

Engraver interview questions

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What to expect

Engraver interviews usually combine a practical assessment with a conversation about your process, quality control and customer handling. Employers want to see that you can work accurately from a brief and keep finish consistent across different materials.

- **Technical and process:** How you set up machines, choose depth and speed, and work from digital or hand-drawn artwork.
- **Quality and detail:** How you check alignment, spelling, depth and surface finish before a job leaves the workshop.
- **Safety:** How you handle hand tools, lasers, dust and materials safely under WHS requirements.
- **Client-facing:** How you confirm artwork, material options and deadlines with customers who may not know engraving terminology.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of solving a production problem, handling a mistake or managing a tight deadline.
- **Practical test:** A short bench or machine task, sometimes with a supplied artwork file, to see your setup and finishing.

The interview may start with a workshop tour and a practical task, then move to a one-on-one conversation with the supervisor or owner. You might be asked to talk through a portfolio or sample pieces. Questions often move from your technical setup and quality checks to how you deal with customers and deadlines, finishing with your questions about the workshop.

1. Walk me through how you set up a laser engraver for a new job on a material you have not used before.

Why they ask

They want to see your process for depth control, test pieces and material behaviour.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step walk-through: describe the material, the artwork file, the machine settings, the test piece, and how you confirm the result before running the job.

Example answer

"First I check the material type and thickness, because acrylic and stainless steel behave differently. I open the artwork in LightBurn, check the vector paths and font outlines, and set a power and speed starting point from my notes or the material chart. I run a small test on an offcut, check the depth and edge quality under a loupe, and adjust the speed or number of passes. Once the test looks right, I clamp the workpiece, set the origin, and run the job. I stay with the machine for the first pass so I can pause if anything looks off."

2. Tell me about a time you caught an error in a job before it went to the customer.

Why they ask

Quality control and attention to detail are central to engraving.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result. Keep it specific to a piece you were working on.

Example answer

"I was engraving a set of acrylic awards for a local sporting club. The artwork had a sponsor name that looked correct on screen, but when I did a test cut on scrap I noticed the letter spacing was too tight and two letters nearly touched. I stopped the job, went back to the Illustrator file, adjusted the kerning, and re-ran the test. The finished awards were clean and the club ordered the same design the following year. Catching it at the test stage saved a full batch of acrylic."

3. A customer sends a low-resolution logo and asks you to engrave it on glass. How do you handle that?

Why they ask

Engravers often deal with artwork that is not production ready, and they need to explain limits without losing the job.

How to structure your answer

A judgement and communication structure: acknowledge the request, explain the technical issue in plain language, offer options, and confirm the path forward.

Example answer

"I would thank them for the file and explain that the resolution is too low for a clean glass engraving, because the edges would look fuzzy. I would ask if they have a vector version or a higher resolution file. If not, I can redraw the logo as a vector for a small artwork fee, or suggest a simpler text-only engraving that still looks good on glass. I would show them a sample of a similar job so they can see the difference. Then I would confirm the final artwork in writing before I start."

4. What safety checks do you do before using a laser engraver?

Why they ask

Lasers, dust and some materials create real risks, and employers need to know you follow WHS requirements.

How to structure your answer

A checklist walk-through: ventilation, material suitability, machine guards, fire safety, and personal protection.

Example answer

"I check that the extraction is running and the filters are clear, because laser engraving produces fumes and dust. I confirm the material is safe to laser, since PVC and some plastics release harmful fumes. I make sure the lid or interlock is working, the fire blanket or extinguisher is within reach, and I never leave the machine running unattended. I also wear safety glasses if the machine is open, and I keep the work area clear of flammable items."

5. How do you prepare a file in CorelDRAW or Illustrator for a rotary engraving job?

Why they ask

They want to know you can produce clean, machine-ready artwork, not just operate the machine.

How to structure your answer

A process explanation: file setup, vector paths, font conversion, toolpath order, and test cuts.

Example answer

"I start with a vector file and check that all text is converted to curves so fonts do not substitute. I set the line weights to match the cutter width and arrange the paths in the order I want the machine to cut. I check the size against the brief and add registration marks if the job needs multiple passes. Then I export a file the machine can read, load it, and do a dry run with the cutter raised to check the path. If it looks right, I set the depth and run a test on scrap before the final piece."

6. You have two urgent jobs due the same afternoon: a set of industrial labels in stainless steel and a personalised gift for a walk-in customer. How do you prioritise?

Why they ask

Small workshops often juggle trade and retail work, and they want to see how you manage time and expectations.

How to structure your answer

A judgement-under-pressure structure: assess deadlines, communicate, sequence work, and protect quality.

Example answer

"I would check the actual deadline for the industrial labels and whether the customer is waiting on site. If the labels are for a production line that stops without them, I would explain to the walk-in customer that their gift can be ready later the same day or first thing tomorrow, and offer to take their details. If both are truly urgent, I would run the stainless labels first because they need the rotary machine and a test cut, then switch to the laser for the gift. I would keep both customers informed and not rush the finishing, because a mistake costs more time than a short delay."