

Surfing Instructor interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for surfing instructor roles usually mix a relaxed conversation with practical checks. Employers want to see that you can read the ocean, keep people safe, and teach with patience.

- **Safety and risk assessment:** Questions about how you read conditions, choose locations and manage hazards before and during a lesson.
- **Scenario-based emergency response:** Hypothetical situations like a rip current, a panicked student or a minor injury, testing your judgement under pressure.
- **Teaching and instruction:** How you break down skills, adapt for different levels and give feedback that helps learners improve.
- **Behavioural and teamwork:** Past examples of working with nervous students, supporting colleagues and handling busy periods.
- **Motivation and fit:** Why you want to work at this particular surf school and how you align with its values or programs.

You might start with a phone or in-person chat about your experience, then a practical session where you demonstrate a lesson or paddle out with the team. Some employers ask you to run a short mock lesson with other staff. The formal interview often follows, covering safety, teaching style and availability.

1. Walk me through how you assess surf conditions before a lesson.

Why they ask

This is a core safety and decision-making question. Employers want to know you have a consistent process, not just a gut feel.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step walk-through: what you check, in what order, and how you decide whether to run, move or cancel a lesson.

Example answer

"First I check Surfline and the local swell forecast the night before, then I arrive early and watch the break for at least ten minutes. I look at wave height, period, direction, tide, wind and the number of other surfers. I identify rips and any hazards like rocks or stingers. If the flags are up, I stay between them. I pick a bank that suits the group's level and set clear boundaries. If conditions are too big or the wind is onshore and messy, I move to a sheltered beach or run a land-based session instead."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a nervous or struggling student in the water.

Why they ask

This probes empathy, patience and your ability to adapt under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"A teenage girl joined a group lesson but was terrified of putting her face in the water. I took her to the shallows, away from the group, and we practised blowing bubbles and floating while holding my hand. I broke the lesson into tiny steps and gave lots of encouragement. By the end of the session, she was paddling on her own and catching whitewater waves with a push. She booked another lesson the

following week. The key was not rushing her and celebrating every small win."

3. A student panics in a rip current. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a scenario question. Employers need to know you can stay calm and follow a safe rescue sequence.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: prioritise, act, communicate, then review.

Example answer

"I would stay calm and keep my voice low and steady. I would signal the student to stop swimming against the rip and instead lie on their board and paddle parallel to the beach until they are out of the current. If they are too panicked, I would paddle out on my rescue board, secure them, and bring them in. I would alert other students to stay on the beach and call for help if needed. Afterward, I would check the student is okay and review what happened with the team."

4. How do you adapt your teaching for different skill levels in the same group?

Why they ask

Surf schools often mix beginners and improvers. This tests your ability to differentiate and keep everyone challenged and safe.

How to structure your answer

Explain your approach: assess, group, adjust, and use peer support.

Example answer

"I start by watching everyone paddle and catch a few waves. Then I split the group into two or three smaller sets, each with a different focus. Beginners work on popping up on the beach and riding whitewater. Intermediates practise turning and paddling out through the break. I rotate between groups, giving specific feedback. I also pair stronger surfers with weaker ones for safety and encouragement. If someone is struggling, I scale back the task until they succeed."

5. What's your routine for checking and maintaining surfboards and safety gear?

Why they ask

Equipment checks are a daily task. This shows you take responsibility for gear that keeps people safe.

How to structure your answer

A process answer: daily checks, reporting, storage, and repair.

Example answer

"Before every session, I check each board for dings, cracks and loose fins. I inspect leggings for wear and make sure rescue boards are inflated and ready. I check the first aid kit for missing items and replace anything used. If I find damage, I tag the board and report it to the head instructor so it can be repaired or retired. After the session, I rinse and store gear properly. I keep a simple log so nothing gets missed."

6. Why do you want to work as a surfing instructor at [Company Name]?

Why they ask

This is a motivation and fit question. Employers want to know you've thought about their school specifically, not just any surf school.

How to structure your answer

Show you've researched: mention a program, value or reputation, then link to your own goals.

Example answer

"I've been following [Company Name] for a while and I really like that you run women's only surf sessions and focus on small group sizes. I want to work somewhere that takes safety and teaching quality seriously, and where I can keep learning from experienced coaches. I also enjoy helping people who are nervous about the ocean, so your beginner programs appeal to me. I'm looking for a team that feels like a community, and that's the impression I get from your school."