Grader Operator interview questions

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What to expect

Grader operator interviews are practical and safety-focused. Employers want to know you can set up the machine, read the job, hit design levels, and work with the people around you without breaking the machine or the site rules.

- **Technical and operating:** Questions about blade setup, crossfall, final trim, GPS control, and how you achieve tolerance on subgrade, drains and batters.
- **Safety and pre-start:** Questions on daily checks, SWMS, isolation, working around surveyors and other plant, and what would stop you from operating.
- **Process and planning:** Walk-throughs of how you read plans, grade stakes and survey marks, plan your passes, and check your work as you go.
- **Behavioural and team:** How you have handled disagreements with supervisors or surveyors, trained less experienced operators, or worked to a tight program.
- **Scenario and judgement:** What you would do when levels drift, the ground changes, weather turns, or machine control drops out mid-pass.

Usually a phone or site screen first, then a practical machine assessment or VOC check with a supervisor. A panel with the project manager and HSE representative often follows, covering safety, quality and how you fit the crew. Some employers ask for your tickets and White Card before the practical.

1. Walk me through how you set up a motor grader for a road subgrade job from the plan and survey marks.

Why they ask

This shows whether you can translate a plan into machine settings and work methodically rather than guessing at levels.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through: plan and chainage check, survey marks, blade angle and pitch, crossfall, starting pass, checking against laser or GPS, then adjusting on the run.

Example answer

“First I check the plan and the surveyor's marks for the chainage, design level and crossfall. I set the blade angle and pitch for the material, then do a short test pass on a known mark to confirm depth and slope. If I am on GPS I check the screen against a mark before I trust it, and if I am on laser I set the receiver height and check it against the same mark. Then I work to the marks in passes, checking behind me with the level or the surveyor before I move too far ahead. If the material changes I adjust blade angle and speed rather than forcing the same settings through.”

2. Tell me about a time you spotted a grade or level issue before it became a problem.

Why they ask

Employers want operators who catch small errors early rather than letting rework build up behind them.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation and task, the action you took on the machine or with the surveyor, and the result for the job.

Example answer

“On a pad job we were cutting to a mark that did not match the surrounding levels. I stopped the pass and walked back with the surveyor, and we found the mark had been moved by a delivery truck. We reset it and I re-cut the area before the compactor came through. That kept the pad within tolerance and saved the crew from reworking a much larger area later. Now I always check a mark against a second reference before I commit to a full pass.”

3. You are grading a pad and the levels are drifting out of tolerance as the day heats up. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you can adjust method without cutting corners on quality.

How to structure your answer

Show your judgement sequence: stop and assess, check the cause, adjust method or settings, communicate with the supervisor, then re-check before continuing.

Example answer

“I would stop and check the cause rather than keep pushing. Heat can change the material and the machine, so I would check the mark, the blade and the GPS or laser against a known point. If it is the material drying out, I might adjust moisture with the supervisor or change the pass pattern. I would tell the supervisor what I am seeing and what I plan to do, then re-cut a short section and check it before carrying on. If the drift continues, I would ask the surveyor to re-check the marks.”

4. What does your daily pre-start look like on a grader, and what would stop you from operating the machine?

Why they ask

Pre-start routine and the courage to park a machine are core safety behaviours for this role.

How to structure your answer

Give a clear process answer: walk-around, fluid and leak checks, tyres or tracks, blade and circle, controls, lights and alarms, then the stop conditions.

Example answer

“I do a walk-around first, checking for leaks, loose bolts, tyre condition and anything unusual around the blade and circle. I check engine oil, coolant, hydraulic oil and fuel, then start it and test the controls, brakes, steering, lights and radio. I also check the cutting edge and the moldboard for wear. What stops me is a hydraulic leak under pressure, a brake or steering fault, a damaged cutting edge I cannot fix safely, or a GPS or laser fault I cannot verify. If it is not right, I tag it or report it and do not operate it.”

5. How do you work with surveyors and supervisors when the design levels and site conditions do not match?

Why they ask

Grading is a team job, and employers need operators who communicate rather than working around people.

How to structure your answer

Use a behavioural and client-facing structure: how you raise it, how you agree a solution, how you record it, and how you keep the job moving.

Example answer

“I raise it early with the surveyor and supervisor rather than grading to a level I know is wrong. I show them what I am seeing on the ground and ask for a re-check or an agreed adjustment. If it is a small variation I will note it and keep the passes short until we confirm. If it needs a design change, I wait for the instruction before cutting any further. The main thing is that we all agree on the mark, and I do not

put the next crew in a position where they have to fix my work."

6. Describe how you use GPS machine control or laser level on a grading job, and what you do when the system drops out or reads incorrectly.

Why they ask

Modern graders rely on machine control, and employers want to know you can use it without becoming reliant on it.

How to structure your answer

Use a technical troubleshooting structure: setup and verification, normal use, fault response, fallback method, and communication.

Example answer

"I set up the system and check it against a known survey mark before I start cutting. On the run I watch the screen or receiver but I also check the ground and the marks behind me. If the signal drops out or the reading looks wrong, I stop the pass, check the antenna or receiver, and compare against a laser or the surveyor's mark. If I cannot verify it, I switch to grading off the marks and tell the supervisor so the surveyor can re-check the setup. I do not keep grading on a reading I do not trust."