

Concrete Products Machine Operator interview questions

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

What to expect

Concrete products operators are interviewed by a production supervisor or plant manager, often after a short phone screen. Employers are checking whether you can run the machine safely and independently, whether you notice quality problems early, and whether you will still be turning up for the early shift in six months.

- **Technical and process:** How you set up, adjust and troubleshoot moulding, mixing and curing equipment, including PLC settings and product specifications.
- **Safety:** Working around overhead cranes, forklifts, moving moulds, wet floors and heavy product, plus your understanding of WHS duties and pre-start checks.
- **Quality and attention to detail:** How you inspect product, what defects you look for, and what you do when something is out of specification.
- **Scenario and judgement:** What you would do mid-run when a batch goes wrong, a machine jams or the schedule is under pressure.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of catching a fault, keeping a line running, working in a team or handling a difficult shift.
- **Reliability and physical fit:** Shift patterns, standing for long periods, heat, dust and the physical handling involved in stripping and moving product.

Usually a short phone or onsite screen with a recruiter or supervisor covering your tickets, licences and availability, then a face to face or panel interview at the plant with the production supervisor and sometimes a leading hand. Many employers walk you through the factory floor during the visit and ask you to talk through what you see on a machine or a finished product. Safety and quality questions tend to come first, technical and scenario questions in the middle, and your own questions at the end.

1. Walk me through how you set up and adjust a moulding machine at the start of a production run.

Why they ask

This is the core of the job. The interviewer wants to hear a logical sequence, not a rehearsed speech, and to see that you know which adjustments affect fill, density and finish.

How to structure your answer

Give a step by step walk-through in the order you actually do it on the floor, from reading the work order to checking the first units off the line. Name the checks and the settings, and finish with how you confirm the setup is right.

Example answer

"I start with the work order and match it against the mould that is on the machine, then inspect the mould box and pallets for wear, cracks or leftover concrete before anything runs. I set vibration time and cycle settings on the PLC panel to suit the mix, run two or three cycles with no pour to check the mould is seated and the stripper plate is working, then pour a test unit and check its dimensions, edges and surface. If one corner is short on fill, I change one thing at a time, usually vibration first and then feed speed, so I know which adjustment actually fixed it. Once the test unit is right I let the line run and check again after about ten units."

2. Tell me about a time you picked up a defect in a finished product. What did you do about it?

Why they ask

Quality control sits with the operator, not just the inspector at the end. The interviewer is testing whether you catch problems early and follow through on the cause rather than just setting the bad unit aside.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: the situation and what you were running, the task, the action you took on the spot and afterwards, and the result for the batch and the line.

Example answer

"We were running a batch of kerb units and I noticed the edges were crumbling slightly as they came off the stripper plate. I stopped the line, quarantined that run next to the rack and checked the mould, which had a build-up of set concrete along one edge. I cleaned the mould back properly, reapplied release agent and ran a test unit before restarting. I also told the supervisor so the units already racked could be rechecked before dispatch. We ended up scrapping a small number rather than sending out product that would chip on site, and the cleaning step went into the start of run checklist."

3. Halfway through a pour, you start seeing honeycombing and blowholes in the product. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a scenario question. They want to see you stop and think rather than keep pushing product through to hit the schedule.

How to structure your answer

Talk through your judgement on the spot: stop, contain, diagnose, escalate. Say what you would check and in what order, and how you would decide whether to keep running.

Example answer

"I would stop the pour rather than keep filling the mould, because continuing just creates more scrap. I would check the obvious causes in order: vibration time and whether the vibrator is actually working, the mix consistency and slump, and whether release agent has been applied properly. I would look at whether it is one mould or the whole run, since a single mould points to a mould problem rather than the mix. Then I would let the supervisor know, keep the affected units separate so they can be assessed once cured, and run a test unit before restarting. If the cause was the mix, I would be checking whether the batch from the batching plant was consistent with what we normally run."

4. How do you monitor curing and decide a product is ready to strip?

Why they ask

Curing drives both product strength and the day's schedule. The answer shows whether you understand why strip timing matters and whether you follow procedure or guess.

How to structure your answer

Explain the signals you use, the procedures you follow and what you do when conditions are unusual, such as cold or humid weather.

Example answer

"I follow the strip times for the mix and product type rather than going on feel, and I check the curing area conditions through the shift, particularly temperature and dampness. In colder weather or when the plant is running a slower setting mix, I check with the supervisor before stripping anything early. I look at the edges and corners as the product comes off the pallet, because that is where you see damage first if it is stripped too soon. If curing racks are tight I would rather flag it and adjust the schedule than pull product early and lose it at dispatch."

5. What does working safely around overhead cranes and forklifts look like on a busy plant floor?

Why they ask

This is a safety question with real consequences. Employers want an operator who respects exclusion zones and does not cut corners when the plant is busy.

How to structure your answer

Answer in practical terms: what you check before you start, how you move around the floor, how you communicate, and what you do when something is not right.

Example answer

"Before I use the crane I do the pre-start check, look at the slings and the load, and make sure the area underneath is clear and nobody has wandered into the exclusion zone. I use standard hand signals or the radio, and I never stand under a suspended load or between a moving forklift and a rack. On the floor I stay aware of forklift traffic and wet patches, and I wear the right PPE for the task. If I see a load being moved unsafely or a sling that is worn, I stop it and raise it with the supervisor straight away, even if it slows the shift down. It is easier to explain a five minute delay than an injury."

6. This role runs fixed shifts and you are on your feet all day with wet concrete, dust and heavy product around. How do you manage that?

Why they ask

Employers want to know you understand the physical reality of the job and will still be reliable after the first few weeks.

How to structure your answer

Be honest and practical. Talk about how you look after yourself across a shift and about your previous shift work, attendance and physical conditioning.

Example answer

"I have worked rotating shifts before, including early starts, so I know the routine that keeps me going: proper sleep, eating properly before a shift rather than grabbing something at the vending machine, and drinking water regularly through the day. On the floor I wear the right gloves and boots, use mechanical aids and the crane where I can rather than lifting by hand, and rotate between tasks where the supervisor allows it so I am not doing the same movement for eight hours. I have had the usual aches from stripping heavy product and I manage that with stretching and not trying to be a hero with a load that needs two people."