

Protective Services Officer interview questions

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What to expect

The Protective Services Officer selection process is thorough and designed to test your judgement, integrity and resilience. It typically includes aptitude testing, a panel interview, physical and medical checks, and a psychological assessment.

- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask you to describe past experiences, often using the STAR method, to show how you handle conflict, teamwork and pressure.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Situational questions that place you in a realistic PSO scenario, such as a fare evasion incident or a medical emergency, to assess your decision-making and use of powers.
- **Technical and legal:** Questions about your understanding of the Victoria Police Act, limited police powers, and correct procedures for arrest, infringement and evidence handling.
- **Safety and physical readiness:** Questions and assessments that check your ability to apply use-of-force principles, firearm safety and physical stamina in a dynamic environment.
- **Motivation and integrity:** Questions that explore why you want to be a PSO, how you handle ethical dilemmas, and your commitment to public service.

The panel interview usually runs for about an hour and includes a mix of behavioural and scenario questions. You may sit before a panel of two or three people, often including a Victoria Police sergeant and a civilian recruiter. Some candidates also complete a written exercise or a role-play. The interview is followed by a fitness test, a medical examination and a psychological interview, and successful candidates then undergo background checks and academy training.

1. Tell us about a time you had to defuse a tense situation with a member of the public.

Why they ask

This behavioural question tests your de-escalation skills, which are central to daily PSO work on the transport network.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the Situation, the Task you faced, the Action you took, and the Result. Focus on your communication, body language and any support you called on.

Example answer

"In my previous role as a crowd controller at a major event, a patron became aggressive after being denied entry. I stayed calm, kept my distance and spoke in a low, steady voice. I explained the reason for the decision and offered an alternative way to resolve his issue. He eventually calmed down and left without further incident. I learned that slowing down the interaction and showing respect can prevent escalation."

2. You are patrolling a train station and see a group of youths intimidating passengers. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario question assesses your judgement under pressure and your ability to prioritise safety while using your limited powers appropriately.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your assessment: identify the risk, decide on the best response, act within your powers, and review the outcome. Explain how you would communicate with the group, passengers and your radio dispatch.

Example answer

"I would first observe from a safe distance to gauge the level of threat and whether weapons are visible. I would radio for any nearby units and request CCTV monitoring. I would then approach the group calmly but firmly, identifying myself as a PSO. I would separate the ringleader from the others and explain that their behaviour is causing alarm. If they comply, I would issue a move-on direction and stay until they leave. If the situation escalates, I would use my training in defensive tactics and call for police backup. Throughout, I would keep passengers informed and safe."

3. What do you understand about the powers of a Protective Services Officer under the Victoria Police Act?

Why they ask

This technical question checks that you know the legal boundaries of the role and can apply them correctly.

How to structure your answer

Define the key powers, such as arrest, detention and issuing infringements, then explain the limits, such as not investigating serious crimes or carrying out searches without proper authority. Give an example of when you would use each power.

Example answer

"As a PSO, my powers come from the Victoria Police Act. I can arrest and detain someone without a warrant if I believe they have committed an offence and it is necessary to prevent further harm or ensure they appear in court. I can issue infringements for fare evasion and disorderly conduct. However, I cannot investigate major crimes or conduct searches beyond what the Act allows. For example, if I saw a passenger assault another person, I would arrest the offender, secure the scene and hand over to police for investigation. I would always document my actions carefully and stick to the limits of my authority."

4. Describe a time you worked as part of a team to achieve a safety outcome.

Why they ask

This behavioural question explores your teamwork and communication skills, which are essential when coordinating with police, ambulance and transport staff.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR again, but emphasise your specific role in the team and how you supported others. Highlight any measurable result, such as a safer event or a quicker response.

Example answer

"While working as a security screening officer at a stadium, I was part of a team managing a large crowd during a controversial match. We noticed a growing confrontation near one gate. I radioed my supervisor and worked with two colleagues to create a barrier between the groups. We used clear verbal instructions and guided fans to separate entrances. The situation de-escalated and no one was injured. The team debrief afterwards highlighted how our quick coordination prevented a major incident."

5. How would you handle a situation where a colleague is not following correct procedure?

Why they ask

This integrity question tests your professionalism, loyalty to the team and commitment to safety standards.

How to structure your answer

Explain how you would address it directly but respectfully, focusing on the procedure and safety rather than the person. Describe when you would escalate to a supervisor and how you would document the

issue.

Example answer

"If I noticed a colleague skipping a required check, such as not turning on their body-worn camera, I would speak to them privately as soon as possible. I would remind them of the procedure and ask if there was a reason they were struggling. If they continued to ignore the standard, I would report it to my supervisor because public safety and legal compliance depend on everyone following the rules. I would keep my report factual and focus on the behaviour, not the person."

6. Why do you want to be a Protective Services Officer rather than a police officer or a security guard?

Why they ask

This motivation question helps the panel understand your commitment to the specific PSO role and its unique focus on public transport and community engagement.

How to structure your answer

Compare the roles clearly, then explain what draws you to the PSO position, such as the blend of public contact, visible patrols and targeted powers. Show that you understand the career path and the demands.

Example answer

"I want to be a PSO because it offers a unique mix of public contact and targeted law enforcement. Unlike a security guard, I would have sworn powers to arrest and issue infringements. Unlike a police officer, I could focus on the transport network and build relationships with regular commuters. I enjoy the challenge of deterring crime through visible patrols and helping people feel safe on their daily journey. I also value the structured training and clear career path that Victoria Police provides."