

"I'd check the anemometer reading against the load chart's wind limit for that specific load and boom configuration, and if it's approaching the limit I'd radio the rigger and supervisor to let them know I'm bringing the load down to a safe position rather than parking it mid-air. I wouldn't wait until we hit the exact limit, because conditions can change faster than I can react, so I'd rather pause early and resume once it settles."

5. How do you calculate a load's weight and confirm it's within the crane's safe working load?

Why they ask

This is a core technical skill, and the interviewer wants to see you actually understand capacity charts rather than relying on someone else's numbers.

How to structure your answer

Explain the calculation process step by step, including what information you need up front and how you cross-check it.

Example answer

"I start with the dockets or engineering drawings for the load weight, then add rigging gear weight if it's not already accounted for. I check the crane's capacity chart for that specific radius and boom configuration, including any deductions for jib length or counterweight setup, and I make sure the figure I'm working to includes a safety margin, not just the rated maximum. If the paperwork doesn't

match what I'm seeing on site, I stop and get it clarified before hooking on."

6. Describe how you keep communication clear with riggers and spotters during a lift where visibility is limited.

Why they ask

Crane operators often can't see the landing zone directly, so clear radio discipline is critical to preventing dropped or misplaced loads.

How to structure your answer

Explain your communication protocol, including how you confirm instructions and what you do if a signal is unclear.

Example answer

"I agree on radio channel and call signs with the dogman before we start, and I use standard terminology rather than casual phrasing so there's no ambiguity between 'stop' and 'slow'. If I lose sight of the landing zone, I rely entirely on the dogman's calls and I'll stop the load and ask for a repeat if any instruction sounds unclear or cuts out mid-sentence, rather than guessing what was meant."