

Customs Broker interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Customs Broker roles typically assess your technical knowledge of tariff classification and customs procedures, as well as your ability to manage client relationships and resolve compliance issues. Employers look for attention to detail, problem-solving skills, and a strong understanding of Australian border requirements.

- **Technical:** Questions that test your knowledge of tariff classification, duty calculation, and the Integrated Cargo System.
- **Scenario-based:** Hypothetical situations that assess your judgement in ethical dilemmas or time-sensitive clearances.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking you to describe past experiences, often using the STAR method.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about how you communicate complex regulations to clients and manage expectations.

The interview usually begins with an introduction and a review of your experience. Then you may face technical questions or a classification exercise, followed by scenario-based and behavioural questions. Some employers include a client-facing role-play. The interview typically ends with your questions for the panel.

1. Can you walk me through the process of classifying a new product under the Australian tariff?

Why they ask

This tests your technical knowledge of tariff classification, a core duty of the role.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: outline the steps you take, the resources you use, and how you verify the classification.

Example answer

"First, I gather all product information, including composition, function, and packaging. I then refer to the Australian Border Force tariff classification guides and use the Integrated Cargo System to search for potential codes. I apply the General Rules for the Interpretation of the Harmonized System to determine the most specific code. If I am uncertain, I request a formal classification advice from the ABF. Finally, I document the classification and communicate it to the client."

2. A client asks you to undervalue goods to reduce duty. How do you respond?

Why they ask

This assesses your ethical judgement and ability to handle pressure while upholding compliance.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: assess the ethical and legal implications, explain the consequences, and offer legitimate alternatives.

Example answer

"I would explain that undervaluing goods is illegal and could lead to penalties, seizure of goods, and damage to their reputation. I would then outline legitimate ways to reduce duty, such as checking eligibility for trade agreements, tariff concessions, or duty drawbacks. I would document the conversation and ensure the client understands their obligations under the Customs Act."

3. Tell me about a time you resolved a non-compliance issue with a shipment.

Why they ask

This behavioural question probes your problem-solving skills and experience with real clearance challenges.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the situation, task, action, and result.

Example answer

"Situation: A shipment of electronics was held by the ABF due to a discrepancy in the declared value. Task: I needed to resolve the issue quickly to avoid storage costs. Action: I reviewed the commercial invoice and found a currency conversion error. I contacted the client to obtain corrected documents and lodged an amendment with the ABF, providing a detailed explanation. Result: The shipment was released within 24 hours, and the client avoided significant storage fees."

4. How would you explain the difference between customs duty and GST to a client who is new to importing?

Why they ask

This checks your client-facing communication skills and ability to simplify complex regulations.

How to structure your answer

Analogy and clear explanation: use a simple example to illustrate the difference.

Example answer

"I would explain that customs duty is a tax on the value of the imported goods, calculated based on the tariff classification and the country of origin. GST is a broader tax on consumption, applied to the value of the goods plus duty, freight, and insurance. I would use a simple example, like importing a television, to show how each is calculated and why both are payable. This helps the client understand the total landed cost."

5. Describe how you use the Integrated Cargo System (ICS) in your daily work.

Why they ask

This technical question verifies your familiarity with the key system used in customs broking.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through of key functions and how they support clearance.

Example answer

"I use the ICS to lodge import declarations, check the status of shipments, and communicate with the Australian Border Force. I also use it to access tariff information and manage client profiles. For each declaration, I enter the goods description, tariff code, value, and origin, then submit it for assessment. I monitor the ICS for any holds or queries and respond promptly to resolve them. This ensures timely clearance and compliance."

6. You receive a last-minute request to clear a shipment of perishable goods. What steps do you take?

Why they ask

This scenario tests your ability to prioritise and manage time-sensitive clearances under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Prioritisation and risk management: assess urgency, identify requirements, act quickly, and communicate.

Example answer

"First, I assess the urgency and the nature of the goods. I check if all documents are in order and if any permits are required. I prioritise lodging the declaration and request priority processing if available. I communicate with the client and the freight forwarder to ensure all parties are aware of the timeline. If there are issues, I escalate to my supervisor or the ABF to find a solution. After clearance, I review the process to prevent future delays."