

Steel Fixer interview questions

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

What to expect

Steel fixing interviews sit somewhere between a conversation and a practical check. Employers want to know you can read a drawing, place steel to spec, and stay safe while doing it, so expect the conversation to move quickly past your resume and onto how you actually work.

- **Technical and plan reading:** Questions about bar bending schedules, reinforcement drawings, laps, cover and spacing. You may be handed a drawing and asked to talk through it.
- **Safety:** Working at heights, edge protection, SWMS, pre-starts and hazard reporting come up in almost every interview, because the risk on a fixing deck is real and immediate.
- **Practical or trade skills:** Some employers run a short practical assessment or ask you to describe tying, bending and cutting methods in detail.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about catching errors, working to a pour deadline, and handling conflict or pressure on site.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypotheticals based on real site problems, such as a placement issue discovered while the concrete truck is waiting.
- **Reliability and logistics:** Start times, travel between sites, outdoor work in heat and rain, and whether you will stay on the crew.

Most steel fixing interviews start with a short phone screen covering tickets, availability and travel, then move to a face-to-face on site or in the site office with a supervisor or leading hand. The second stage often includes a walk around an active deck, a look at a set of drawings, or a short practical assessment of tying and tool use. You will usually meet the crew you would work with, and offers often follow within a few days because crews need people on the next pour.

1. Walk me through how you read a bar bending schedule and set out reinforcement for a suspended slab.

Why they ask

This is the core technical skill of the job. The interviewer wants to hear a method, not a definition, and to see whether you would catch an error before the pour.

How to structure your answer

A process answer: take it in order, from receiving the schedule to the final check before pour. Name the steps you actually do and the checks you make at each one, then finish with how you confirm the steel is ready to pour.

Example answer

"First I check the schedule against the structural drawings to make sure the bar marks and revisions line up, because an old schedule is the fastest way to place the wrong steel. I mark out the grid and the bar positions on the formwork or the deck, then set the bottom mat first, working to the scheduled spacing and keeping the laps where the drawing shows them. I use bar chairs or spacers to hold cover, then tie off with tie wire at the intervals the spec calls for, working from the middle out so the mat stays square. Once the bottom mat is tied I set the top mat and the chairs between the two, then do a final check of laps, cover and spacing against the drawing before I call the leading hand over. I would rather spend twenty minutes checking than have a pour go ahead with steel sitting in the wrong spot."

2. Tell me about a time you picked up a placement error before a pour.

Why they ask

Employers want someone who checks their own work and speaks up. This question tests both attention to detail and whether you are prepared to raise a problem under time pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR, kept tight. Set the scene briefly, describe what you noticed and how, explain what you did and who you told, then give the outcome, including what it saved or how the crew responded.

Example answer

"We were on a commercial job tying column cages for a level that was due to pour the next morning. I was working through a set of cages and noticed one had its starter bars sitting further in than the others, so the cover on one face was going to be short. I stopped, checked it against the drawing and confirmed it was wrong, then told the leading hand straight away rather than trying to fix it quietly. We pulled that cage apart, repositioned the starters and re-tied it that afternoon. It cost us a couple of hours instead of a strip-out after the pour, and the supervisor started asking me to check cages before handover after that. It taught me that raising it early is always cheaper than hoping nobody notices."

3. You arrive on a deck and notice the top mat spacing is out on part of the slab. The concrete truck is already on site and the pour is scheduled to start. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a judgement under pressure question. It tests whether you default to safety and structural integrity or to keeping the program moving.

How to structure your answer

A judgement-under-pressure answer: state your immediate priority, then the order of actions, then how you communicate. Do not jump straight to a solution before you have stopped the risk.

Example answer

"My first move is to make sure nobody starts placing concrete over that section, so I would tell the pump operator and the leading hand to hold off while I check it. Then I would look at how far out the spacing actually is and over what area, because there is a difference between one bar nudged out of line and a whole bay placed wrong. I would raise it with the supervisor and the engineer if they are on site, show them the drawing and the section, and let them make the call on whether it can be corrected in place or whether that bay has to be re-tied. If it can be fixed, I would get two of us on it straight away while the truck waits, and I would keep the supervisor updated so they can manage the delivery timing. Either way the pour does not go over steel that does not meet the drawing."

4. What do you check before you start fixing on a new level or a new work area?

Why they ask

Safety questions come up in every steel fixing interview. The interviewer is checking whether you have a routine or whether you rely on someone else to spot the hazards.

How to structure your answer

A checklist answer in priority order. Start with access and edge protection, then the immediate work area, then your tools and the task itself, and finish with who you report to.

Example answer

"I start with how I get there and how I am protected once I am there, so I look at the access, the edge protection and the tie-off points before I carry anything onto the deck. Then I check the deck itself for gaps, penetrations and anything not covered off, and I look at what is happening above and below me, because dropped tools and other trades working overhead are a real risk. I check the SWMS and the pre-start for the day so I know what has changed, then I look at my own gear, the grinder leads, the cutter and the tying tools, to make sure they are in good condition and tagged if they need to be. If I see something I am not comfortable with, I raise it with the leading hand before starting rather than

working around it.”

5. How do you tie a column cage so the laps and cover meet specification?

Why they ask

This probes your hands-on method and whether you understand why laps and cover matter structurally, not just that they are on the drawing.

How to structure your answer

Describe your method step by step, then explain how you verify it. Finish with what you do if the cage does not match the drawing once it is standing.

Example answer

“I build the cage on the ground where I can, laying out the verticals at the scheduled spacing and fixing the starter bars so the laps sit where the drawing shows them, then tying the ties at the spacing in the schedule. I work from the bottom up so the cage stays straight and I am not fighting it, and I keep the cover spacers or chairs in place as I go rather than trying to push them in afterwards. Once the cage is stood and braced, I check the cover on all four faces and the lap lengths against the drawing, because a cage can look right from one side and be short on the other. If something does not match, I fix it before the formwork goes on, because once it is boxed up you have lost the chance to correct it cheaply.”

6. This work is outdoors, often at heights, and you will move between sites. How do you manage that side of the job?

Why they ask

Employers on fixing crews care about whether you will turn up, travel and stay. This question is about reliability and honest self-assessment, not a trick.

How to structure your answer

An honest fit answer: acknowledge the reality of the conditions, give evidence from your own experience, then state your practical arrangements. Avoid overpromising.

Example answer

“I know what the job is. I have worked through summer on an open deck and through a wet winter on a civil site, and I would rather be outside than in a shed, so the conditions are not something I need to be talked into. With travel, I check the site location and the start time before I accept a job so I know my run in and I am not turning up late on the first week. I keep my own gear ready the night before and I get to site early enough to sign in, get through the induction and be on the deck when the crew starts. If a site is a long way out and the crew is doing six days, I want to know that up front and commit to it properly rather than agreeing and then dropping off after a month.”