

Metal Trades Assistant interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for metal trades assistant roles are usually run by the person you'd actually work under, so they lean practical. Employers are checking that you work safely around tools, that you're reliable, and that you can be trusted to support qualified tradespeople without needing to be watched every minute.

- **Safety and compliance:** Questions about PPE, hazard reporting, tagging out faulty equipment, SWMS and what you'd do when someone asks you to work outside a safe procedure.
- **Practical and technical:** Questions about tool checks, cutting and grinding technique, measurement, lifting gear and how you read a job drawing.
- **Behavioural and teamwork:** Questions about working with tradespeople, taking direction, communicating a problem, and staying useful when a job changes.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Questions that put you under time pressure with a workpiece that isn't fitting, a damaged tool, or an instruction you're not sure about.
- **Reliability and process:** Questions about attendance, shift work, repetitive work and how you keep quality consistent across a long day.

Usually a short phone screen first, then a face-to-face interview on site with the supervisor or leading hand, often including a walk through the workshop and a practical component such as a cut, a grind or a measurement check. Some employers add a trial shift, a pre-employment medical, or a drug and alcohol screen.

1. Walk me through how you'd set up to cut a length of steel to size for a welder.

Why they ask

This is the core task of the role, and the interviewer wants to see whether your process is safe and ordered or whether you jump straight to the tool.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: start with the instruction, then preparation, then the cut, then the check. Name your PPE and your measurement check at each stage.

Example answer

"I'd start with the drawing or job sheet and confirm the cut length and quantity with the tradesperson, because it's cheaper to ask than to cut short. Then I'd pick the stock, mark it with a soapstone and check the mark with a tape. I'd set the piece on the saw or the bench so it's supported and can't roll, check the blade or disc is right for the material and in good condition, and put on my glasses, face shield, gloves and hearing protection. Once the cut is done I'd deburr the edge, check the length against the drawing, and stack it where it won't get knocked or walked into. If anything about the setup felt wrong I'd stop and ask before I started."

2. Tell me about a time you spotted a safety issue in a workshop or on site and what you did about it.

Why they ask

Safety questions are asked in almost every interview for this role, and they want a real example rather than a statement about caring about safety.

How to structure your answer

STAR: keep the situation brief, be specific about what you saw, describe the action you took and who you told, then the outcome.

Example answer

"At a previous workshop we had a bench grinder with a cracked guard. It had been like that for a while and people kept using it because it was the closest one to the bay. I noticed it at the start of a shift and mentioned it to the leading hand, and he said it had already been reported. I tagged it out anyway and moved it off the bench so nobody would pick it up, then followed it up with the supervisor later that morning so it was on the maintenance list. It got a new guard that week. It slowed us down for a couple of days because everyone had to walk to the other grinder, but nobody got hurt and it showed that tagging things out actually works."

3. You're holding a workpiece in position for a boilermaker and the fit isn't lining up. He's under time pressure. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you'll force something unsafe to save a few minutes.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: acknowledge the time pressure, then work through options in order, saying what you'd try first and when you'd escalate.

Example answer

"First thing I'd do is stop and not force it, because holding something that's fighting you is how people get hurt. I'd tell the boilermaker straight away that it's not lining up and ask what he wants. Often it's something simple, a bit of dags on the edge, a tack that's pulled it out of square, or the wrong piece. If it's a quick fix like dressing the edge I'd do that and we'd try again. If it needed re-cutting or the drawing looked wrong I'd take it to the supervisor rather than guess, and I'd be upfront that we'd lose a bit of time. A short delay is better than a weld that has to be cut out."

4. What checks do you do on an angle grinder before you use it, and what would make you stop and tag it out?

Why they ask

Grinders are the tool most associated with injuries for this role, so interviewers listen for a specific routine rather than a general answer.

How to structure your answer

Technical check: list the checks in the order you'd actually do them, then give a clear line on what makes you stop.

Example answer

"I'd check the lead and plug for cuts or exposed wire, check the guard is fitted and not cracked, check the disc for chips or cracks and that it's the right type and size for the grinder, and make sure the side handle is tight. I'd run it for a few seconds away from anyone before putting it to the work. I'd stop and tag it out for a cracked or badly worn disc, a missing or damaged guard, a damaged lead, or if it vibrated or made a noise it shouldn't. I'd also stop if there was no safe way to position the work, because a grinder is only as safe as the setup around it."

5. A tradesperson you're assisting asks you to do something a different way to the SWMS. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

It checks whether you can hold a safety line without being difficult to work with, which matters in a small crew.

How to structure your answer

Safety and authority: show respect for the tradesperson's experience, be clear about your own limits and training, then name the escalation step.

Example answer

"I'd ask about it rather than just refusing, because there's often a good reason and I want to understand what he's seeing. If it's still outside the SWMS or outside what I'm trained and authorised to do, I'd say so plainly and suggest we check with the supervisor before we change anything. If it's a task I'm not ticketed for, like rigging or dogging, that's a no from me regardless of who's asking, and I'd say it without making it personal. Most of the time it's a two minute conversation and we get on with the job."

6. This role has a lot of repetitive cutting, grinding and cleaning. How do you keep your work consistent across a long shift?

Why they ask

Employers want to know you'll still be measuring properly at hour nine and that you understand the work is physical and repetitive.

How to structure your answer

Behavioural, focused on habits rather than a single event. Describe the routine you follow, then give one example of it holding up under pressure.

Example answer

"I work in blocks. I check the drawing and set up once, then cut and check the first piece properly, and once I know the setup is right I keep spot checking every few pieces rather than trusting it all the way through. I keep my bench and my leads tidy as I go, because that's usually where mistakes and trips come from. On a long shift I'd rather take a proper break and come back sharp than push through and start measuring lazily. When we had a big run of brackets to cut, working that way meant the last batch was the same as the first and the fitter didn't have to send any back."