

Instructional Designer interview questions

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What to expect

Instructional design interviews are usually two conversations in one: a discussion of how you work through a design problem, and a look at your actual output. Employers want to see that you can interrogate a brief, work with a subject matter expert who is not a natural teacher, and make a defensible call about delivery mode. Bring two or three portfolio pieces you can talk about in detail, including what you would do differently now.

- **Process and design thinking:** How you move from a request to a finished course: needs analysis, learning objectives, storyboarding, sign-off and evaluation.
- **Portfolio or work sample review:** A walk-through of a module you built, why you structured it that way, what the constraints were and what the results looked like.
- **Behavioural and stakeholder:** How you have handled subject matter experts who cannot explain their own job, managers who want a course for the wrong problem, and competing deadlines.
- **Scenario and troubleshooting:** What you do when completion is high but behaviour has not changed, or when a build is not tracking properly in the LMS.
- **Technical and accessibility:** Tool-specific questions on Storyline or Captivate, SCORM and xAPI publishing, LMS administration and designing to WCAG 2.1 AA.
- **Evaluation and data:** How you decide whether training worked, and what you do with completion, assessment and feedback data after a launch.

Most processes run across two stages. A first interview with the hiring manager or learning lead covers your background, your design process and a walk-through of one or two portfolio pieces, and you may be given a short task beforehand such as storyboarding a single screen or critiquing an existing module. A second interview or panel then goes deeper into stakeholder scenarios and tool questions, and often includes the subject matter expert or LMS administrator you would work with day to day. Some larger organisations add a short conversation with a People and Culture representative about ways of working.

1. Walk me through how you would take a new course from the first brief through to launch.

Why they ask

This is the core process question. The interviewer is checking whether you have a repeatable method or improvise, and whether analysis and evaluation are genuinely part of it rather than something you mention after the fact.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a linear walk-through with the decision points named: scoping and needs analysis, subject matter expert interviews, learning objectives, storyboard and sign-off, build or developer brief, LMS testing, staged launch, then review against data. Keep it to about two minutes and flag where timelines usually slip.

Example answer

"My last course was a compliance refresher for about 400 staff. I started with a scoping session with the compliance manager to work out what the regulator actually required and what incidents had prompted the review. Then I interviewed two subject matter experts and two people who do the job, because the experts could tell me the rules but the frontline staff could tell me where people actually got it wrong. From there I wrote the learning objectives, built a paper storyboard, and got sign-off on that before touching Storyline, which saved a rebuild later. I built four short modules with a branching scenario in the third one, loaded them into the LMS and tested completion tracking with the LMS

administrator on a couple of dummy accounts, then launched to one team first. After a month I pulled the completion and assessment data and trimmed a section that everyone was skipping through."

2. Tell me about a time you worked with a subject matter expert who could not explain what learners needed to know.

Why they ask

Subject matter experts are usually the hardest part of this job. The interviewer wants to see that you can extract usable content from someone who knows their job too well to describe it, without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, but keep the situation and task brief and put the weight on the action. Show the specific technique you used to get the information out, and finish with what changed in the course as a result.

Example answer

"I was designing an induction module for a maintenance team and the senior technician I was paired with answered everything with 'you just know'. I stopped asking him what he knew and started asking about the last time a new starter got something wrong. He described three specific jobs straight away, and that gave me the actual tasks to build around. I then sat with him while he did one of those jobs and recorded the steps, and wrote the module from that before sending it back to him for review. The module went from restating policy statements to covering the three jobs that new starters were most often getting wrong, and he became much easier to work with once he could see his own work in it."

3. Completion rates on a module are high, but nothing has changed on the job. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is the classic evaluation scenario in instructional design. The interviewer is testing whether you diagnose before redesigning, and whether you are willing to say that training is not always the answer.

How to structure your answer

Treat it as a diagnostic question. Work through the possible causes in order, from measurement error to assessment quality to whether the workplace allows the skill to be used, and only then describe what you would change. Say what you would do if the answer turns out to be outside the training.

Example answer

"I would want to know whether the completion data is telling me anything before I redesign anything. The first thing I would check is whether the assessment actually tests the task or just recall of the slides, because a module that asks people to click the right box will show full completion and mean nothing. Then I would talk to a few team leaders about what they see on the floor, and whether anyone gets a chance to use the skill in their first few weeks. If the assessment is the problem, I would rewrite it as a scenario or an on-the-job observation with a checklist. If the workplace is the problem and people have no opportunity to practise, the module was never going to fix it, and I would say so and suggest what would, whether that is a job aid, a supervisor checklist or a change to the process itself."

4. How do you decide between a self-paced eLearn and a facilitated workshop?

Why they ask

Delivery mode is one of the few genuinely design-level decisions a designer makes, and employers want to hear reasoning rather than a preference for one tool.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a set of trade-offs rather than a preference. Cover what the learner has to be able to do afterwards, how much practice and feedback that needs, how often the content changes, and how many

people need it. Finish with a recommendation and the honest blended option if that is what fits.

Example answer

"It comes down to what the learner has to do afterwards. If the skill is a decision made under time pressure, like triaging a complaint or handling an upset customer, a facilitated session with role play is usually better because people need feedback in the moment and the feel of doing it badly once. If it is a process people look up occasionally and just need to follow correctly, a short self-paced module plus a job aid is cheaper, faster to update and easier to roll out across sites. Cost and logistics matter too: a workshop for 400 people across six locations is a significant ask. Often the honest answer is a short eLearn for the knowledge and one workshop or a coaching conversation for the part that needs practice. I would put that trade-off in front of the stakeholder with a recommendation rather than just picking one silently."

5. Describe a time you pushed back on a stakeholder who wanted a course that would not solve their problem.

Why they ask

Stakeholder management is where designers either protect the quality of the learning or become an order taker. The interviewer wants to see how you handle disagreement with someone more senior than you.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, and be explicit about how you raised the concern and what you offered instead. Interviewers listen for whether you brought evidence and an alternative, or just said no.

Example answer

"A manager asked me to build a two-hour eLearn on time management because their team was missing deadlines. I asked how many people were affected and what the deadlines actually were, and it turned out the real issue was that work was being assigned without a clear priority order and two people were covering three roles. I went back to her with that and was direct about it: I could build the course, but completion would go up and nothing on the floor would change. I proposed a short module on how the team prioritises work together, plus a fix to how work was allocated, which was her call to make. She went with the shorter module and a change to their planning meeting. It was a harder conversation than just saying yes, but she came back to me for the next project because she trusted I would tell her if a course was not the answer."

6. How do you build accessibility into a module?

Why they ask

Australian organisations are generally held to accessibility standards, and accessibility is where a lot of Storyline builds quietly fail. The question also reveals whether you test your work or assume it is fine.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a standards question with a practical edge. Group your answer around visual, audio, interaction and structure, name WCAG 2.1 AA as the benchmark, and spend the last part on how you test rather than how you design.

Example answer

"I design to WCAG 2.1 AA as the baseline, since that is what most Australian organisations are accountable for. In practice that means captions and a transcript for anything with audio, alt text for images that carry meaning and a null alt for decorative ones, colour contrast that is checked rather than eyeballed, and interactions that work with a keyboard as well as a mouse, which is usually where Storyline builds fall over. Structure matters too: proper heading levels, a logical reading order for screen readers, and no text baked into images. Then I test rather than assume. I run the module through a screen reader, tab through every screen and interaction, and where I can, get someone who actually uses assistive technology to try it before launch."