

Train Driver interview questions

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What to expect

Train driver interviews with Australian rail operators mix competency-based questions about safety procedure with scenario questions that test judgement under pressure. Panels usually include an operations manager or driver trainer, and technical knowledge of signalling and emergency procedure is checked alongside behavioural evidence from past roles.

- **Safety and compliance:** Questions on inspection routines, fatigue management and adherence to Rail Safety National Law and operator procedures.
- **Technical/process:** Questions checking understanding of signalling, braking systems and how to read track and control information correctly.
- **Behavioural (STAR):** Questions asking for real past examples of fault detection, delay management or teamwork with rail traffic control.
- **Scenario/judgement under pressure:** Hypothetical situations testing decision-making when systems fail, communication drops out or an emergency occurs mid-route.
- **Communication and teamwork:** Questions on working with control centres, guards and other crew, and raising safety concerns appropriately.

Most rail operators run an initial phone or online screen covering availability and basic eligibility, followed by a panel interview combining behavioural and technical questions. Shortlisted candidates then go through medical assessment, drug and alcohol screening, and often a simulator or practical driving assessment before a final offer, reflecting the safety-critical nature of the role.

1. Talk me through the checks you would complete during a pre-journey inspection.

Why they ask

This tests whether you understand the practical safety routine that underpins every shift, not just the theory.

How to structure your answer

Walk through the process in the order you would actually perform it: locomotive exterior, brake systems, controls, documentation, then sign-off.

Example answer

"I start with a walk-around of the locomotive checking for visible damage or fluid leaks, then move to the brake system and confirm air pressure and response are within range. I check controls, lights and radio communication equipment are functioning, then review the logbook from the previous shift for any noted faults. Once I'm satisfied everything is in order I record the inspection and confirm readiness with control before departure."

2. How do you interpret a signal that unexpectedly changes to caution while you're approaching a curve?

Why they ask

Checks technical understanding of signalling and whether you apply the correct response rather than guessing.

How to structure your answer

Explain the technical reasoning first, then the judgement call: what the signal means, what action it requires, and how you'd confirm with control if unsure.

Example answer

"A caution signal means I need to be prepared to stop at the next signal, so I'd immediately start reducing speed in line with braking distance for the curve and track conditions. I'd also call rail traffic control to confirm the reason for the change, whether it's a track condition, a following train, or a signal fault, and adjust my approach based on what they tell me rather than assuming."

3. Tell me about a time you identified a mechanical fault before it became a bigger problem.

Why they ask

Looks for evidence of the attention to detail that prevents service disruption and safety incidents.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"During a pre-journey inspection I noticed a slight irregularity in brake pressure readings that wasn't quite matching the usual pattern. My task was to decide whether it was safe to proceed. I flagged it to maintenance staff rather than assuming it was within tolerance, and they found a minor fault in the braking line that needed adjustment. The result was the issue got fixed before departure instead of surfacing mid-route."

4. You're mid-route and lose radio contact with rail traffic control. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure and knowledge of fallback safety procedure when normal communication fails.

How to structure your answer

Describe the immediate priority, the procedure you'd follow, and how you'd re-establish communication and safety margins.

Example answer

"My first priority is to maintain safe train operation, so I'd continue running to the last instructions received and reduce speed if there's any doubt about track conditions ahead. I'd try alternative contact methods, including any backup radio channel or mobile contact listed in procedure, and follow the operator's lost-communication protocol, which usually means proceeding cautiously to the next signal or station where contact can be restored."

5. Describe a situation where you had to manage a delay and keep passengers or cargo informed.

Why they ask

Checks communication skills and composure when things don't go to plan.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"There was a signal fault ahead that held my train for longer than expected. My task was to keep passengers informed and manage their expectations without knowing the exact restart time. I made regular announcements explaining what was happening and stayed in contact with control for updates, passing on accurate information as soon as I had it. Passengers stayed calm and the service resumed once the fault was cleared, with no complaints raised about how it was handled."

6. How would you handle a fellow crew member not following correct safety procedure?

Why they ask

Rail safety culture depends on drivers raising concerns rather than letting shortcuts slide.

How to structure your answer

Outline how you'd address it directly but professionally, then escalate if needed.

Example answer

"I'd raise it with them directly and specifically, explaining what I'd observed and why it matters for safety, since sometimes people don't realise they've slipped into a shortcut. If it continued or was serious enough to risk safety, I'd report it to a supervisor or safety officer rather than let it go, because the consequences of not following procedure on the rail network are too significant to ignore."