

HR Advisor interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Interviews for HR Advisor roles test legal and policy knowledge alongside judgement in sensitive situations. Panels usually include a senior HR person and a hiring manager from the business area the advisor will support, since the role sits between compliance and day-to-day people management.

- **Technical/knowledge:** Questions checking understanding of employment legislation, Modern Awards, and how HR policy should reflect them.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about handling grievances, difficult conversations or competing stakeholder demands.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd balance legal risk, fairness and business pressure in a live case.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about advising and influencing managers who may resist HR guidance.

Expect an opening round on your HR background and why you're interested in the role, then a mix of technical and scenario questions making up the bulk of the interview, and a closing segment where the hiring manager asks about your fit with their team and you ask your own questions about the role's scope.

1. Talk me through how you'd advise a manager who wants to terminate an employee for underperformance, but hasn't documented any prior warnings.

Why they ask

Tests practical understanding of procedural fairness and unfair dismissal risk, a core part of the advisory function.

How to structure your answer

Walk through the process step by step: what you'd tell the manager first, what documentation or process you'd insist on before any termination, and how you'd manage the manager's expectations if they want to move faster than is safe.

Example answer

"I'd start by telling the manager that termination without a documented performance process carries real unfair dismissal risk under the Fair Work Act. I'd ask what conversations have already happened informally, then set up a formal performance improvement plan with clear expectations, timeframes and support, documented in writing. I'd explain that this protects both the employee's right to a fair process and the organisation if the matter is later contested. I'd also flag the relevant timeframe under the applicable award or agreement so the manager understands why rushing the process creates risk rather than saving time."

2. Describe a time you had to investigate a workplace grievance or dispute.

Why they ask

Investigating grievances is a listed core task, and interviewers want evidence of a fair, methodical process under real pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the situation and who was involved, your specific task in the investigation, the actions you took to gather evidence and manage confidentiality, and the result including how the matter was closed out.

Example answer

"An employee raised a complaint about a colleague's conduct in team meetings. I was responsible for running the investigation, so I interviewed the complainant, the respondent and two witnesses separately, kept detailed notes, and checked the complaint against the organisation's code of conduct. I kept both parties updated on timing without revealing details of what others had said. The investigation found the conduct breached the code, and I recommended a formal warning plus a review of team meeting protocols. The matter was resolved within the timeframe set by policy and didn't escalate further."

3. A senior manager wants to skip the standard recruitment process to fast-track a candidate they already know. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure from a stakeholder with more organisational power, balancing compliance with relationship management.

How to structure your answer

Outline the competing pressures, state the position you'd take and why, and describe how you'd manage the relationship without simply saying no.

Example answer

"I'd acknowledge the manager's urgency but explain that skipping selection criteria and a documented process creates equity and discrimination risk, and could undermine confidence in the recruitment process if challenged later. I'd offer a faster but still compliant option, such as a shortened but genuine shortlisting and interview process, and explain the timeframe this adds. If the manager pushed back, I'd escalate to my own manager for a second opinion rather than approving an exception unilaterally."

4. How do you interpret a Modern Award when a manager asks whether a proposed roster change is compliant?

Why they ask

Checks working knowledge of award interpretation, a task specific to this role and one that's easy to get wrong.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your process: which clauses you'd check first, what other sources you'd consult if the award is ambiguous, and how you'd communicate the answer back to the manager.

Example answer

"I'd start with the relevant award's ordinary hours, rostering and consultation clauses, and check whether the enterprise agreement, if one exists, overrides the award on this point. If the wording is ambiguous, I'd check Fair Work Ombudsman guidance or precedent decisions rather than guessing. I'd then give the manager a plain-language answer, including any consultation obligation with affected employees, and put it in writing so there's a record of the advice given."

5. What's your experience with HRIS platforms like Workday or SAP SuccessFactors, and how have you used them in policy or reporting work?

Why they ask

Tests practical tool fluency since HR Advisors are expected to pull data and manage case records through these systems.

How to structure your answer

Give a direct account of the systems you've used, a specific task you completed in them, and how the output supported a policy or management decision.

Example answer

"I've used SAP SuccessFactors for tracking performance review cycles and case notes on disciplinary matters. I pulled headcount and turnover data from the system to support a policy review on probation periods, comparing outcomes for staff who'd had a structured induction against those who hadn't. That data helped make the case for extending the induction program, which the leadership team approved."

6. Why are you looking to move into an HR Advisor role now, and what draws you to this organisation specifically?

Why they ask

Standard motivation and fit question, but panels are also listening for genuine interest versus a generic answer given the role's stakeholder-facing demands.

How to structure your answer

Keep it brief and specific: one sentence on your career trajectory, one on what you're looking for next, and a direct link to something concrete about this employer or role.

Example answer

"I've spent the last few years building a strong grounding in employment law and workplace investigations, and I'm ready to take on more autonomy advising managers directly rather than working purely in a support capacity. This role appeals to me because of the breadth across recruitment, compliance and workplace relations, and I'm particularly interested in how your organisation handles [specific program or challenge relevant to the employer]."