

Tree Faller interview questions

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What to expect

Tree faller interviews focus on safety, judgement and practical skills. Employers want to know you can read a tree, plan a fall and stay calm when conditions change. You may be asked to walk through a felling scenario or complete a practical assessment on site.

- **Process:** Questions about how you assess a tree, plan a cut and clear an escape route.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experiences with hazards, close calls or changing conditions.
- **Scenario:** Questions that put you in a tricky felling situation and ask what you would do.
- **Technical:** Questions about chainsaw maintenance, wedge and winch use, and cut selection.
- **Safety:** Questions about fatigue management, communication and working alone.

Typically a phone screen with a supervisor, followed by an on-site interview and a practical felling assessment. Some employers will ask you to demonstrate hazard identification and chainsaw handling before a formal offer.

1. Walk me through how you assess a tree before you start cutting.

Why they ask

They want to see a systematic approach to hazard identification and fall planning.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step sequence: species and lean, dead limbs and defects, surrounding hazards, escape route, then cut plan.

Example answer

"First I look at the tree from a distance to check its lean, any defects like cracks or fungal growth, and dead limbs that might drop. Then I check the surroundings for other trees, machinery, fences or powerlines, and I plan at least two escape routes at about 45 degrees from the fall line. I clear those routes of debris. Next I look at wind direction and speed, and decide which way the tree wants to go. If it's a heavy lean I'll consider using wedges or a winch to guide it. Only then do I start my saw and make the scarf cut."

2. Tell me about a time you abandoned a fell because conditions changed. What did you do?

Why they ask

They want to know you can make the call to stop when it's not safe, rather than pushing on.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"I was felling a large spotted gum in a native forest block. I had assessed the lean and set my escape route, but just as I started the back cut the wind picked up from a different direction and I noticed a dead branch shift overhead. I stopped the saw immediately, left the tree and retreated along my escape route. I radioed the crew to hold off and waited about ten minutes for the wind to settle. I then re-assessed the tree and decided it was still unsafe because the lean was now unpredictable. I marked it for a different approach the next day with a winch. The result was no one was hurt and we avoided a potential barber chair or a fall toward the crew."

3. You're felling a tree with a heavy lean toward a fence line. What's your plan?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and your ability to protect assets without taking unnecessary risks.

How to structure your answer

Assess the situation, consider options, choose the safest one, and explain why.

Example answer

"I would first check how much lean we're talking about and whether the tree has any defects. If the lean is heavy and the fence is close, I'd look at using a winch to pull the tree away from the fence. I'd set the winch line high in the tree and anchor it well back. I'd also clear an escape route to the side. If a winch isn't available, I might use wedges to encourage the fall in a different direction, but only if the lean allows it. If neither is safe, I'd walk away and find another way, like section felling from the top down or bringing in a machine. The fence can be repaired, but a person can't."

4. How do you maintain your chainsaw in the field to keep it running safely?

Why they ask

They need to know you can keep equipment reliable and safe in remote conditions.

How to structure your answer

Walk through a practical routine, covering daily checks, sharpening, fuel, and basic repairs.

Example answer

"At the start of each shift I check the chain tension, air filter, spark plug and fuel levels. I sharpen the chain every time I refuel, and I make sure the depth gauges are correct. In the field I carry a spare chain and a sharpening kit. If the saw starts to cut poorly I stop and sharpen immediately rather than forcing it. I also check the bar for burrs and rotate it regularly. For bigger issues I have basic tools to replace a pull cord or clean the carburettor, but if it's something major I tag it out and radio for a replacement saw."

5. How do you manage fatigue and communication when working alone or in a remote crew?

Why they ask

Felling is high-risk and often isolated, so they want to see that you take fatigue and check-ins seriously.

How to structure your answer

Describe your personal systems, radio protocol, and how you adjust your work.

Example answer

"I plan my day so I'm not felling when I'm most tired, usually early morning or late afternoon. I take regular breaks and stay hydrated. I always carry a two-way radio and do scheduled check-ins with the crew, even if it's just a quick call every hour. If I'm working alone I let someone know my location and expected finish time. I also watch my own signs of fatigue, like losing focus or making small mistakes, and if that happens I stop and take a break or switch to easier tasks like limbing. Communication is key: before I start a fell I radio the crew to let them know where I am and which way the tree is going."

6. Describe a time you had to guide a fall direction using wedges or a winch. What was the outcome?

Why they ask

They want to see you can control the fall in tight situations.

How to structure your answer

STAR, focusing on the technique and result.

Example answer

"I was felling a stringybark in a regrowth forest that had a slight lean toward a stand of young saplings we wanted to keep. I used two wedges and a forestry winch to pull the tree away from the saplings. I set the winch line about two-thirds up the tree and anchored it to a sturdy stump behind. I made my scarf cut facing the intended fall direction, then started the back cut and drove the wedges in as I went. Once the tree started to go, the winch operator kept tension and the tree fell cleanly in the intended direction. The saplings were untouched and the tree landed in a clear area. It took a bit longer than a straight fell, but it saved the regrowth and showed the landowner we could work carefully."