

Solutions Architect interview questions

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

What to expect

Solutions Architect interviews mix technical depth with tests of judgement and communication, since the role sits between engineering teams and executive decision-makers. Panels typically include a hiring manager, a senior architect or technical lead, and sometimes a business stakeholder who has worked with architects before.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through how you actually do the work, such as gathering requirements or producing a design, step by step.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions probing stakeholder influence, conflict handling and decision-making under real constraints.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement when business pressure and technical risk pull in different directions.
- **Technical:** Direct questions on cloud platforms, architecture frameworks and design trade-offs.
- **Risk and compliance:** Questions on how you build security, risk and regulatory requirements into a design rather than treating them as an afterthought.

Expect an opening discussion of your background and current role, followed by a block of technical and process questions, then one or two scenario or behavioural questions to test judgement and communication, and time at the end for you to ask about the technology environment and current architecture priorities.

1. Walk me through how you gather and translate business requirements into a technical design.

Why they ask

This is core to the role: architects fail when the design doesn't match what the business actually needs, so interviewers want to see a repeatable method rather than a one-off story.

How to structure your answer

Describe it as a sequence of stages: initial stakeholder engagement, requirements documentation, translating requirements into design options, and validation before build.

Example answer

"I start by meeting the executive and operational stakeholders separately, because they often describe the same problem differently. I document requirements in Confluence and map them against constraints like budget, existing infrastructure and compliance obligations. From there I sketch two or three design options in Lucidchart, with trade-offs clearly labelled, and take those back to stakeholders before committing to a final architecture. That validation step has saved me from building the wrong thing more than once."

2. Tell me about a time you had to convince stakeholders to accept a technical recommendation they were resistant to.

Why they ask

Architects need influence without direct authority over business decision-makers, so panels test whether you can hold a technical position under pushback.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result, with emphasis on how you framed the technical issue in business terms.

Example answer

"Situation: a business unit wanted to fast-track a vendor integration that bypassed our standard identity management approach. Task: I needed to get them to accept a slower, compliant path without appearing obstructive. Action: I quantified the risk in terms they cared about, cost of a potential breach and remediation timeframes, rather than technical jargon, and proposed a phased rollout that met their deadline for a pilot group while the full integration went through proper review. Result: they accepted the phased approach, and the pilot became the template for the wider rollout."

3. A business stakeholder wants to push ahead with a vendor solution that doesn't meet your organisation's security requirements, and the deadline is fixed. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under real pressure, balancing business urgency against technical and compliance risk, which comes up often in this role.

How to structure your answer

Explain your reasoning in stages: assess the actual risk, identify options short of an outright block, and describe how you'd escalate if needed.

Example answer

"First I'd get specific about what the gap actually is and how serious it is, rather than treating all non-compliance as equally urgent. If it's a manageable gap, I'd look for compensating controls or a scoped exception with a remediation date. If it's a serious risk, I'd put the trade-off in front of the risk or security function directly rather than deciding alone, and give the business stakeholder a clear picture of the exposure they're accepting if they override that advice. The deadline doesn't change the risk, it just changes who needs to sign off on accepting it."

4. How do you decide between AWS, Azure and GCP when designing a solution?

Why they ask

Cloud platform choice is a frequent technical question and shows whether you reason from workload needs rather than personal preference.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a set of decision criteria, then illustrate with a concrete example.

Example answer

"I look at what's already in the environment, since sticking with an existing platform usually beats a marginal technical advantage elsewhere. Beyond that I weigh service maturity for the specific workload, data residency requirements, and existing licensing agreements like an organisation's Microsoft enterprise agreement, which often makes Azure the practical choice even when another platform has a slightly better native service. For a recent data platform project, GCP's data tooling was technically stronger, but the organisation's existing Azure AD integration and support contracts made Azure the lower-risk overall choice."

5. How do you explain a complex architecture decision to executives who don't have a technical background?

Why they ask

Written and verbal communication to non-technical stakeholders is one of the general skills the role depends on most.

How to structure your answer

Describe your approach to simplifying without distorting, and give a specific example of a decision you've had to explain this way.

Example answer

"I lead with the business consequence, not the technical mechanism. Instead of explaining microservices architecture, I'll say a change means a payment failure in one part of the system won't take down the whole platform, and describe the cost and timeline trade-off in plain terms. I keep the detailed architecture diagrams available for anyone who wants them, but the executive summary is usually one page with a clear recommendation and the risk of not proceeding."

6. How do you factor risk and compliance requirements into a solution design rather than treating them as a final check?

Why they ask

Given the role's exposure to regulated industries like financial services and public administration, panels want to see risk built in early rather than bolted on.

How to structure your answer

Explain it as an integration point in your process: where compliance sits in the design timeline and who you involve.

Example answer

"I bring the security and compliance functions into the design review at the option stage, not after a design is finalised, because retrofitting controls into an agreed architecture is expensive and usually gets resisted. For work touching customer data I check requirements against the Australian Privacy Principles early, and in financial services contexts I map the design against relevant APRA prudential standards before presenting options to stakeholders, so risk isn't a surprise late in the process."