Accountant interview questions

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What to expect

Accountant interviews usually move through three kinds of questions.

- **Process questions:** Check that you actually know the day-to-day work, things like closing a reporting cycle.
- **Behavioural questions:** Ask about a specific time something happened, good or bad.
- **Scenario questions:** Put you in a tricky judgement call, often involving a client or a number that doesn't add up.

Most interviews open with a few minutes on your background, spend the bulk of the time moving between the technical and behavioural questions, and leave the last ten minutes or so for what you want to ask them. Knowing the mix in advance means the shift from "how would you" to "tell me about a time" doesn't throw you.

1. Walk me through how you'd close out a month-end reporting cycle.

Why they ask

Shows whether you actually know the sequence of reconciliation, review and reporting, not just the theory behind it.

How to structure your answer

This is a process question. Walk through the steps in order, reconciliations, then accruals, then review, then reporting, and mention the specific checks you run at each one. What the interviewer wants to hear is a sequence that sounds like something you've actually done, plus how you catch errors before a report goes out the door.

Example answer

“I start with the big reconciliations, bank, receivables, payables, against the general ledger, and I chase down variances as I find them rather than leaving them to the end. After that I process accruals and prepayments so the period lands in the right timing, then run a variance check against budget or the prior period. Anything odd gets looked at before it goes anywhere near management. Reports only go out once that review is done, usually with a short note on whatever moved.”

2. Tell me about a time you found an error in a financial report before it went out. What did you do?

Why they ask

A behavioural question, testing how you handle catching a mistake, yours or someone else's, before it goes out the door.

How to structure your answer

The STAR structure works well here: situation, task, action, result. Keep the setup brief, be specific about what the error actually was and how you spotted it, then spend most of your answer on what you did about it. Finish with the outcome, and if you changed a process afterwards so it couldn't happen again, say so.

Example answer

“During a quarterly review I noticed a revenue figure that didn't match the sales data behind it, a discrepancy of about $40,000 caused by a duplicated invoice. I traced it back far enough to confirm it was an isolated entry, corrected the ledger, and flagged it to my manager along with what caused it, rather than just fixing it quietly. Afterwards we added a duplicate-invoice check to the month-end checklist, so it couldn't happen the same way again.”

3. How do you stay current with changes in tax law or accounting standards?

Why they ask

Interviewers are checking for real, ongoing development, not something you learned once in your degree and never touched again.

How to structure your answer

Name your actual sources rather than a vague "I read up on it", then give one recent example of a change you learned about and applied. Vague answers here are easy to spot, so a specific example does most of the work for you.

Example answer

“I follow ATO updates and CPA Australia's technical bulletins directly, and I set aside time each quarter for CPD instead of leaving it to pile up before year end. When the Single Touch Payroll reporting changes came through, I worked through the ATO's guidance and updated our payroll process ahead of the deadline, rather than waiting for a client to bring it up first.”

4. A client disagrees with your advice on a deduction they want to claim. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure and whether you can hold a compliant line while keeping the client relationship intact.

How to structure your answer

This one's testing judgement more than knowledge. Start by acknowledging the client's point of view, explain your compliance position calmly and clearly, and show you're looking for a legitimate way forward rather than just saying no. The interviewer cares more about how you handle the disagreement than whether you know the rule.

Example answer

“I'd start by understanding why they think the deduction applies, since sometimes there's a legitimate angle I haven't heard yet. If it genuinely isn't compliant, I explain the specific rule and the risk in plain terms, no jargon, and try to find a legitimate alternative that gets them closer to what they're actually after. Most clients respect a calm, clear no far more than they'd respect being told yes and then getting audited.”

5. What accounting software have you used, and how did you handle the transition if you've switched systems?

Why they ask

Practical and tool-specific: expect this if the job ad names a specific platform like Xero or MYOB.

How to structure your answer

Be specific about which platforms you actually know well, rather than listing every tool you've ever opened. If you've been through a system migration, a short concrete example goes a long way: what moved, what you checked for data integrity, how you kept things running through the switch.

Example answer

“I've worked daily in Xero for the past three years, and I know MYOB well from an earlier role. When we migrated a client from MYOB to Xero, I ran a parallel reconciliation for the first month to confirm the opening balances and chart of accounts had carried across correctly before switching reporting over fully. That caught a mismatched GST code before it became a real problem.”

6. Where do you see AI and automation changing this role over the next few years?

Why they ask

Increasingly common question. Interviewers want to see you understand which parts of the role are automating and which aren't, and that you're positioning yourself toward the parts that will still matter.

How to structure your answer

This is more of an opinion question, but it still wants substance. Say which parts of the role are genuinely automating, things like data entry, reconciliation, basic reporting, and which parts aren't, like judgement, advisory work and client trust. Then connect that briefly to how you're developing your own skills. The trap is either extreme: dismissing automation completely, or sounding like you think the job is disappearing.

Example answer

"A lot of the routine data entry and reconciliation work is already automating, and honestly I think that's a good thing. It frees up time for the parts of the job that actually need judgement: reading what the numbers mean, advising clients on structuring decisions, catching things a system won't flag on its own. I've been leaning into that by taking on more advisory work rather than treating the automation as a threat."