

Tailor interview questions

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What to expect

Tailor interviews blend a conversation about customer service with a practical look at your hands. Employers want to see how you measure, cut, sew and finish, and how you explain a fitting to someone who is not a sewer.

- **Practical trade test:** You may be asked to hem a garment, replace a zip or complete a small alteration on the spot, using the workshop's machines and pressing equipment.
- **Process questions:** Questions that ask you to walk through measuring, pattern adjustment or a fitting step by step.
- **Behavioural questions:** Questions about past clients, difficult fits, deadlines and complaints, answered with real examples.
- **Scenario questions:** Questions that put you in a rushed or awkward situation, such as a last-minute wedding alteration or a garment that cannot be saved.
- **Client-facing and communication questions:** Questions about explaining fit, managing expectations and handling a client who disagrees with your assessment.
- **Safety and workshop questions:** Questions about machine safety, needle changes, iron use and keeping a clean work area.

A typical hiring process starts with a short phone or in-person conversation about your experience, then moves to a practical test or paid trial in the workshop. Some retail alteration employers ask you to complete a timed alteration, such as a trouser hem or sleeve shortening, while bespoke and made-to-measure workshops may ask you to bring a portfolio or samples. You will usually meet the workshop supervisor or owner, and the final conversation covers hours, pay and how work is allocated.

1. Walk me through how you take measurements for a made-to-measure garment and how you record them.

Why they ask

This is a process question. The employer wants to know that your measuring is repeatable and that you capture enough detail to avoid a second fitting.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walkthrough: what you ask the client, which measurements you take, how you note posture and preference, and how you check your notes before cutting.

Example answer

"I start by asking what the garment is for and how the client likes to wear it, because a jacket for daily work sits differently from one for a wedding. I take measurements over the clothes they plan to wear underneath, working from the natural shoulder line and keeping the tape snug but not tight. I record chest, waist, hip, shoulder width, sleeve length, back length and any asymmetry, such as one shoulder sitting lower. I also note posture, whether they stand with weight on one leg, and any preference for a closer or looser fit. Before cutting, I read the notes back to the client and confirm the key numbers, then transfer them to the pattern with a bit of extra allowance for the first fitting."

2. Tell me about a time you had to alter a garment for a client with a fit challenge, such as a significant height difference or a garment that had already been altered elsewhere.

Why they ask

This is a behavioural question. The employer wants to see your problem solving and technical judgement when the straightforward fix is not available.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: the situation, what you had to achieve, the action you took, and the result for the client.

Example answer

"A client brought in a wool coat she had bought online. The sleeves were too long, the shoulders were too wide, and a previous tailor had already taken in the side seams, so there was not much fabric left to work with. I unpicked the previous alterations to see what I had, then recut the shoulder line and reset the sleeves rather than just shortening them from the cuff. I let out the side seams as far as the seam allowance allowed and used a facing to cover the area where the old stitching had marked the fabric. She collected it before a trip to Melbourne and came back the next month to say it was the first coat she had owned that did not pull across the back when she drove. That taught me to check what previous alterations have done before I plan my own."

3. A client brings in a suit two days before a wedding and wants the trousers taken in and the jacket sleeves shortened. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a scenario question. The employer wants to see how you judge what is possible under time pressure and how you communicate that to a client who is stressed.

How to structure your answer

Assess the garment and timeline first, then explain what is possible and what is not, then prioritise the work and confirm the collection time.

Example answer

"I would ask them to put the suit on so I can see the fit and check the fabric and construction. Trousers taken in at the waist and jacket sleeves shortened are both realistic in two days if the jacket has a working cuff or enough seam allowance. I would tell them exactly what I can do and what I cannot guarantee, such as matching a complex pattern across a shortened sleeve. I would book the work in immediately, mark the pins, and tell them to collect it the day before the wedding so there is still time for a final press. If the jacket had surgeon's cuffs or the fabric was fragile, I would say so upfront and offer to take in the body instead, rather than promise something that might not hold."

4. What experience do you have with industrial sewing machines, overlockers and pressing equipment, and how do you keep them running safely?

Why they ask

This is a technical and safety question. The employer wants to know you can use the workshop equipment without damaging it or injuring yourself.

How to structure your answer

Name the machines you have used, then talk about setup, daily checks and the safety habits you follow.

Example answer

"I have used industrial lockstitch machines, overlockers and both steam irons and a professional pressing table. On a lockstitch I check the needle is the right size for the fabric, set the tension on a scrap piece first, and change the needle if it has been in for a long run or hits a pin. On the overlocker I thread it in the correct order, test on a remnant, and keep the knife sharp. For pressing I use a cloth between the iron and delicate fabrics, keep the iron on its stand when not in use, and never leave it resting on the garment. I clean lint from the machine bed at the end of each session and report any electrical fault rather than trying to fix it myself."

5. How do you handle a client who is not happy with the fit after you have completed an alteration?

Why they ask

This is a client-facing question. The employer wants to see calm listening, a practical resolution and a professional manner in front of other customers.

How to structure your answer

Listen first, look at the garment on the client, then explain what you see and agree on a fix.

Example answer

"I ask them to put the garment on again and I listen without interrupting. Often the issue is something they could not describe over the phone, such as a collar sitting away from the neck or a hem that feels tight when they sit down. I look at the fit from the front, side and back, and I explain what I can adjust and what would happen if I changed it. If it is a genuine fault in my work, I fix it at no charge and thank them for coming back. If it is a matter of preference, I offer a quote and a time frame. Either way I do not argue about it in front of other customers."

6. Tell me about a time you had to manage a high volume of alteration work with tight deadlines.

Why they ask

This is a behavioural question about time and deadline management. The employer wants to know you can prioritise and communicate when the rack is full.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, with a focus on how you sorted the work, kept quality up and communicated with clients.

Example answer

"In the weeks before Christmas, the alteration shop I worked in had a rack of garments waiting and more coming in each day. I started by checking every docket for the collection date and pulling out anything needed that day. I grouped similar jobs together, such as hems on one machine and zips on another, so I was not changing setup for every garment. I told the front counter staff which jobs were at risk so they could call clients early, and I stayed back two evenings to clear the oldest work. By the last week before Christmas the rack was down to same-day jobs and no client was left without their garment for an event."