

Border Force Officer interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Border Force Officer roles are run by the Australian Border Force and typically combine behavioural questions, judgement-based scenarios and checks on your understanding of relevant legislation. Given the security clearance requirements of the role, integrity and honesty questions feature heavily alongside the standard competency assessment.

- **Behavioural (STAR):** Past-experience questions asking you to describe how you've handled pressure, conflict or decision-making in a previous role, assessed against APS-style capability frameworks.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd respond to an uncooperative traveller, a security alert or a borderline legal call, assessing decision-making under pressure rather than a rehearsed answer.
- **Technical / legislative knowledge:** Questions checking your understanding of the Migration Act, Customs Act and Biosecurity Act, and how these frameworks apply to everyday screening decisions.
- **Integrity and values:** Questions probing honesty, discretion and how you'd handle a colleague or situation that compromises procedure, reflecting the security-cleared nature of the role.

Expect a panel interview, often two or three assessors, following a structured question set with fixed follow-up prompts. Legislative and scenario questions are usually interspersed with behavioural ones rather than grouped separately, and there is typically a short values or integrity segment near the end tied to the security clearance process.

1. Tell me about a time you had to make a quick decision with limited information.

Why they ask

Border screening often requires officers to act on incomplete evidence within seconds, so assessors want evidence of sound judgement rather than hesitation.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: set the Situation and Task briefly, describe the specific Action you took and the reasoning behind it, then state the Result and what you'd do differently if anything.

Example answer

"In a previous role I was checking documentation for a group of passengers when one presented a visa that looked correct but had an inconsistency in the issue date. I had seconds to decide whether to clear them or refer them for secondary checks. I flagged the inconsistency, explained calmly to the passenger that a routine check was needed, and referred the case rather than assuming it was an error. The secondary check confirmed the document had been altered. I learned to trust small inconsistencies rather than dismiss them under time pressure."

2. A traveller becomes agitated and raises their voice during a routine baggage inspection. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This tests de-escalation skill and composure in a public-facing, potentially volatile situation, a core part of the role.

How to structure your answer

Talk through the situation as a live scenario: state your immediate priority, the steps you'd take in order, and how you'd escalate if the situation didn't de-escalate.

Example answer

"My first priority is safety, both mine and the traveller's, and keeping the interaction professional. I'd lower my own voice, acknowledge their frustration without agreeing or disagreeing with the reason for the inspection, and explain clearly what the process involves and how long it will take. If they remained aggressive I'd call for backup via radio rather than escalate the confrontation myself, and document the incident afterward in line with reporting requirements."

3. Walk me through how you would assess the risk level of an incoming cargo shipment.

Why they ask

Risk-based screening is central to the role, and this checks whether you understand the practical process behind intelligence-led enforcement.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step process walkthrough: what information you check first, what tools or systems you use, and how you decide on the outcome.

Example answer

"I'd start by checking the cargo declaration against the database for the consignor's history and the nature of the goods. If anything flagged as inconsistent, such as a mismatch between declared contents and weight, I'd escalate to a physical inspection using X-ray screening first, then a manual check if needed. I'd also cross-reference against current intelligence-led enforcement priorities, since some categories of goods or origin countries carry a higher baseline risk. The outcome and reasoning would then go into the inspection record regardless of whether anything was found."

4. You notice a colleague skipping steps in the screening process to move passengers through faster. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is an integrity check tied directly to the security clearance process and the expectation of consistent procedural compliance.

How to structure your answer

Answer directly and briefly: state the principle you'd apply, then the practical action, without over-justifying or hedging.

Example answer

"Procedure exists for a reason, so I wouldn't ignore it even if it felt like it was slowing things down. I'd raise it with the colleague directly first in case there was a reasonable explanation I was missing, and if it continued I'd report it through the proper channel. Consistency in screening protects everyone, including the colleague, from the consequences of a missed risk."

5. What legislation governs your ability to detain a person or seize goods at the border, and how does that shape your decisions?

Why they ask

Assessors need confidence you understand the legal basis for your authority before you're given operational discretion.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a knowledge check: name the relevant legislation, then briefly explain how it applies in practice.

Example answer

"Decisions around goods and prohibited items generally sit under the Customs Act and Biosecurity Act, while questions of entry and immigration status fall under the Migration Act. In practice, this means I need to be clear on which framework applies before I act. If I'm uncertain whether something

is a customs matter or a biosecurity risk, I treat it cautiously and refer it rather than making an on-the-spot call outside my authority."

6. Describe a time you had to communicate a difficult decision to someone who disagreed with you.

Why they ask

Officers regularly deliver unwelcome outcomes, like refusing entry or seizing goods, so this checks how you manage that interaction professionally.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, with particular focus on the language and tone you used during the Action step, since that's what's really being assessed.

Example answer

"I once had to inform a traveller that an item in their baggage was prohibited and would be seized, which they were unhappy about since it had sentimental value. I explained the specific rule that applied, kept my tone matter-of-fact rather than apologetic, and gave them clear information on the process for querying the decision afterward. They remained frustrated but accepted the outcome once they understood it wasn't a personal judgement call on my part."