Financial Controller interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for financial controller roles are a mix of technical accounting, process discipline and leadership judgement. Employers want to see you can own the accuracy of the numbers, run a tight close and communicate with auditors, the board and your team.

- **Technical accounting and compliance:** Questions on Australian Accounting Standards, statutory reporting, audit requirements and how you keep the financial statements compliant.
- **Process and controls:** Questions about month-end close, reconciliations, internal controls and how you prevent and detect errors or fraud.
- **Behavioural and leadership:** Questions that ask for past examples of leading a team, managing deadlines and handling sensitive issues.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical situations such as discovering a misstatement or a control failure, testing how you prioritise and communicate under pressure.
- **Executive communication:** Questions on how you translate complex financial information for non-financial executives and boards.

Typically begins with a phone screen with a recruiter or hiring manager covering your background and salary expectations. The next stage is a technical interview with the CFO or finance director, often including a case study or technical questions on reporting and controls. A final panel may include peers from finance and another department, focusing on leadership and stakeholder management. Some employers ask for a short presentation on a reporting issue or a controls improvement.

1. Walk me through how you ensure financial statements comply with Australian Accounting Standards before they go to the board.

Why they ask

This tests your technical knowledge and your review process, which is central to the controller role.

How to structure your answer

A process walk-through: start with the accounting policy framework, then the close and review steps, then the sign-off and disclosure checklist.

Example answer

"I start with the accounting policy manual, which is aligned to AASB and IFRS. During the close, my team prepares the statements and supporting schedules. I review significant judgements, new transactions and any changes in standards. I use a disclosure checklist to confirm all required notes are included. Before board submission, I hold a review meeting with the financial accounting team and, if needed, our external auditors to clear any areas of uncertainty. Then I sign off on the final version."

2. Describe your month-end close process. How do you ensure it runs on time and accurately?

Why they ask

This is core to the role. Employers want to see structure, ownership and control.

How to structure your answer

Chronological walk-through with a focus on timing, ownership and controls.

Example answer

“We work to a close calendar that starts three days before month end. Sub-ledgers are closed first, then reconciliations are completed by each accountant. I review high-risk reconciliations and any unusual journals. We use a close checklist in Excel, with a traffic light system. I hold a daily stand-up during close week to clear blockers. Once all reconciliations are signed off, I review the trial balance and prepare the management pack. We aim to close in seven working days, and I track actual versus target each month to find bottlenecks.”

3. Tell me about a time you identified a significant internal control weakness. What did you do?

Why they ask

Behavioural question to assess your control mindset and how you handle sensitive issues.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

“In a previous role, I noticed that supplier bank account changes were being processed without secondary verification. I treated it as a fraud risk. I immediately paused the process and documented the gap. I then designed a call-back verification control and worked with IT to add a system flag for any bank detail changes. I trained the accounts payable team on the new procedure. Within a month, the control was in place and the external auditors noted it as an improvement. No fraudulent payments occurred.”

4. You discover a material misstatement two days before the audit committee meeting. What do you do?

Why they ask

Scenario question to test judgement under pressure and communication with senior stakeholders.

How to structure your answer

Assess, communicate, remediate, document: a calm, sequential approach.

Example answer

“First, I would quantify the misstatement and understand its cause. I would inform the CFO immediately and discuss whether it needs to be corrected before the meeting. If it is material, we would need to adjust the financial statements. I would brief the audit committee chair ahead of the meeting to avoid surprises, explaining the issue, the correction and the control fix. I would document the error, the adjustment and the remediation plan. Then I would present a clear summary at the meeting. Transparency and speed matter more than looking flawless.”

5. How do you manage and mentor an accounting team during a busy reporting period?

Why they ask

Leadership question. They want to see you can keep a team motivated and effective under deadline pressure.

How to structure your answer

Behavioural or situational: describe your leadership approach with a specific example.

Example answer

“I set clear expectations at the start of each reporting cycle. I allocate work based on strengths and development areas. During close week, I protect the team from unnecessary meetings and make sure everyone takes breaks. I check in individually to see if anyone is stuck or overwhelmed. I also use the period as a coaching opportunity, reviewing their work and explaining the why behind adjustments. After the peak, I run a debrief to capture what we can improve. In my last role, this approach kept turnover low and helped two team members step up to senior accountant roles.”

6. How do you explain a complex accounting issue to a non-financial executive?

Why they ask

Executive communication is a key part of the controller role, bridging the numbers and strategic decisions.

How to structure your answer

A communication framework: context, impact, options, recommendation, in plain language.

Example answer

"I start by asking what decision they need to make. Then I explain the issue in plain terms, avoiding jargon. I focus on the financial impact and the risks. For example, if a new lease standard changes how we report, I would say it moves debt onto the balance sheet and affects our covenants. I give two or three options with pros and cons, and I make a clear recommendation. I always follow up with a one-page summary. The goal is to give them confidence to decide, not to demonstrate how much accounting I know."