

Detective interview questions

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What to expect

Detective interviews assess your investigative thinking, integrity, and ability to handle complex casework under pressure. They combine behavioural questions with scenario-based exercises and technical checks.

- **Investigative process:** Questions that ask you to walk through how you would manage a case from start to finish, including evidence gathering and coordination.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experiences with teamwork, integrity, conflict resolution and managing competing priorities.
- **Scenario-based:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement, ethical decision-making and ability to stay calm under pressure.
- **Technical and legal:** Questions on legislation, evidence handling, brief preparation and the use of police databases and forensic tools.
- **Court and stakeholder communication:** Questions about how you work with prosecutors, victims, witnesses and other agencies to achieve outcomes.

The interview is typically a panel of senior officers, including a detective sergeant or inspector. You might start with introductions and a few background questions, then move to scenario exercises, behavioural questions and technical queries. Some processes include a written assessment or a practical case file review. The panel will want to see how you think, how you document decisions and how you manage the demands of the role.

1. Walk me through how you would investigate a serious assault where the victim is unable to provide a statement.

Why they ask

This tests your process knowledge, from securing the scene to building a case without direct victim testimony.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through: initial response, scene management, evidence gathering, witness identification, forensic coordination, and case theory development.

Example answer

"First, I would ensure the scene is secure and that any immediate risks are managed. I would identify and separate witnesses, then coordinate with forensic officers to collect physical evidence such as DNA, fingerprints and clothing. I would canvass the area for CCTV and check QPRIME for any similar incidents or known associates. Even without a victim statement, I would build a timeline using phone records, witness accounts and forensic results. I would then consult with the prosecutor early to ensure the brief of evidence meets requirements for a circumstantial case."

2. Tell me about a time you had to interview a reluctant witness. How did you get them to cooperate?

Why they ask

This probes your interpersonal skills and ability to obtain information without coercion.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"In a fraud investigation, a key witness was afraid to speak because they feared retaliation. My task was to obtain a statement that could be used in court. I arranged to meet them at a neutral location and explained the confidentiality protections available. I listened to their concerns without pressure, explained the importance of their evidence and offered support through the process. They eventually provided a detailed statement, which helped secure a conviction. The result was a successful prosecution and the witness felt supported throughout."

3. You are investigating a case and discover a colleague has mishandled evidence. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests your integrity, understanding of police protocols and ability to handle a sensitive internal matter.

How to structure your answer

Use a judgement-under-pressure structure: acknowledge the issue, assess the risk, take immediate action, report through the chain of command, and document everything.

Example answer

"I would first ensure the evidence is secured and no further contamination occurs. I would assess the severity of the mishandling and whether it compromises the case. Then I would report the matter to my supervisor immediately, as required by policy. I would document what I observed, the time and the actions taken, and cooperate fully with any internal investigation. Maintaining integrity and the admissibility of evidence is paramount."

4. How do you ensure your briefs of evidence meet court standards?

Why they ask

This checks your technical knowledge and attention to detail, which are critical for successful prosecutions.

How to structure your answer

Explain your process: legal research, quality checks, consultation with prosecutors, and use of case management systems.

Example answer

"I start by thoroughly reviewing all evidence and ensuring it is relevant, admissible and properly documented. I use a checklist based on the Evidence Act and local court requirements. I consult with prosecutors early to clarify any legal issues and I use case management systems to track exhibit lists and witness statements. Before submitting, I have a colleague review the brief for completeness. This approach has helped me avoid delays and ensure cases proceed smoothly."

5. Describe a time you had to manage a large caseload with competing deadlines. How did you prioritise?

Why they ask

This assesses your time management, organisational skills and ability to work under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"At one point I was handling several serious assault cases and a fraud investigation simultaneously. I prioritised by assessing which cases had imminent court dates or urgent evidence gathering needs. I used a daily task list and QPRIME to track deadlines. I delegated administrative tasks where possible and kept stakeholders informed of progress. As a result, all my briefs were submitted on time and I maintained a high standard of investigation."

6. What steps do you take to maintain your own wellbeing and resilience in this role?

Why they ask

This explores your self-awareness and coping strategies, which are important for a demanding role with exposure to trauma.

How to structure your answer

Use a reflective structure: describe the challenges, your strategies, and how they benefit your work.

Example answer

"I recognise that detective work can be emotionally taxing, especially when dealing with victims and disturbing evidence. I maintain a strict separation between work and personal time, and I debrief with colleagues after difficult cases. I also use the support services available through my employer, such as peer support and counselling. Staying physically active and taking regular leave helps me return to work focused and clear-headed. This means I can give each case the attention it deserves."