Stock and Station Agent interview questions

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What to expect

Stock and station agent interviews test your rural knowledge, your calm under pressure on sale day, and your ability to build trust with farmers and buyers. Expect a mix of practical scenarios, client conversations and process questions.

- **Process:** How you run a sale from listing and assessment through to auction, payment and record keeping.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of negotiation, difficult vendors, buyer disputes, or a sale that did not go to plan.
- **Scenario:** Market downturn, buyer withdrawal, animal welfare incident, or a client who wants to hold stock against your advice.
- **Technical:** Assessing livestock condition, wool quality, grain specifications, NLIS compliance and saleyard systems.
- **Client-facing:** Advisory conversations about price expectations, seasonal finance and property transactions.
- **Safety:** Yards, livestock handling, WHS and keeping people safe around cattle, sheep and machinery.

Typically a first interview with a branch manager or senior agent, covering your background and a walk-through of a recent sale. You may then meet the wider team or complete a practical session at a saleyard or on a property, where you assess stock and talk through a sale plan. Final conversations often focus on client relationships and how you handle a tough market.

1. Walk me through how you manage a livestock sale from the moment a vendor lists stock to the day payment is settled.

Why they ask

This tests your operational knowledge, attention to detail and understanding of the full sale cycle, not just auction day.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step walk-through: listing, assessment, reserve setting, saleyard or online preparation, auction, buyer follow-up, vendor payment and record keeping. Name the systems you use at each stage.

Example answer

“When a vendor lists stock, I visit the property or meet them at the yards to assess the cattle or sheep, check NLIS tags and PIC details, and talk through their price expectations and timing. I estimate market value using recent sales, AuctionsPlus results and buyer feedback, then agree a reserve. Before sale day I draft the lots, arrange transport and update the vendor on likely buyer interest. On the day I manage penning and weighing, brief the auctioneer, and stay close to the bidding so I can step in if a pen stalls. After the fall of hammer I confirm the buyer, issue the invoice and enter the sale into Xero and Excel. I follow up on any weight or condition queries within 24 hours, then reconcile vendor payments and send a written summary so they know exactly what sold and when funds will clear.”

2. Tell me about a time you had to negotiate a sale when the market was against you.

Why they ask

Negotiation is the core of the role, and this question reveals how you handle pressure, protect the vendor's interests and keep buyers engaged.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Keep the situation brief, focus on the actions you took to create competition, and end with the outcome for the vendor.

Example answer

“Last autumn I had a line of steers to sell on a day when the market softened and buyers were cautious. The vendor needed to move them to make room for a new mob, so holding over was not an option. I called three regular buyers the night before, sent them weights and photos, and asked them to inspect the cattle early. On sale day I opened the bidding confidently, kept the auctioneer informed of the reserve, and when bidding stalled I encouraged a buyer who had shown interest in a similar pen to go one more bid. The steers sold just above reserve, and the vendor was able to take delivery of his new mob on time. He has listed with me every season since.”

3. A buyer disputes the weight or condition of a pen after the fall of hammer. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a judgement-under-pressure question. It tests whether you can stay calm, follow saleyard rules and protect both the buyer relationship and the vendor's outcome.

How to structure your answer

Pause, gather facts, check the rules, communicate clearly with both sides, resolve or escalate, then record what happened. Show that you separate the commercial decision from the emotion of the moment.

Example answer

“First I would take the buyer aside and ask them to show me exactly what they are seeing. I would check the sale records, the pen card and any weight dockets, and confirm whether the dispute relates to a condition issue or a weighing discrepancy. If the rules allow a reweigh or a review, I would organise that immediately and keep the vendor informed. If the sale stands, I would explain why clearly and calmly, and offer to work with the buyer on their next purchase so the relationship stays intact. Either way I would log the incident, note the outcome and brief the branch manager that afternoon. The priority is a fair result for the vendor and a buyer who trusts the process next time.”

4. How do you assess the market value of a pen of mixed-age ewes?

Why they ask

This tests your technical judgement and your ability to justify a recommendation to a vendor who may have a different figure in mind.

How to structure your answer

Explain the factors you consider, assess the current market using real sources, then apply that to a recommendation. Finish with how you would present the figure to the vendor.

Example answer

“I start with the fundamentals: age, condition, wool cut, pregnancy status if known, and any health or feet issues. I check recent saleyard results for similar lines, look at AuctionsPlus listings and clearance rates, and ring two or three buyers who are active in that category. I also factor in the season, feed availability and how many ewes are coming onto the market that week. From there I build a value range and pick a reserve that gives the vendor a realistic chance of a sale while protecting their downside. When I sit down with the vendor I show them the comparable sales and explain why the range is where it is. If they want to aim higher I will list at their figure but I make sure they understand the risk of a passed-in pen.”

5. A long-term client wants to hold stock for a better price, but the season is turning dry. How do you advise them?

Why they ask

This is a client-facing question that tests your advisory skills, your ability to balance empathy with commercial reality and your understanding of seasonal finance.

How to structure your answer

Listen first, acknowledge their position, present options with clear trade-offs, then confirm the decision and put a plan in writing.

> **Example answer**
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> *"I would start by asking about their feed budget, water situation and cash flow needs. If the season is drying off, holding stock might cost more in supplementary feed than the price improvement they are hoping for. I would lay out three options: sell now at the current market, hold for a set number of weeks with a clear trigger point to sell, or sell a portion now and hold the rest. For each option I would show the feed cost, the risk of a further market drop and the impact on cash flow. I would also mention any seasonal finance options they could discuss with their bank. Then I would ask what they want to do and write a short plan with dates and trigger prices. If they decide to hold, I would book a follow-up call in a fortnight so the decision stays on track."*

6. What safety checks do you complete before moving cattle through the yards?

Why they ask

Safety is non-negotiable in livestock work. This question shows whether you identify hazards early and lead by example around animals and machinery.

How to structure your answer

Describe hazard identification, the controls you put in place, how you communicate with the team and how you review the job. Keep it practical and specific to cattle yards.

> **Example answer**
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> *"Before any mob goes through the yards I walk the race and crush to check for broken rails, sharp edges, slippery concrete and anything that could spook cattle. I make sure the gates swing properly and latch securely. I check that everyone on the team is wearing the right gear, knows their position and has an escape route if an animal turns. If we are using a crush or head bail I test it before the first beast goes in. I also check the weather and the temperament of the mob, because both change how we handle them. During the job I keep talking to the team so no one gets caught behind an animal. Afterwards we do a quick debrief, note anything that needs fixing and report it the same day."*