

Costume Designer interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for costume designers usually focus on your creative process, technical skills, and ability to collaborate under production constraints. You may be asked to present a portfolio and discuss specific productions.

- **Portfolio and process:** Questions that ask you to walk through your design approach, from script breakdown to final costume.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past collaborations, budget management, or handling tight deadlines.
- **Technical:** Questions about software, budgeting tools, and costume construction methods.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations involving last-minute changes, fitting issues, or conflicting creative directions.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about working with directors, performers, and wardrobe crews.

Typically starts with an introduction and portfolio review, then moves to behavioural and technical questions, and may end with a scenario or a conversation about availability and rates.

1. Walk me through your process for designing costumes for a script, from first read to final fitting.

Why they ask

This shows how you interpret a script and manage the design journey.

How to structure your answer

A chronological walk-through: initial read, research, sketches, sourcing, fittings, and final adjustments.

Example answer

"I start by reading the script and noting every character, scene, and time period. Then I research the era, the social context, and the director's vision. I create mood boards and sketches, often using Adobe Illustrator or Procreate to refine ideas. Next, I break down the script for costume changes and budget considerations. I source fabrics and accessories, bringing samples to fittings. During fittings, I collaborate with the performers and wardrobe team, adjusting for comfort and continuity. Finally, I oversee the construction and ensure every piece is ready for shooting or opening night."

2. Tell me about a time when a production budget forced you to change your design approach. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

Assesses budgeting and creative problem-solving.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"On a short film, the original design called for custom-made period gowns, but the budget wouldn't cover it. I researched rental options and found a local theatre company with a stock of period costumes. I negotiated a rental fee that fit our budget and coordinated fittings to ensure they worked for the actors. I then used my sewing skills to alter two pieces for a better fit. The result was a cohesive look that stayed within budget and kept the director happy."

3. You're on set and the lead actor's costume rips just before a crucial scene. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests quick thinking and problem-solving under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: assess, prioritise, act, and communicate.

Example answer

"First, I'd assess the damage quickly to see if it's repairable. If it's a minor tear, I'd do a quick hand stitch or use temporary adhesive. If it's major, I'd check if we have a duplicate or a similar piece that fits. I'd communicate with the director about the delay and options. If we can't fix it immediately, I'd suggest shooting a different scene first. I always carry a repair kit on set, so I'd use that. The priority is keeping the actor comfortable and the production moving."

4. How do you use software like CLO 3D in your design process?

Why they ask

Checks technical skills and familiarity with industry tools.

How to structure your answer

Explain your typical use, benefits, and any limitations.

Example answer

"I use CLO 3D to create virtual prototypes of designs before committing to fabric. It helps me visualise how a garment will drape and move on a performer, and I can share these with the director for feedback. I also use Adobe Illustrator for technical flats and Photoshop for mood boards. CLO 3D saves time and reduces fabric waste because we can test ideas digitally. However, I still rely on physical fittings to check comfort and fit, as digital tools can't fully replicate real-world movement."

5. Describe how you collaborate with a director who has a very different vision from your own.

Why they ask

Assesses collaboration and communication.

How to structure your answer

A collaborative approach: listen, clarify, find common ground, and propose solutions.

Example answer

"I start by listening carefully to the director's vision and asking questions to understand their priorities. I then present my ideas and explain how they serve the story. If we disagree, I try to find a compromise that honours both perspectives. For example, I might suggest a colour variation that fits their vision while maintaining the character's arc. I also bring in visual references to facilitate discussion. The goal is to create costumes that support the production, so I remain flexible and focused on the shared objective."

6. Tell me about a time you had to manage continuity across multiple scenes or locations.

Why they ask

Continuity is crucial in costume design.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"On a television series, we shot scenes out of order across different locations. I kept a detailed continuity log with photos and notes for each character's costume, including accessories and wear and tear. Before each scene, I checked the log with the wardrobe team. When we had to return to a scene weeks later, we could replicate the exact look. I also labelled each costume piece and stored them in order. This prevented continuity errors and saved time on set."