

Careers Counsellor interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Interviews for careers counsellor roles test whether you can run a structured assessment, hold a difficult conversation with a client, and keep your advice grounded in current labour market and course data rather than generic guidance. Expect a mix of practical process questions and situational judgement.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through how you actually run an assessment, workshop or case-management cycle from intake to follow-up.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about specific clients or situations, usually answered using a STAR structure.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Hypothetical client situations, often involving a disagreement between client wishes and labour market reality, testing how you balance honesty with support.
- **Technical / knowledge:** Questions checking your familiarity with tools such as myfuture.edu.au, psychometric instruments and current VET or tertiary pathway requirements.
- **Client-facing / communication:** Questions about adapting your approach for clients with different confidence levels, literacy or cultural backgrounds.

Most interviews run as a single panel session of 45 to 60 minutes, often including a hiring manager and a senior counsellor or team lead. Some employers, particularly schools and universities, add a short practical exercise such as a mock client session or a review of a sample career action plan before or after the formal questions.

1. Walk me through how you'd run an initial career assessment session with a new client.

Why they ask

This checks whether you have a repeatable, professional process rather than an ad hoc chat, and whether you know how to use assessment tools to get useful information.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step process walkthrough: describe the session from intake and rapport-building, through assessment tool selection, to translating results into next steps.

Example answer

"I start by clarifying what brought the client in, whether that's finishing school, changing careers or coming off unemployment, before moving to any formal testing. Depending on the client I might use something like the Strong Interest Inventory alongside a conversation about their current skills and constraints, such as location or study costs. Once I have that picture I cross-check it against current labour market data and course entry requirements so the options I suggest are realistic, then we agree on two or three concrete next steps with a follow-up date."

2. Tell me about a time you helped a client who had no clear sense of direction.

Why they ask

Indecisive clients are common in this role, and the interviewer wants evidence you can move someone from vague uncertainty to a workable plan.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"I once worked with a client in their late twenties who'd left retail management but had no clear next step and was anxious about starting again. My task was to give them a direction they could actually act on within a few sessions. I ran an interest and skills assessment, then matched the results against local job vacancies and short VET courses rather than jumping straight to a four-year degree. They ended up enrolling in a Certificate IV pathway connected to project coordination, and left our final session with an enrolment date and a plan for part-time work alongside study."

3. A client is set on a course that labour market data suggests has weak job prospects. How do you handle that conversation?

Why they ask

This tests whether you can be honest about outcomes without being dismissive of a client's aspirations, which is a common tension in the role.

How to structure your answer

Judgement-under-pressure: describe how you'd weigh the client's autonomy against your professional obligation to inform, and what you'd actually say.

Example answer

"I wouldn't tell them not to do it. I'd lay out the labour market data plainly, including realistic employment rates and typical entry-level pay for that field, and ask what part of the course actually appeals to them. Sometimes there's a related pathway with better prospects that still meets the underlying interest. If they still want to proceed after that conversation, I'll support the choice but make sure they've also got a fallback plan, since my job is to inform their decision, not make it for them."

4. How do you keep your knowledge of VET and tertiary pathways current, and which tools do you rely on for labour market research?

Why they ask

Course requirements and job market conditions shift regularly, so employers want to know you have an active, not stale, information habit.

How to structure your answer

Knowledge demonstration: name specific sources and describe how often and how you use them.

Example answer

"I check myfuture.edu.au and Workforce Australia's labour market data regularly, and I keep a running list of course entry changes from the main providers in my region. For job search trends I also monitor SEEK and LinkedIn postings to see which skills employers are actually asking for, since that often moves faster than official course descriptions catch up with."

5. How would you adapt your approach for a client with low confidence or literacy barriers?

Why they ask

Careers counsellors work with a wide range of clients, and this checks your ability to adjust communication style rather than deliver a one-size-fits-all session.

How to structure your answer

Approach explanation: describe your adaptation strategy and give a concrete example of applying it.

Example answer

"I slow the pace right down and rely more on verbal explanation and simple visual planning tools than written handouts. With one client who found forms overwhelming, I worked through their resume out loud with them typing while I talked, rather than handing over a template and asking them to fill it in alone. It took longer per session but meant they actually left with something they understood and could update themselves."

6. How do you know if your career guidance is actually working?

Why they ask

This probes whether you follow through and adjust your practice based on real outcomes, rather than treating advice-giving as the end point.

How to structure your answer

Process walkthrough with a reflective element: describe your follow-up method and what you do when outcomes don't match the plan.

Example answer

"I build a follow-up point into every action plan, usually a few weeks after a client starts a course or job search, and I check in on whether the original plan is still on track. When a client comes back and the course wasn't the right fit, I treat that as useful information rather than a failure, and we go back to the assessment stage to work out what got missed the first time."