

Cleaner interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for cleaner roles are usually short and practical, focused on reliability, safety awareness and how candidates handle the day-to-day realities of the job rather than formal qualifications.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through how you'd actually carry out a cleaning task, checking you know the correct order of steps and standards.
- **Safety:** Questions about chemical handling, equipment use and WHS awareness, since cleaners work with hazardous substances and machinery daily.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past situations, such as handling complaints or noticing problems, to see how you've acted under real conditions.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical situations testing what you'd do when something goes wrong or isn't covered by standard instructions.

Expect a brief conversation about your availability and physical capacity for the work, followed by a handful of practical and safety-focused questions, and sometimes a short site walk-through or trial shift to confirm you can meet the required standard.

1. Walk me through how you would clean and sanitise a public bathroom in a commercial building.

Why they ask

Checks whether you understand hygiene sequencing and infection control basics without needing to be told each step.

How to structure your answer

Describe the task in the order you'd actually perform it: preparation, cleaning surfaces from cleanest to dirtiest, sanitising high-touch points, and final checks.

Example answer

"I'd start by putting on gloves and checking I have the right chemicals for each surface. I clean from the cleanest areas to the dirtiest, so mirrors and sinks first, then toilets and floors last. I sanitise high-touch points like door handles, taps and flush buttons, and finish by mopping the floor and restocking soap and paper towels. I always check the SDS if I'm unsure about a chemical before using it."

2. Tell me about a time you had to deal with a complaint from a client or building occupant about cleanliness.

Why they ask

Cleaners often work in occupied buildings and need to manage complaints calmly and professionally.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: outline the situation, the specific task or complaint, the action you took, and the result.

Example answer

"An occupant once told my supervisor the kitchen bins weren't being emptied regularly enough. I checked the cleaning schedule and realised the bin collection time clashed with when the kitchen was busiest. I asked if I could adjust my round slightly to empty that bin later in the shift instead. The complaints stopped and the supervisor mentioned it in my next review."

3. What would you do if you found a cleaning chemical without a label, or weren't sure how it should be used?

Why they ask

Tests safety judgement and whether you'd take shortcuts with unknown substances.

How to structure your answer

Explain the immediate action you'd take, then who you'd escalate to and why, showing you prioritise safety over finishing quickly.

Example answer

"I wouldn't use it. I'd set it aside, avoid mixing it with anything else, and report it to my supervisor straight away so it could be identified or disposed of properly. Mixing unknown chemicals can create dangerous fumes, so it's not worth guessing."

4. How do you manage your time when you've got a large area to clean in a limited shift?

Why they ask

Cleaners are often expected to complete set rounds within a fixed time, so pacing and prioritisation matter.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your practical approach: how you'd plan the order of tasks and what you'd prioritise if time ran short.

Example answer

"I usually plan my route so I'm not backtracking across the same area twice, and I tackle high-priority spots like bathrooms and kitchens first since they get checked most often. If I'm running short on time, I'll finish the essential hygiene tasks properly and leave lower-priority tidying, like straightening chairs, for last."

5. What safety precautions do you take when using equipment like a pressure washer or handling waste?

Why they ask

Direct safety and technical question about equipment you'll be expected to use regularly.

How to structure your answer

List the specific precautions relevant to the equipment, showing hands-on familiarity rather than general statements.

Example answer

"With a pressure washer, I check the hose and connections before starting, wear closed footwear and keep the nozzle away from people and power points. For waste, I use gloves, check bags aren't overfilled or leaking, and follow the site's separation rules for general and recyclable waste."

6. Describe a time you noticed a maintenance issue while cleaning. What did you do about it?

Why they ask

Reporting maintenance problems is a core task for cleaners, and this checks initiative and follow-through.

How to structure your answer

STAR format: the situation you noticed, the task or risk involved, the action you took, and the outcome.

Example answer

"I noticed a small leak under a sink while mopping a kitchen area. I mopped up the water so no one would slip, put out a wet floor sign, and reported it to the building manager straight away with the exact location. It got fixed within a day, and my supervisor said reporting it early probably saved further water damage."

