Rostering Officer interview questions

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

What to expect

Rostering Officer interviews focus on your ability to build compliant rosters, solve coverage problems, and work with managers and staff. You may be asked to talk through a real roster scenario or complete a short practical exercise.

- **Process and system:** Questions about how you build, publish and adjust rosters using workforce management software.
- **Compliance and award interpretation:** Questions on modern awards, enterprise agreements, fatigue rules and the National Employment Standards.
- **Scenario and problem-solving:** Hypothetical coverage gaps or last-minute changes that test your judgement under pressure.
- **Behavioural and stakeholder:** Past examples of managing leave, shift swaps, and difficult conversations with managers or staff.
- **Safety and fatigue:** How you monitor fatigue and keep rosters safe, especially in 24/7 care or high-risk settings.

Typically a phone screen with recruitment, then a one-on-one or panel interview with the rostering manager and a senior team member. Some employers include a practical test: you might be given a set of availabilities and asked to draft a roster, or asked to work through a system like Deputy or UKG in a live demo.

1. Walk me through how you build a roster from scratch for a new fortnight.

Why they ask

This shows whether you have a repeatable process and understand the moving parts, from award rules to staff availability.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: start with the demand pattern, then list the steps you take in order, and finish with how you check the roster before publishing.

Example answer

“First, I check the staffing requirements for each shift against the previous fortnight and any known changes, like planned leave or training. Then I pull availability from the workforce management system and compare it to the demand. I draft the roster in the system, starting with the harder-to-fill shifts, such as nights and weekends. Once the draft is done, I run a compliance check against the relevant award and our enterprise agreement, looking at break lengths, maximum shift lengths and fatigue rules. I also check that no one is rostered outside their availability without agreement. After that, I publish the roster with a clear deadline for swap requests. Finally, I monitor the first few days and adjust as needed.”

2. How do you ensure rosters comply with awards, enterprise agreements and fatigue rules?

Why they ask

Compliance is a core part of the role; employers want to know you can read and apply industrial instruments, not just fill shifts.

How to structure your answer

Compliance explanation: name the key rules you check, describe how you stay current, and give an example of catching a problem before it happened.

Example answer

"I work from the relevant modern award and our enterprise agreement, and I keep a one-page summary of the main rules I need to check, like minimum breaks, maximum ordinary hours, and penalty rate triggers. I also review any updates from the Fair Work Ombudsman or our HR team. In practice, I run a compliance report in the workforce management system after drafting the roster. For example, I once noticed a care worker was rostered for a fifth consecutive night shift, which would have breached our fatigue policy. I adjusted the roster and arranged cover for the last shift before publishing, so we avoided a safety risk and a potential breach."

3. Tell me about a time you had to fill a difficult shift at short notice.

Why they ask

This tests your problem-solving and your network of contacts, and how you stay calm under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result. Keep it concise and focus on the actions you took and the outcome.

Example answer

"At my previous aged care site, a night shift nurse called in sick at 4pm on a Friday. I was the only rostering officer on duty. I first checked the system for anyone who had indicated they wanted extra hours and was not already at their maximum. I found one nurse who was available but had already worked four nights that week. I checked the fatigue rules and confirmed a fifth night would exceed our policy, so I did not roster her. Instead, I called two nearby sites to see if they had a nurse who could cover, and I also contacted our agency partner. Within an hour, an agency nurse was confirmed for the shift. I updated the roster, notified the manager, and made a note to review our casual pool for future Friday nights."

4. A staff member calls in sick for a night shift two hours before it starts. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a common scenario in rostering; it tests your judgement, prioritisation and ability to follow process under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Scenario judgement: prioritise safety and coverage, work through the steps you would take in order, and explain how you communicate with everyone involved.

Example answer

"First, I confirm the details with the staff member and make sure they know not to come in. Then I check the roster to see if there is anyone already on shift who can cover, or if a nearby team has surplus staff. If not, I start calling casuals and part-timers who have indicated availability for that night. I keep a list of who I have called and when. If I cannot fill it within thirty minutes, I contact the agency. Throughout, I keep the shift manager informed so they can plan for a possible gap. Once the shift is covered, I update the roster and timekeeping system, and I follow up with the staff member the next day to see if they need any support."

5. How do you handle a manager who wants to change the roster at the last minute?

Why they ask

Rostering Officers often sit between operational demands and staff entitlements; this question tests your stakeholder management and your ability to say no when needed.

How to structure your answer

Stakeholder management: acknowledge the request, explain the constraints, offer alternatives, and document the outcome.

Example answer

“I start by asking what has changed and what outcome they need. Then I explain the impact on staff, such as broken shifts or rest period breaches, and check whether the change is allowed under the award or enterprise agreement. If it is allowed, I look for volunteers and adjust the roster, making sure any extra hours are recorded correctly. If it is not allowed, I offer alternatives, like rearranging tasks or bringing in agency cover for part of the shift. I always follow up in writing so there is a clear record of what was agreed. If the manager pushes back, I involve my HR contact to make sure we stay compliant.”

6. What workforce management systems have you used, and how do you keep records accurate?

Why they ask

This confirms your technical fit and your attention to detail, which are essential for payroll and compliance.

How to structure your answer

Technical/tool knowledge: name the systems, describe your workflow, and give an example of how you catch and fix errors.

Example answer

“I have used UKG Workforce Dimensions, Deputy and Humanforce, and I am comfortable picking up new systems like RosterOn. My usual workflow is to enter shifts as they are confirmed, check the timekeeping data daily against the roster, and flag any discrepancies to the manager before payroll closes. For example, in my current role I noticed a pattern of missed breaks being recorded for one team. I worked with the manager to adjust how breaks were being entered and set up a weekly report to catch any repeats. That reduced the number of pay queries and kept our records clean.”