

Driller interview questions

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What to expect

Driller interviews are usually run by a rig supervisor or drilling superintendent, often with a safety or HR representative involved, and they focus heavily on whether you can be trusted around pressurised equipment in a remote environment. Expect a mix of straightforward process questions, safety-focused questions, and a few scenarios designed to see how you think when something goes wrong mid-shift.

- **Process:** Walk-through questions on rig operation, drill string handling and gauge monitoring to check you understand the mechanics of the job.
- **Safety:** Questions on briefings, protocols and incident prevention, since this is a high-risk occupation where a lapse has real consequences.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions asking you to describe specific situations, usually about fault detection, teamwork or handling fatigue on long swings.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement when equipment readings are abnormal or a supervisor isn't immediately available.
- **Technical:** Direct knowledge checks on drilling systems, such as mud circulation troubleshooting or interpreting pressure and depth data.

Expect an initial phone or in-person screen covering licences, availability for roster and remote work, then a longer interview or site visit where technical and safety questions dominate, often finishing with a scenario question to see how you'd handle a live problem on the rig.

1. Walk me through how you'd monitor pressure, depth and rate-of-penetration gauges during a normal drilling shift.

Why they ask

Checks that you understand the core monitoring task and can describe it clearly, not just that you've used the equipment.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: describe the sequence from shift start, what you're checking, how often, and what you do when a reading moves outside the expected range.

Example answer

"At the start of the shift I check the handover notes for anything unusual from the previous crew, then settle into a routine of watching the pressure, depth and ROP gauges together rather than in isolation, since a change in one often explains a change in another. If ROP drops without a matching change in weight on bit, I'll check for bit wear or a formation change before assuming it's mechanical. I log readings at set intervals and note anything that drifts, even slightly, so the next crew has a full picture."

2. Describe how you run a pre-shift safety briefing on a drill site.

Why they ask

Safety briefings are listed as a core task, and drillers are often responsible for enforcing site protocols, so interviewers want to see you take this seriously and can lead it, not just attend it.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through with emphasis on what gets covered and why, plus how you handle pushback or complacency.

Example answer

"I start with any changes since the last shift: work program updates, weather, ground conditions or known equipment issues. Then I go through the specific tasks planned for the shift and the hazards attached to each one, and I ask the crew to confirm they understand rather than just nodding along. If someone's rushing through the checklist, I'll slow it down, because a briefing that's treated as a formality defeats the purpose."

3. Tell me about a time you identified an equipment fault before it caused a bigger problem.

Why they ask

Troubleshooting and fault detection are explicit parts of the role, and this tests attention to detail under real conditions.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"During a shift the standpipe pressure started climbing slightly above what I'd expect for that depth and mud weight. My task was to work out whether it was a genuine downhole issue or a surface equipment problem before it escalated. I checked the mud pumps and circulation lines first, found a partial blockage developing in the flow line, and flagged it to the service technician straight away. We cleared it during a planned stop rather than an unplanned one, which kept us on program and avoided a bigger equipment failure."

4. You notice a pressure gauge reading outside the normal range mid-shift and your supervisor is off-site. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement and decision-making when you can't immediately escalate, which matters given how remote and high-risk drill sites are.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state the immediate priority, the decision process, and how you'd communicate afterward.

Example answer

"Safety comes first, so I'd stop or slow the operation if the reading suggested any risk to the crew or the well, not wait for a call back. I'd check the obvious causes on-site, whether that's a valve, a gauge fault or an actual pressure change downhole, and use the work program and site procedures to guide the next step. Once I'd stabilised things, I'd contact my supervisor to report what happened and what I did, and log it properly so there's a clear record."

5. What's the difference between a returns loss and rising standpipe pressure, and how would you troubleshoot each?

Why they ask

A direct technical check on mud circulation knowledge, since drillers are expected to manage this system without constant supervision.

How to structure your answer

Technical explanation: define both issues, then outline a troubleshooting approach for each.

Example answer

"Returns loss usually points to fluid going somewhere it shouldn't, like a lost circulation zone downhole, and I'd check volumes in and out and look at formation data before assuming it's a leak on surface. Rising standpipe pressure more often points to a restriction, whether that's a partially blocked nozzle, a kink in the string or a bit issue, so I'd work through the surface equipment first since it's quicker to rule out, then look downhole if that comes up clean."

6. This role involves long shifts, remote locations and rotating rosters. How do you manage fatigue and stay focused on safety over a long swing?

Why they ask

With 68-hour weeks and remote sites being standard for this occupation, interviewers want evidence you can sustain the physical and mental demands.

How to structure your answer

Behavioural reflection: describe your personal routine and how you self-monitor, with a concrete example if you have one.

Example answer

"I treat sleep and recovery as part of the job, not an afterthought, so I keep a consistent routine around meals and rest even when the roster shifts. On site I pay attention to how the crew is holding up generally, not just myself, because fatigue shows up in small ways first, like someone skipping a step they'd normally do without thinking. If I notice that in myself or someone else, I'll say something rather than let it slide, since on a rig that's exactly when mistakes happen."