

Boarding Kennel Operator interview questions

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What to expect

Boarding kennel interviews are practical and unhurried. Employers are usually small business owners who will walk you through the facility, watch how you are around the animals, and ask questions that reveal whether you'll notice a sick or stressed dog before the owner does.

- **Operational and process:** How you run a feeding round, a cleaning routine or a check in from start to finish, and in what order.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples where you spotted an animal in trouble, handled a difficult owner, or improved a routine.
- **Scenario and judgement:** What you would do when an animal becomes unwell, an owner is unreachable, or two dogs don't settle together.
- **Technical animal care:** Feeding, medication, handling and restraint, hygiene and infection control, and reading animal behaviour.
- **Safety and compliance:** Vaccination requirements, boarding agreements, council animal keeping rules and Work Health and Safety.
- **Client-facing:** Handling bookings, fees, complaints and anxious owners at drop off and pick up.

Expect a short phone conversation first, mostly to check your availability across weekends and school holidays and your experience with dogs and cats. If that goes well you'll be invited on site for an interview and a walk through the kennels, and many employers then ask you back for a paid trial shift of a few hours. Because most kennels are small operations, the person interviewing you is often the owner or manager who will also roster you. The trial matters as much as the conversation: they're watching how you hold a lead, how you talk to a nervous dog, and whether you clean as you go.

1. Walk me through how you'd care for a new dog from check in to its first night.

Why they ask

This is the core of the job, and the answer shows whether you have a routine or just react to whatever is in front of you.

How to structure your answer

Chronological walk-through: paperwork and vaccination check, settling the dog into its run, the first feed and welfare check, then the overnight round. Name the checkpoints you would not skip rather than listing tasks in any order.

Example answer

"When a dog arrives I check the vaccination certificate and the owner's instructions first, and I note anything specific on the kennel card, like a medication or a food that has to be kept separate. Then I walk the dog to its run on a lead, let it settle with water, and give it a few minutes without handling so it can sniff around and decompress. I feed at the scheduled time, and if it hasn't eaten by the next check I write that down and mention it to whoever is on with me. On the first night I put a nervous dog in the quieter end of the block and check it again on the last round before lights out, so I'm not leaving a stressed dog unobserved overnight."

2. Tell me about a time you noticed an animal was unwell or stressed and what you did about it.

Why they ask

They want to see whether you actually observe animals or just complete tasks around them, and whether you escalate early or wait.

How to structure your answer

STAR: the situation and the animal, the task of monitoring it, the action you took and who you told, and the result for the animal and the owner.

Example answer

"We had a border collie boarded for a fortnight and around day three I noticed she wasn't coming to the front of the run at feeding time, which was out of character. I checked the kennel card, there was nothing flagged, so I watched her over the next two feeds and saw she was drinking more than usual and a bit flat. I rang the owner, who gave permission to contact their vet, and the vet saw her that afternoon and treated her for a urinary infection. We kept her on the medication for the rest of the stay, documented every dose, and the owner picked up a healthy dog. It changed how I do the morning round. I look at the animal before I look at the feed bucket."

3. A dog in your care becomes unwell overnight and the owner is overseas and uncontactable. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is the judgement question. They want to know you can act on welfare first and sort out permission and cost later.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state the immediate welfare priority, then the escalation path to a vet and the emergency contact, then the documentation and how you'd tell the owner once reachable. Be clear about what you'd decide yourself and what needs a manager.

Example answer

"First thing is to make sure the dog is safe and stable, so I'd move it somewhere quiet and warm if that helps, and check it against the kennel card for any known condition. I'd ring the emergency vet for advice while a colleague works through the emergency contacts on the boarding agreement, because there should be at least one. If the vet says bring it in, it goes in, and the paperwork goes with it. Everything gets written down with times, and the owner hears from us as soon as they're contactable, with the vet's notes and a plain explanation of what happened and what it cost and why. Even if I can't reach anyone, the dog's welfare comes first."

4. How do you manage feeding and medication for a full kennel where every animal has a different diet?

Why they ask

This role lives or dies on a system. They're checking whether you have one and can describe it clearly.

How to structure your answer

Technical walk-through: the system you use on paper or in software, the physical setup at the feed station, and the specific things you do to prevent mix-ups. Concrete methods beat general statements about being organised.

Example answer

"I work off the kennel card and a whiteboard at the feed station, and I set up the whole round before I start feeding, because once you're in the run you're not going to remember who gets what. Dry food only boards get their own scoop, medications go into individually labelled containers, and anything that has to be kept separate is stored in a different bin so there's no chance of cross-contamination. I feed the dogs on medication first while I'm fresh, and I record any refusals straight away so a pattern shows up over a couple of days rather than at the end of the stay."

5. What do you check before admitting a dog into the kennel?

Why they ask

Vaccination status, temperament and paperwork are where a kennel gets itself into trouble. They want to hear that you take it seriously.

How to structure your answer

Checklist structure: paperwork and vaccination status first, then temperament and health, then the physical kennel and run, then anything you'd raise with the owner before the booking starts.

Example answer

"Before a dog comes in I check the vaccination certificate is current, which for dogs means the C5, and I confirm desexing status and any known temperament or bite history. I go through the boarding agreement with the owner so we've got their vet details and an emergency contact, and I check the kennel is disinfected and the run has water and shade. If something's missing, like a vaccination due to expire mid-stay, I raise it then rather than three days into the booking, because the last thing you want is a full block with an unvaccinated dog in the middle of it."

6. An owner rings you upset because their dog came home unwell or unsettled. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Boarding is a repeat business built on trust, and they want to see you can take criticism without getting defensive.

How to structure your answer

Client-facing structure: let the owner speak, acknowledge the concern, gather the facts from your records, explain honestly and offer a next step, then follow up.

Example answer

"I'd let them finish, then say I understand why they're worried and ask what they're seeing and when it started. I'd pull the care records so I can tell them exactly what the dog was fed, whether it ate, and whether anything was noted, and I'd be honest if we missed something. If it sounds like it needs a vet, I say so plainly and offer to send the records straight to their vet. Then I follow up a day or two later, because a phone call that ends the conversation isn't the same as one that resolves it."