

Court Reporter interview questions

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

What to expect

Court reporter interviews in Australia usually combine a conversation about your transcription process with a practical test. The panel wants to see accuracy, court awareness and calm judgement when audio, deadlines or protocols are less than perfect.

- **Technical transcription and accuracy:** Questions about software, editing, legal terminology and quality control.
- **Process and court workflow:** Walk-throughs of how you prepare, record and deliver transcripts across a court list.
- **Behavioural and pressure management:** Past examples of urgent deadlines, poor audio or competing priorities.
- **Scenario and ethical judgement:** Hypotheticals about confidentiality, out-of-protocol requests and conflicts between deadlines.
- **Stakeholder communication:** How you deal with judges, associates, lawyers and self-represented litigants.
- **Legal knowledge and terminology:** Checks that you can handle case names, citations, exhibit references and court procedure.

Most processes start with a short phone or online screen with a court services manager, registrar or senior reporter. The main interview is often a panel of two or three people, followed by a practical transcription task using a short audio excerpt. You may be asked to explain your quality checks after the test. Some courts run the practical test first and the panel second, and some ask for a second interview with a judicial officer or operations manager.

1. Walk me through how you prepare for and record a full day of hearings in a busy court list.

Why they ask

This role lives or dies on process. The panel wants to see you can set up, keep pace and close out a list without losing accuracy.

How to structure your answer

Use a chronological walk-through: pre-court setup, in-court capture, post-court quality control. Name the checks you do at each stage and how you flag issues early.

Example answer

"Before court starts, I check the list, confirm courtroom allocations and test my audio or stenographic equipment. I create a session file with the matter names, parties and counsel, and I add a glossary for unusual names or technical terms. During proceedings, I mark speaker changes, exhibit references and timestamps as I go, so the transcript has clear anchors. If audio drops or speakers overlap, I note the time and ask the associate to clarify after the bench rises. After court, I run the audio against my transcript, fix speaker attribution and legal citations, then send the draft through my quality check before certifying and delivering it. For urgent rulings, I start the clean-up as soon as the judge finishes speaking."

2. Tell me about a time you had to produce an urgent transcript when audio quality was poor or speakers overlapped. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

Court reporters constantly face imperfect recordings. The panel wants evidence of problem solving, not just typing speed.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result. Keep the result specific but do not invent numbers. Describe the checks and communication that fixed the issue.

Example answer

"In a tribunal hearing, the audio was patchy and two parties spoke over each other during a key exchange. The associate needed the transcript before the next session. I replayed the section at slower speed, used my speaker notes and timestamps, and cross-checked the names against the exhibit list. I marked the few words I could not verify and asked the associate to confirm them with the presiding member. I then delivered the transcript with clear bracketed notes where clarification was still needed. The associate used it the same morning, and I added the matter to my glossary so future transcripts from that list were cleaner."

3. A judge asks for a transcript of a complex ruling within two hours. You have another urgent matter due at the same time. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a scenario about judgement under pressure. The panel is testing prioritisation, communication and whether you understand court expectations.

How to structure your answer

Show a judgement-under-pressure structure: assess urgency and risk, communicate early, sequence the work, protect accuracy, and follow up. Do not pretend you can do everything at once without trade-offs.

Example answer

"I would first confirm the judge's deadline and what the transcript is for, because a ruling needed for a bail decision may outrank another filing. I would tell the associate about the clash straight away and ask which matter has the firmer deadline. If the ruling must go first, I would start a clean draft immediately, use my in-court notes and audio markers, and keep the other matter moving by sending a short update to the requesting party. I would not skip quality checks on names, citations or exhibit references. If both deadlines are immovable, I would ask a senior reporter or supervisor to help with the second transcript. Afterwards, I would note the clash in my workflow so the next list is planned better."

4. How do you ensure accuracy when transcribing legal terminology, names, and multi-speaker testimony?

Why they ask

Accuracy is the core technical skill. The panel wants to hear a repeatable method, not a promise to be careful.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step technical explanation: preparation, real-time capture, verification, and final quality control. Mention your tools and how you handle uncertainty.

Example answer

"I prepare before court by reading the list, checking party names, counsel and any known legislation, then building a glossary in my transcription software. During the hearing, I use Express Scribe or FTW Transcriber to mark speaker changes and timestamps, and I type legal terms as I hear them rather than paraphrasing. If a name or citation is unclear, I flag it immediately and check the court file, exhibit list or associate at the next break. After the hearing, I run the audio against the transcript, search for common errors in names and citations, and read the transcript for sense and formatting. I only certify a transcript when the speaker attribution, legal references and exhibit numbers are verified. For

ongoing lists, I keep a running glossary so accuracy improves over time."

5. Describe how you manage exhibits and evidence labelling during a proceeding.

Why they ask

Exhibits are central to a usable transcript. The panel wants to know you can keep evidence references clean and auditable.

How to structure your answer

Use a process structure: receive, label, log, track, cross-reference. Explain how you prevent confusion when multiple parties tender documents.

Example answer

"When an exhibit is tendered, I record the exhibit number, description, tendering party and time in my exhibit log. I label the digital file or physical item using the court's naming convention and link it to the relevant transcript page or timestamp. If several exhibits are tendered quickly, I ask the associate to confirm the numbering before I finalise the log. I keep a running index so judges, lawyers and self-represented litigants can be pointed to the right reference. During editing, I check every exhibit mention in the transcript against my log, and I fix any mismatch before delivery. If an exhibit is later admitted or rejected, I update the log and note the change so the transcript remains accurate."

6. This role involves regular contact with judges, lawyers and self-represented litigants. How do you handle a request for a transcript that falls outside protocol?

Why they ask

Client-facing and ethical. The panel needs to see you can stay helpful while protecting confidentiality and court process.

How to structure your answer

Use a communication framework: listen, clarify, check policy, refer, document. Show empathy without promising something you cannot deliver.

Example answer

"I would listen to the request and make sure I understand what the person actually needs, because they may be asking for a copy, a correction or a faster deadline. I would explain the court's transcript request process in plain language and confirm what I can and cannot release. If the request is outside protocol, I would not hand over the transcript or discuss the case informally. I would refer them to the registrar, associate or published court process, and I would document the request in my notes. If the person is self-represented and anxious, I would keep my tone calm and give them the exact next step. Confidentiality and the integrity of the record come first, but people should still be treated with respect."