

Stone Machine Operator interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for stone machine operator roles are practical and safety-focused. Employers want to see that you can set up and run the machines accurately, handle heavy slabs without damage or injury, and work cleanly around silica dust.

- **Process and setup:** Walk-throughs of how you prepare a machine, load a slab and run a cut to specification.
- **Technical and drawing-based:** Questions on reading plans, nesting jobs in Slabsmith or AlphaCAM and checking dimensions.
- **Safety and compliance:** Dust control, slab handling, machine guarding and WHS procedures.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of quality saves, mistakes, teamwork and working under pressure.
- **Scenario and problem solving:** What you would do when a slab, machine or deadline goes wrong.

Typically a short phone screen, then a workshop interview with the supervisor or leading hand, often followed by a practical test on the saw or a walk-through where you explain setup and safety steps. Some employers ask you to complete a safety and silica awareness questionnaire before the face-to-face.

1. Walk me through how you set up a bridge saw for a benchtop job, from the job sheet to the first cut.

Why they ask

The employer wants to know your setup process is repeatable, accurate and safe, not improvised each time.

How to structure your answer

A process question, so answer as a sequence: review the job sheet and drawing, check slab condition, set the machine origin and blade, confirm dimensions, then make the first cut and verify. Name the checks you do at each stage.

Example answer

"I start by reading the job sheet and the technical drawing together, checking overhangs, sink and cooktop cut-outs, and the edge profile. I measure the slab and mark the grain or vein direction so the finished tops match the customer's selection. Then I set the machine origin, check the blade is the right type and in good condition, and confirm the cut list against the drawing. I load the slab with the vacuum lifter or crane, clamp it, and dry-run the program with the blade clear. For the first cut I take a shallow pass and measure it before continuing, so any offset shows up before I commit the slab."

2. How do you read a technical drawing and turn it into a cutting plan in Slabsmith or AlphaCAM?

Why they ask

This tests whether you can bridge the office drawing and the machine without losing dimensions or wasting stone.

How to structure your answer

Explain your method: identify critical dimensions, set datums, nest parts, account for blade width, check grain and overhangs, then verify the plan against the drawing before you cut.

Example answer

"I look at the drawing for the critical dimensions first: overall length and depth, sink and cooktop positions, and any radius or edge profile. I set a datum corner and work from that so the cut-outs and edges stay consistent. In Slabsmith I nest the parts on the slab, allowing for blade width and the finished edge, and I place the veins where they will read best on the benchtop. I check the nested plan against the drawing, then print or save it and confirm the machine origin matches. If anything does not add up, I go back to the detailer before cutting."

3. What steps do you take to control silica dust when cutting engineered stone?

Why they ask

Silica is the main health risk in this trade, so employers listen closely to how you answer and whether your habits match your words.

How to structure your answer

Use the hierarchy of control: elimination or substitution, engineering controls like wet cutting and extraction, then administrative controls and PPE. Mention health monitoring and housekeeping.

Example answer

"I treat engineered stone as a high-silica material every time. I use wet cutting or on-tool extraction as the first line, check the water flow and extraction before I start, and keep the area behind the saw clean so dust does not build up. I wear a fitted P2 respirator, safety glasses and hearing protection, and I never dry sweep or use compressed air to clean down. I follow the workshop's health monitoring and fit-testing schedule, and I report any breakdown in extraction straight away so no one cuts without it."

4. Tell me about a time you picked up a mistake or a slab fault before it became a costly problem.

Why they ask

Past behaviour is the best predictor of whether you will speak up early or let a problem reach the customer.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the situation and the job, the task you were responsible for, the action you took when you spotted the issue, and the result for the job and the team.

Example answer

"We had a run of benchtops for an apartment project and I was setting up the CNC for the first sink cut-out. I noticed a hairline crack near the edge of the slab as I positioned it. I stopped the setup, tagged the slab and told the leading hand. We checked the rest of the delivery and found two more slabs with similar marks from transport. We set those aside for smaller jobs and used the good slabs for the main run, which kept the install date and avoided cutting a cracked slab into finished tops. The supervisor asked me to check incoming slabs before loading after that, and I still do."

5. A slab is loaded and you notice a hairline crack near the sink cut-out. The job is due for install tomorrow. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a judgement question about pressure, honesty and protecting the customer from a failed benchtop.

How to structure your answer

A scenario answer: stop work, assess the fault, escalate, propose options, protect the schedule and the customer. Do not guess or hide it.

Example answer

"I stop the job and do not cut into the crack. I assess how far the crack runs and whether it affects the sink cut-out or the finished edge. I tell the supervisor or leading hand straight away and take a photo for the record. Then I check whether we have another slab of the same batch in stock, or whether a smaller part of the job can come out of the cracked slab safely. If we need a replacement, I flag it to the office so they can contact the supplier and the customer early. I would rather delay one cut than send a top that fails on site."

6. How do you make sure polished edges and finishes meet specification before a job leaves the workshop?

Why they ask

Finish quality is what the customer sees, so the employer wants a method, not just a promise to do your best.

How to structure your answer

A method question: describe your checks, the order you do them, samples and sign-off.

Example answer

"I check the finish against the approved sample first, because the customer has already signed off on that edge profile and sheen. I run the polisher through the sequence of grits, keeping the machine moving and checking the edge for flatness and any swirl marks as I go. Once the top is finished I clean it down, inspect it under good light and check the dimensions and cut-outs against the job sheet. If anything is out, I fix it before it goes on the truck, and I sign the job off with the leading hand so the installers know it is ready."