

Forensic Scientist interview questions

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What to expect

Forensic Scientist interviews usually mix technical questioning with scenario-based judgement checks, since panels need to confirm both bench competence and courtroom credibility. Expect at least one interviewer with a scientific background probing your methodology in detail.

- **Process/technical:** Questions checking you can walk through evidence handling, analysis and reporting steps accurately and in the right order.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypotheticals testing how you'd handle pressure, ambiguity or challenge, particularly around court testimony or contested results.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions using specific incidents to assess attention to detail and problem solving.
- **Compliance/safety:** Questions on chain-of-custody, documentation standards and evidence integrity procedures.
- **Communication:** Questions testing your ability to explain technical findings to non-scientific audiences, including juries and investigators.

Most panels run a structured interview with two or three assessors, often a laboratory manager and a senior scientist, moving from technical process questions through to behavioural and scenario questions. Some employers include a short practical or case-study exercise, such as reviewing a sample report for errors, before the panel discussion.

1. Walk me through how you would process a piece of physical evidence from crime scene collection through to a finalised laboratory report.

Why they ask

This checks you understand the full evidentiary chain, not just one stage, and that you can sequence procedures correctly under standard protocols.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walk-through: collection and preservation, transport and logging, analysis method selection, results review, report drafting and sign-off.

Example answer

"I'd start at the scene by photographing and documenting the item in situ before collecting it using the appropriate protocol for that evidence type, then package and seal it with a chain-of-custody label recording who handled it and when. Once it reaches the lab, I log it into the LIMS, select the analysis method suited to the sample, whether that's GC-MS for chemical traces or DNA sequencing for biological material, and run it against reference standards. I then draft a report setting out the method, results and conclusion in plain language, and have it reviewed by a colleague before it's finalised, since a second set of eyes catches errors I might miss."

2. Tell me about a time you noticed something inconsistent in test results or a colleague's work and how you handled it.

Why they ask

Attention to detail and willingness to flag problems matter enormously in forensic work, where an unnoticed error can affect a legal outcome.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result, focusing on how you verified the inconsistency and what you did once confirmed.

Example answer

"During a routine review of a colleague's chromatography results, I noticed a peak that didn't match the reference pattern we'd expect for that compound. I re-ran the sample independently rather than assuming it was a one-off, and the second run confirmed the discrepancy was a genuine contamination issue with the equipment, not an error in technique. I flagged it to the lab manager immediately, we recalibrated the instrument, and reprocessed the affected batch before any reports went out."

3. You're giving expert testimony and the defence barrister aggressively challenges your methodology in front of the jury. How do you respond?

Why they ask

Court testimony is a core part of this role, and panels want to see you can stay composed and credible under adversarial questioning.

How to structure your answer

Frame as a judgement-under-pressure response: acknowledge the challenge, explain your reasoning calmly, and describe how you'd avoid getting drawn into speculation.

Example answer

"I'd stay calm and answer only what I can support with data. If the barrister questions my method, I'd explain plainly why it's the accepted approach for that type of sample and refer to the validation standards behind it, rather than getting defensive. If a question moves beyond what my results can actually show, I'd say so directly rather than guessing, because overstating certainty under pressure is what damages credibility, not admitting the limits of the evidence."

4. How do you maintain accurate chain-of-custody documentation when you're handling multiple cases under tight deadlines?

Why they ask

Breaks in chain-of-custody can make evidence inadmissible, so employers need confidence you won't cut corners under workload pressure.

How to structure your answer

Answer with a description of your working system or habits, then an example of it holding up under pressure.

Example answer

"I log evidence into LIMS as soon as it's received rather than batching that task for later, and I never rely on memory for handover details, everything gets written down at the point it happens. On a case with several samples arriving the same day, I kept a running checklist against the case file so nothing was logged out of sequence, which meant the documentation was clean when it was later reviewed for court."

5. What's your experience with GC-MS and DNA sequencing platforms, and how do you validate that your results are reliable?

Why they ask

This tests genuine hands-on competence with the core equipment of the role, not just familiarity with the terminology.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a direct technical response covering your experience level, the validation steps you follow, and one specific example.

Example answer

"I've used GC-MS regularly for trace chemical analysis and DNA sequencing equipment for biological samples. For validation, I run known reference standards alongside test samples every time, check

instrument calibration logs before relying on results, and cross-reference unusual findings against a second method or a colleague's review before they go into a report. That discipline caught an instrument drift issue early on one occasion, before it affected any case reports."

6. How would you explain a complex forensic finding, such as a DNA match probability, to a jury with no scientific background?

Why they ask

Reports and testimony are only useful if non-specialists can understand them accurately, so communication skill is assessed directly.

How to structure your answer

Answer by describing your approach to simplifying language, then give a brief example of a plain-language explanation.

Example answer

"I avoid jargon and statistical shorthand, and instead explain what the number actually means in practical terms. Rather than quoting a match probability as an abstract figure, I'd say something like: this profile is expected to occur in roughly one in however many people in the general population, so it's extremely unlikely to have come from someone unrelated to this sample. I'd also be upfront about what the result doesn't tell us, since juries need the limits of the evidence as much as the strength of it."