

Personal Assistant interview questions

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What to expect

A personal assistant interview usually tests your organisation, your judgement under pressure, and how you handle a single person's competing demands. Expect questions about systems, discretion, and real scenarios you might face day to day.

- **Process and logistics:** How you manage diaries, travel and expenses in practice.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of working with a demanding stakeholder or fixing a scheduling problem.
- **Scenario and judgement:** What you would do when priorities clash or plans change at short notice.
- **Technical:** Your familiarity with Outlook, Word, Excel, Google Workspace and project tools.
- **Discretion and confidentiality:** How you handle sensitive information and stay professional.

Typically a phone or video screen with a recruiter or HR, then a face to face or panel interview with the person you would support and perhaps an office manager. Some employers ask you to complete a short practical task, such as prioritising a set of meeting requests or drafting a reply to an email.

1. Walk me through how you would manage a week where your executive has three competing meeting requests, a flight to book and a report due.

Why they ask

Tests your process and how you prioritise when everything looks urgent.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through structure: list the steps in order, explain the logic behind each, and finish with how you would confirm the plan with the executive.

Example answer

"First, I would check the executive's existing calendar for the week and identify any immovable commitments, like a board meeting or a flight that is already booked. Then I would sort the three meeting requests by who is asking and what the meeting is for, and I would ask the executive which one has the highest priority if it is not clear. I would book the highest priority meeting first, then the next, and offer the third one an alternative time. For the flight, I would book it around the confirmed meetings so it does not clash. For the report, I would find out the deadline and who is contributing, then block out time in the diary for the executive to review it. At the end, I would send a short summary of the week's plan to the executive so they can see everything in one place."

2. Tell me about a time you had to rearrange travel at short notice.

Why they ask

Shows how you handle disruption and keep a cool head.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"In my last role, my manager was flying to Melbourne for a client meeting when the airline cancelled the flight two hours before departure. I called the airline while I looked at alternative flights and trains, and I found a later flight that still got them to the meeting with 30 minutes to spare. I also rang the client to let them know there might be a small delay and arranged a taxi to meet the manager at the airport. The meeting went ahead, and the client appreciated the heads up. Afterwards, I set up a travel alert system so I would see cancellations as soon as they happened."

3. You are supporting a manager who is double booked for two important meetings. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure and how you handle competing demands.

How to structure your answer

A judgement structure: assess the situation, check the priorities, act, and communicate.

Example answer

"I would first look at both meetings and see if one can be moved without causing a problem. If both are genuinely urgent, I would speak to the manager briefly and ask which one they want to attend and who should represent them at the other. If that is not possible, I would attend the less critical meeting myself to take notes and report back, or ask the organiser if it can be rescheduled. Either way, I would let both sets of attendees know quickly so no one is left waiting, and I would follow up with a short summary of what was decided."

4. What is your experience with Microsoft Outlook and other scheduling tools?

Why they ask

Checks your technical comfort and whether you can hit the ground running.

How to structure your answer

A technical structure: name the tools, give a specific example of how you use them, and mention any advanced features you rely on.

Example answer

"I use Microsoft Outlook every day for diary management, including shared calendars, room bookings and setting up recurring meetings. I am comfortable with Word for formatting documents and Excel for tracking expenses and budgets. I have also used Google Workspace when a workplace ran on Gmail and Google Calendar. In a previous role, I set up colour coded categories in Outlook so my manager could see at a glance which meetings were internal, client facing or travel related, which made it easier to spot clashes."

5. How do you handle confidential information, for example a sensitive document or a conversation you overhear?

Why they ask

Discretion is central to a personal assistant role.

How to structure your answer

A principles structure: state your approach, give an example, and explain how you keep information secure.

Example answer

"I treat everything I see or hear in the role as confidential unless I am told otherwise. I keep sensitive documents in a secure folder, I do not discuss work in public places, and I am careful about who is copied on emails. In one role, I was preparing a restructure announcement and I did not share the details with anyone outside the small group involved, even when colleagues asked what was happening. I simply said it was not my news to share and directed them to the manager."

6. Describe a time when you had to deal with a difficult stakeholder.

Why they ask

Tests your stakeholder management and problem solving.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"I once had a client who insisted on booking a meeting with my manager at a time that clashed with another commitment. They were frustrated and felt their matter was being ignored. I listened to their concern, explained the clash clearly, and offered two alternative times that week, plus the option of a phone call in between. They chose one of the alternatives, and I confirmed it straight away. After that, I made a point of checking in with them a few days before each meeting to make sure the time still worked, and we did not have the same problem again."