

Depot Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Depot manager interviews focus on whether you can run a site safely, keep freight moving and lead a mixed team of drivers and warehouse staff. Employers want to hear how you handle pressure, compliance and client issues, not just that you know the theory.

- **Operational process:** Questions that ask you to walk through daily planning, dispatch, receiving and rostering.
- **People leadership:** Questions about rostering, performance management and keeping drivers and warehouse staff engaged.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions on Chain of Responsibility, fatigue management, load restraint and WHS duties.
- **Scenario and problem solving:** Questions that put you in a live service failure or resourcing crunch and ask what you do first.
- **Commercial and budget:** Questions about managing depot costs, overtime, maintenance and reporting variances.
- **Client and stakeholder:** Questions about dealing with clients, transport operations teams and regulators.

Most processes start with a phone screen with a recruiter or transport manager, then a site interview with the transport manager and sometimes a WHS or HR representative. You may be asked to walk through a day's operations, discuss a compliance scenario and explain how you would handle a service failure. Some employers include a short depot tour and a conversation with supervisors.

1. Walk me through how you plan a typical day at a depot, from the morning check to end of shift.

Why they ask

This shows whether you understand the real sequence of depot work: safety checks, labour, vehicles, freight cut-offs and client promises.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through. Start with the first task you do, then move through the day in order, and finish with how you close out the shift and set up tomorrow.

Example answer

"I start by checking overnight reports, vehicle availability, driver call-ins and any urgent freight. Then I confirm the roster against the run sheet, adjust for sick leave or vehicle defects, and hold a short pre-start with supervisors. I set priorities for receiving and dispatch, check that forklifts and scanners are working, and review any client cut-off times. Through the day I monitor GPS tracking and radio calls, move staff between inbound and outbound if a truck is delayed, and keep the transport operations team informed. At close I review missed runs, complete incident reports, and note anything for tomorrow's plan."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a driver or warehouse staff member whose performance was below standard.

Why they ask

Depot managers supervise a mixed workforce, and employers want evidence you can have a difficult conversation without losing the person or the team.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Describe the situation and the performance gap, the action you took to understand and address it, and the result for the person and the depot.

Example answer

"At a previous depot, one driver had repeated late starts and missed pre-start checks. I sat down with him, showed the records, and asked what was getting in the way. He was dealing with a changed school run. We agreed a temporary start time change for a fortnight and a clear check-in each morning. I also made sure he had the fatigue management information. His on-time starts improved, and his pre-start compliance became consistent. I documented the plan and followed up weekly until it was no longer needed."

3. A major client calls at 4pm to say a critical load has not arrived and their line will stop. What do you do?

Why they ask

Service failures are a normal part of depot life, and the interviewer wants to see how you prioritise, communicate and recover under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Use a judgement-under-pressure structure: stay calm, acknowledge the client, gather facts, check safety and options, act, communicate clearly, then review.

Example answer

"I would stay calm and thank them for calling. First I check the load status in the transport scheduling system and GPS, then call the driver if safe to do so. If the truck is delayed, I look at whether another run can divert or whether a nearby depot has stock. I keep the client updated with a realistic time, not a guess. If we cannot meet their line stop, I escalate to the transport manager and agree a recovery plan. Afterward I review the run sheet and cut-off times to see what caused it and whether we need a buffer."

4. How do you make sure your depot stays compliant with Chain of Responsibility and heavy vehicle rules?

Why they ask

Depot managers carry real compliance duties, and the employer needs to know you can keep the site on the right side of NHVR and WHS requirements.

How to structure your answer

Give a structured compliance answer: name the key duties, explain how you embed them in daily work, and show how you respond when something goes wrong.

Example answer

"I start with the HVNL and CoR duties that apply to the depot: scheduling, loading, fatigue, mass and maintenance. I make sure rosters give drivers legal breaks and that run sheets are realistic. In the yard, load restraint is checked before departure, and I keep records of pre-start inspections and defects. I train supervisors on their CoR obligations and use toolbox talks for fatigue and load restraint. If an issue comes up, I report it and fix the process, not just the person. I also keep up with NHVR guidance and state WHS requirements."

5. Describe how you would manage the depot budget when freight volumes rise but you cannot increase headcount.

Why they ask

This tests commercial judgement and whether you can solve a resourcing problem without simply asking for more money or more staff.

How to structure your answer

Use a cost-prioritisation structure: review the main cost lines, find efficiencies in rosters and routes, engage supervisors, set a monitoring routine, and report clearly.

Example answer

"I would review the main cost lines first: overtime, agency staff, maintenance and consumables. I would look at the run sheet to see if routes can be combined or if start times can be staggered to cover peaks without extra hours. I would talk to supervisors about where the bottlenecks are, because they often know which tasks can be simplified. I would set a weekly budget check and report variances to the transport manager. If volumes stay high, I would build a case for temporary support with the numbers to back it."

6. Tell me about a time you improved safety or compliance at a depot.

Why they ask

Safety is a core part of the role, and a concrete example shows you can spot a risk and make a lasting change rather than just quoting policy.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set out the safety issue, your investigation, the practical fix you introduced, and the result in terms of fewer near misses or better daily habits.

Example answer

"At a courier depot, forklift incidents near the loading dock were a concern. I reviewed the traffic flow and saw pedestrians and forklifts sharing the same entry. I consulted the WHS representative and drivers, then introduced a marked walkway, a one-way flow for forklifts, and a daily pre-start reminder. I also ran a short refresher on pedestrian safety. Over the next few months, near misses dropped and the dock felt calmer. I kept the walkway marked and added it to the supervisor's daily checks."