

Photographer interview questions

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

What to expect

Photographer interviews usually combine a look at your portfolio with questions about how you handle clients, technical setups and the pressure of a live shoot. Employers want evidence you can deliver a consistent result under real-world conditions, not just produce good images in ideal ones.

- **Portfolio and technical review:** Questions about specific images in your portfolio: lighting choices, camera settings, and the editing decisions behind the final output.
- **Client-facing:** How you run a consultation, interpret a vague brief, and manage client expectations before and during a shoot.
- **Scenario / problem-solving:** What you'd do when equipment fails, weather changes, or a location falls through on shoot day.
- **Business and project management:** How you manage timelines, deliverables, file handovers and multiple bookings without dropping quality.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of difficult clients, creative disagreements, or tight deadlines, usually asked in a STAR format.

Expect an initial conversation about your background and style, followed by a portfolio walk-through where the interviewer asks you to explain choices behind two or three images. This usually leads into scenario and behavioural questions, and finishes with practical logistics: availability, equipment ownership, and how you handle bookings and file delivery.

1. Walk me through this image in your portfolio: what were your lighting and camera settings, and why?

Why they ask

Tests whether you understand the technical reasoning behind your own work, not just that you can produce a good result by trial and error.

How to structure your answer

Walk through it in shoot order: the brief or goal for the image, the lighting and camera setup you chose and why, any adjustments made on the day, then the editing decisions that got it to final.

Example answer

"This was a headshot for a corporate client who wanted a warm but professional look. I used a single softbox at 45 degrees with a reflector on the shadow side to keep detail without flattening the face, shot at f/4 to keep the background softly out of focus, and metered for the skin tones rather than the background. In editing, I did minor skin retouching and warmed the white balance slightly to match their brand colours, then delivered both colour and black and white versions as requested in the brief."

2. A client's brief is vague, they've said they want photos that 'feel premium' but haven't given examples. How do you handle the consultation?

Why they ask

Checks whether you can turn ambiguous client language into a workable shot list without wasting shoot time guessing.

How to structure your answer

Describe your judgement process: how you'd probe for detail, what reference points you'd bring to the conversation, and how you'd confirm alignment before the shoot day.

Example answer

"I'd ask them to show me two or three images they like, from anywhere, even competitors, so I can see what 'premium' means to them specifically. I'd also ask about the end use, whether it's for a website, a printed brochure or social media, since that changes composition and format. Before the shoot I'd send a short mood board based on that conversation so we're aligned before I book the location or props, rather than finding out on the day that we had different ideas."

3. You're mid-shoot at a client's premises and your main light fails. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests practical problem-solving and composure when equipment or conditions change unexpectedly, a common real-world pressure in this job.

How to structure your answer

Talk through immediate priorities under pressure: what you'd assess first, what backup or workaround you'd use, and how you'd communicate with the client without losing their confidence.

Example answer

"I always carry a backup speedlight and spare batteries for exactly this reason, so I'd switch to that and adjust my settings to compensate for the different light quality. If I didn't have a backup available, I'd look at available window light or bounce flash off a wall or ceiling to keep shooting rather than stopping the session. I'd let the client know calmly that we're adjusting the setup, so they're not left wondering if something's gone wrong."

4. Tell me about a time a client was unhappy with the direction of a shoot or the final images.

Why they ask

Behavioural question probing how you handle conflict and feedback without damaging the client relationship.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the specific task or expectation gap, the action you took to resolve it, and the result for the client relationship.

Example answer

"A client once felt the edited images from an events shoot were too dark for their brand's usual bright, colourful style. I reviewed their previous marketing material with them to understand the tone they meant, then re-edited a batch with brighter exposure and warmer tones to match. They approved that version and we agreed on a written style note for future bookings so we wouldn't have the same mismatch again."

5. How do you manage file delivery and archiving across multiple client jobs?

Why they ask

Checks organisational discipline, since late or lost files are one of the more common complaints about freelance photographers.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your actual process step by step, from shoot to final handover, including how you back up and how clients access files.

Example answer

"I back up cards immediately after a shoot to two separate drives before I format anything. I cull and edit in Lightroom, then export finals to a client gallery on a platform like Shootproof so they can download or select prints themselves. I keep raw and edited files archived by client and date, so if someone comes back six months later wanting a reprint or an alternate crop, I can find it quickly."

6. How do you decide what to charge or how many hours a job will take, given the editing time involved?

Why they ask

Business and project management question, relevant since photographers often quote and manage their own workload even when employed.

How to structure your answer

Explain your estimating method: how you account for shoot time versus editing time, and how you adjust for scope changes.

Example answer

"I base the quote on shoot length plus an editing ratio, usually a few hours of editing per hour of shooting depending on how much retouching is involved. If the brief expands during the consultation, like adding extra locations or a longer image count, I flag that upfront so the timeline and cost reflect the actual scope rather than absorbing it silently and running late on other bookings."