

Wool Classer interview questions

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What to expect

Wool classer interviews are practical and standards-focused. Employers want to see that you can read a fleece quickly, defend your lines against AWEX specifications, and keep records clean when the shed is under pressure.

- **Practical classing:** You may be asked to assess sample fleeces, explain your lines, or talk through a classing run from the board to the bale.
- **Technical standards:** Questions on fibre diameter, staple length and strength, AWEX lines, contamination and yield testing.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Mixed clips, weather damage, stained wool, or a grower who wants lines changed before sale.
- **Behavioural and teamwork:** How you work with shearing teams, pressers, growers and brokers during a busy run.
- **Safety and records:** Shed safety, manual handling, bale branding, classing records and certification paperwork.

The interview often starts with a shed walk or a practical task, then moves to a conversation with a grower, classing contractor or broker. You might class a sample fleece, explain how you would split a clip, and discuss records and safety. Expect follow-up questions that test whether your decisions match AWEX standards and buyer specifications.

1. Walk me through how you class a fleece from the shearing board to the bale.

Why they ask

This is the core practical question. It shows whether you understand the full sequence and can work at shed pace.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through: pick up and throw the fleece, assess breed and crimp, check colour and contamination, skirt and remove oddments, test staple length and strength, allocate to the correct line, record the details, then press and brand.

Example answer

"I pick up the fleece as it comes off the board and throw it out on the table so I can see the whole thing. I check the breed and crimp first, then colour, then any stained, burry or seedy edges that need to come off. I test staple length and strength before I commit it to a line, and I keep the line descriptions in my head as I go. Once the fleece is classed, I record the weight and any test result, then it goes to the press for branding. If something looks borderline, I put it aside and recheck it against the AWEX standard before it joins a sale line."

2. How do you decide which fleece segments to remove, and how do you avoid losing good wool?

Why they ask

This tests your judgement on contamination and value, not just your speed on the board.

How to structure your answer

Explain your criteria, the trade-off between clean lines and yield, and how you check a borderline decision.

Example answer

"I start with the obvious faults: stain, burr, seed, urine, paint and vegetable matter. I remove those before they touch a clean line because one bad segment can drag down a whole bale. I also look at the edges and the belly wool, which usually do not belong in the main line. To avoid losing good wool, I check the fleece against the AWEX standard and the buyer specification before I throw anything away. If I am unsure, I keep it separate and ask the classer or the grower rather than guessing. The aim is clean lines without throwing away sound wool that could still make a saleable line."

3. Tell me about a time you had to manage a difficult classing decision when a clip was mixed or contaminated.

Why they ask

This behavioural question looks for evidence that you stay calm and apply standards when the clip is not straightforward.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result. Keep the result about clean lines, accurate records or a resolved dispute.

Example answer

"In one shed we had a run of weather-damaged wool mixed with sound fleeces, and the grower wanted it all pressed together to save time. My task was to prepare sale lines that would not be rejected at the broker. I separated the sound fleeces first, then classed the damaged wool into its own lines and recorded the test results clearly. I explained to the grower why the lines needed to stay separate and showed him the staple strength results. The clip went to sale with clean descriptions, the broker did not have to reclass it, and the grower could see which lines were affected. It took longer in the shed, but it protected the value of the good wool."

4. A grower disagrees with the lines you have prepared and wants them changed before sale. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario question tests client-facing judgement, communication and knowledge of AWEX standards.

How to structure your answer

Show a calm sequence: listen, clarify the concern, refer to standards and test data, explain trade-offs, document the decision, and escalate if needed.

Example answer

"I would listen first and ask what specifically he wants changed and why. Then I would bring out the classing records and test results and walk him through how the lines were built against AWEX standards and the buyer specification. If he still wants a change, I would explain the risk to the sale line and what it could mean for the clip's description. I would not change a line just to avoid conflict, but I would document the discussion and, if needed, ask the broker or classing contractor to review it. The goal is a decision that the grower understands and that still meets the standards the buyer expects."

5. What records do you keep during classing, and how do they affect the sale catalogue and certification?

Why they ask

This technical and process question shows you understand that classing is not just sorting fleeces; the paperwork follows the wool to sale.

How to structure your answer

List the records, explain why each matters, and describe how you keep them accurate under time pressure.

Example answer

"I record fleece weights, yields, fibre diameter test results, staple length and strength, and the line each fleece goes into. I also note contamination or oddments that were removed and any bales that need special description. Those records feed straight into the sale catalogue and certification, so if they are wrong the buyer is working from bad information. I keep a running sheet at the table and check it against the press records before bales leave the shed. If a test result changes a line, I update the record immediately and tell the presser and the grower. Accurate records are what make the classing decisions useful after the shed is packed up."

6. How do you keep yourself and the shed team safe during a busy shearing run?

Why they ask

This safety question matters because sheds are fast, physical workplaces with machinery, manual handling and fatigue.

How to structure your answer

Cover risk awareness, manual handling, housekeeping, communication and your own fitness.

Example answer

"I start by keeping my own area clear so I am not tripping over fleeces or tools. I use safe lifting when I move bales or fleece bags, and I take micro-breaks when I can because classing is physical work. I keep the press area clear and make sure nobody is standing behind the press when it is operating. I speak up if I see a hazard, whether it is a loose guard, a slippery floor or someone working too close to the shearing board. In a busy run, the team has to look out for each other, so I check in with the presser and the shearers and make sure we are all working at a pace we can sustain."