

# Wood Turner interview questions

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## What to expect

Wood Turner interviews focus on your practical lathe skills, safety awareness and ability to work to drawings or samples. Employers often include a workshop-based test alongside a conversation with a supervisor.

- **Technical:** Questions about lathe setup, tool sharpening, timber selection and turning techniques for spindles, bowls and decorative work.
- **Safety:** Questions about WHS, machine guarding, dust extraction and safe use of gouges, chisels and the lathe.
- **Process:** Questions about reading plans, measuring with calipers, maintaining tolerances and workflow from blank to finished piece.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about attention to detail, problem solving, teamwork and working with furniture makers or joiners.
- **Scenario:** Questions about handling defects, tight deadlines or unexpected timber faults during a production run.
- **Practical test:** A hands-on task, such as turning a simple spindle or bowl, observed by the interviewer.

Typically a phone or video screen first, then an in-person interview at the workshop. You may be asked to complete a short practical turning task while the supervisor watches. The conversation then covers your experience, safety habits and ability to work to drawings or samples.

## 1. Walk me through how you prepare a timber blank and set up a lathe for turning a set of spindles.

### Why they ask

This tests your technical process, timber knowledge and safety habits from the very start of a job.

### How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step walk-through: inspect timber, cut blank to size, mount between centres, set tool rest and speed, rough down, then turn to profile. Mention checking grain direction and sharpening tools before starting.

### Example answer

*"First I check the timber for cracks, knots or awkward grain. I cut the blank slightly oversize on the bandsaw, then mount it between centres or in a chuck. I set the tool rest close to the work and adjust the lathe speed to suit the diameter. I rough down with a gouge, then switch to a skew or spindle gouge for the final profile. I check the diameter with calipers as I go and sharpen tools before each spindle to keep the cut clean. I also make sure the dust extraction is on and I am wearing safety glasses and a face shield."*

## 2. Tell me about a time you had to produce a turned component to a very tight tolerance or match an existing profile.

### Why they ask

This behavioural question probes your attention to detail and ability to work from samples or drawings.

### How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the Situation, the Task, the Action you took, and the Result. Focus on measuring, comparing and refining.

#### Example answer

*"We had a heritage restoration job where the client needed new stair spindles to match an original from the 1890s. The profile had several beads and coves that were slightly worn. I took careful measurements with calipers and made a template from the original. I turned a test piece first, compared it side by side, then adjusted my tool angles until it matched. Once approved, I turned twelve spindles in a batch, checking each one against the template. The joiner said they fitted without any sanding or adjustment on site, which saved time on the install."*

### 3. You notice a finished bowl has a small crack that wasn't visible before sanding. What do you do?

#### Why they ask

This scenario tests your judgement under pressure, quality control and honesty about defects.

#### How to structure your answer

Stop and assess. Decide if the piece can be repaired, downgraded or must be scrapped. Report to your supervisor and adjust your process if needed.

#### Example answer

*"I would stop sanding and look closely at the crack to see how deep it goes. If it is surface only, I might fill it with a matching timber dust and glue mix, then re-sand. If it goes right through, the piece may not be safe for food use or structural work, so I would set it aside as a second or scrap it. I would tell my supervisor straight away and check the remaining blanks for similar faults. If it is a recurring problem, I would look at my drying or mounting process to see what caused it."*

### 4. What safety practices do you follow when operating a wood lathe and using gouges?

#### Why they ask

Safety is critical in a workshop, and employers want to know you will not take risks.

#### How to structure your answer

List key points clearly: PPE, machine checks, tool rest position, speed, dust extraction, no loose clothing. Keep it practical and specific.

#### Example answer

*"Before I start, I check the lathe for any damage, make sure the tool rest is tight and set close to the work. I wear safety glasses and a face shield, and I tie back long hair or remove loose clothing. I always check the speed is correct for the diameter of the timber. I keep my tools sharp so I do not have to force the cut. I use dust extraction and a respirator when sanding. I never reach over the lathe while it is running, and I stop the machine before adjusting the tool rest or checking the work."*

### 5. How do you sharpen and maintain your turning tools, and why does this matter?

#### Why they ask

This technical question checks your understanding of tool maintenance and its effect on quality and safety.

#### How to structure your answer

Explain your sharpening routine, the equipment you use, and how it affects cut quality and control.

#### Example answer

*"I sharpen my gouges and chisels on a slow-speed grinder with a white wheel, or on a diamond stone for touch-ups. I keep the original bevel angle and cool the tool by dipping it in water often so I do not burn the steel. I sharpen little and often, usually before each spindle or bowl. A sharp tool cuts cleanly and safely, so I do not have to push hard. It also gives a better finish straight off the tool, which means less sanding and less chance of tear-out."*

## **6. Describe a time you worked with a client or colleague to solve a problem with a turned piece.**

### **Why they ask**

This behavioural question looks at your communication and teamwork in a workshop or client-facing setting.

### **How to structure your answer**

Use STAR, focusing on how you listened, explained options and reached a solution together.

### **Example answer**

*"A furniture maker I work with had a client who wanted a set of table legs with a very specific taper that was not in our standard range. The maker was unsure if we could match the drawing. I sat down with him and the drawing, worked out the angles and turned a sample leg. I brought it back to him and we checked it against the drawing together. The client approved it, and I turned the full set with a consistent taper using a simple template. The maker now sends me similar custom work because he knows I will work through the details with him."*