

Shopfitter interview questions

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What to expect

Shopfitting interviews usually mix a trade skills conversation with a safety and site-fit check. The interviewer wants evidence you can read plans, set out accurately, install joinery and shopfronts, and work safely around other trades and building occupants.

- **Trade skills and plans:** Questions about reading shop drawings, setting out, fabrication, finishes, tools and installation sequence.
- **Safety and compliance:** How you apply WHS, SWMS, Australian Standards, the National Construction Code and site rules.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of teamwork, problem solving, defects, deadlines and working in live environments.
- **Scenario and judgement:** What you would do when measurements, other trades or client requests change on site.
- **Client-facing and communication:** Explaining progress, defects or access limits to a site manager, shop owner or project coordinator.

Most shopfitter interviews start with a phone or site-office conversation with a supervisor or project manager, followed by a face-to-face or on-site meeting. You may be asked to walk through a set of shop drawings or complete a short practical task. On commercial sites, expect safety induction questions and a site walk-through before any offer.

1. Walk me through how you read a set of shop drawings and plan a fitout installation from first fix to handover.

Why they ask

This shows whether you can translate drawings into a practical build sequence, not just use tools.

How to structure your answer

A clear walk-through works best. Start with the drawing set and title block, then cover setting out, materials, services coordination, installation order, quality checks and handover. Finish with how you record variations or defects.

Example answer

"I start with the full drawing set and check the title block, revision number and any engineer's details. I look at the floor plan, elevations and joinery sections together so I understand how the counter, shelving and shopfront relate to the ceiling, floor and services. On site I confirm the datum and set out with a laser level, then mark the wall positions and check them against the architect's dimensions. I work out the order: first fix framing and blocking, then services rough-in, then sheeting and joinery, then counters and shopfront glazing. I keep a marked-up set of drawings as I go, note any site variation, and do a quality check at each stage before handing over. At completion I walk the area with the supervisor, list defects and make sure the client gets a clean, working tenancy."

2. Tell me about a time you found a problem with a shop drawing or a site measurement before you installed anything. What did you do?

Why they ask

It shows attention to detail, communication and how you prevent rework.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result. Keep the result about time saved, rework avoided or a better finish, not a dollar figure.

Example answer

"On a cafe fitout I was about to set out the server counter when I noticed the drawing showed the counter hard against a structural column that had a services riser behind it. I checked the site measurement against the plan and found the counter would have fouled the riser door. I stopped work, took photos and marked the issue on the drawing, then spoke to the site supervisor and the joinery supplier the same morning. We agreed to shift the counter run by the width of the riser access panel and added a filler panel so the finish still looked intentional. The change was approved before fabrication, so we avoided rebuilding the counter on site and kept the cafe opening on track."

3. You arrive on site and the area is not ready, another trade is in the way, and the client wants the shopfront installed today. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

It tests judgement under pressure and how you protect safety, quality and client relationships.

How to structure your answer

For a scenario question, set out your priorities in order: safety, contract and scope, then options. Explain what you would check, who you would speak to, and what you would and would not do.

Example answer

"First I check whether the area is safe and whether the shopfront can actually be installed without damaging finished work or blocking access. If another trade is still working in the opening, I speak to their leading hand and the site supervisor to find out how long they need and whether part of the installation can start. I would not force the shopfront into an unprepared opening because that risks a bad fit, broken glass or a safety issue. If the client wants it done that day, I explain what is possible, give a realistic time and offer a staged approach, for example installing the frame and hardware now and glazing once the area is clear. I confirm any change in writing through the supervisor so everyone knows the new sequence."

4. How do you make sure your work meets the National Construction Code and Australian Standards on a commercial fitout?

Why they ask

It shows you understand compliance is part of the trade, not paperwork left to someone else.

How to structure your answer

Use a structured technical answer: know the relevant codes and standards, check the drawings and specifications, follow manufacturer instructions, inspect your own work, and escalate anything unclear.

Example answer

"I start with the drawings and specification, because they tell me the required fire ratings, glazing, balustrades, fixings and finishes for that tenancy. I check the National Construction Code and the relevant Australian Standards for the elements I am installing, especially shopfront glazing, doors and hardware, and any fire-rated walls or ceilings. I follow manufacturer instructions for fixings and sealants, and I keep the approved drawing set on site so I can check a detail before I install it. If something in the plans does not match the site or the standard, I stop and ask the supervisor or building certifier rather than guess. I also inspect my own work as I go, because a defect picked up before handover is easier to fix than one found at final inspection."

5. Describe a time you had to complete a high-quality joinery or counter installation while working around a live retail or hospitality environment.

Why they ask

Shopfitters often work in trading spaces, so the interviewer wants to hear how you manage noise, dust, access and presentation.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, with a strong emphasis on the actions you took to protect the client's operation and the result for the finished installation.

Example answer

"I worked on a restaurant fitout where the venue was still trading in the front section while we built the new bar and banquette seating at the rear. I planned the dusty cutting for early morning before service and used a drop saw with dust extraction, and we sheeted off the work area with plastic and zip doors. I kept the walkway clear for staff and customers, and checked with the manager each day about delivery times and quiet periods. The bar joinery was set out and installed in sections so we could keep the finish protected until the last fix. We completed the installation without the restaurant losing a service, and the manager was happy because the front of house stayed clean and open."

6. Tell me about a time you had to work with another trade to resolve a clash or a defect on site.

Why they ask

Commercial fitouts are a team effort. This question checks whether you can solve problems without blame and keep the job moving.

How to structure your answer

STAR works well. Focus on how you identified the clash, who you involved, what you agreed and how you confirmed the fix.

Example answer

"On an office fitout, the plasterer had sheeted a wall before I installed the wall units, and the noggings were in the wrong position for the shelving brackets. I checked the shop drawings and marked the correct bracket centres, then spoke to the plasterer and the site supervisor before anyone started cutting. We agreed to open a small section of the wall, add the correct blocking and re-sheet it, with the plasterer doing the patch and me installing the units once it was set. I sent a photo and a short note to the supervisor so the change was recorded. The shelving went in square and secure, and we avoided damaging the finished wall later."