

Drycleaner interview questions

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What to expect

Dry cleaning interviews are practical and short. The person across from you is usually the owner or store manager, and they are trying to work out whether you can be trusted with other people's clothing and whether you will still be standing at the press at the end of a busy Saturday.

- **Technical and hand skill:** Questions about stains, fabrics, care labels and the machines you have actually operated. They want specifics, not theory.
- **Process:** You will be asked how you move a garment through the shop, because a dry cleaner's whole day is a sequence and gaps in it show up as lost items.
- **Customer facing:** Complaints, damage claims and the awkward conversation when a stain will not come out. Most dry cleaners are small businesses where the person at the machine also talks to the customer.
- **Scenario and judgement:** A hypothetical garment arrives that does not fit the standard process. They are watching how you decide to stop and ask rather than push ahead.
- **Safety and compliance:** Solvent handling, safety data sheets and what you do when equipment plays up. Relevant in every shop, and decisive in a good one.
- **Reliability and availability:** Weekend work, early starts and deadline pressure are built into the trade, so expect direct questions about your availability.

The interview is normally held at the shop, often at the counter or in the workroom with the machines running. Expect a short conversation about your experience and availability first, then a walk through the plant where they point out the dry cleaning machine, the spotting bench and the presses and ask what you have used. Many employers finish with a paid trial shift or a practical test, such as sorting a mixed bag, pressing a shirt or pre-treating a marked garment, before they make a decision.

1. Walk me through how you handle a customer's garments from the moment they come over the counter to the moment they are collected.

Why they ask

This is the core of the job and the quickest way for an employer to see whether you understand the sequence, the checks and the record keeping, or just the cleaning part.

How to structure your answer

Take it in stages and name the check at each one. Counter and tag, sort and inspect, pre-treat, machine, finish, final inspection, rack and record. Mention where you write things down, because lost items come from gaps in the paper trail.

Example answer

"At the counter I check the pockets, point out any existing damage out loud and note it on the docket, then tag the garment with a barcode and scan it into the system so it is on the record from that point. I sort it into the right load by fabric and colour and check the care label before it goes anywhere near the machine. Anything with a mark gets pre-treated and spotted by hand first, and if I am not sure what the stain is I test on an inside seam. After cleaning I inspect it again under good light, then it goes to pressing and finishing. I check the finished item once more against the docket before it is racked, and the system stays updated so anyone at the counter can find it when the customer arrives."

2. Tell me about a time a customer was unhappy about the way their garment came back. What did you do?

Why they ask

Small dry cleaning businesses live on repeat customers, and how you handle a complaint matters as much as how well you clean. They want to hear that you stay calm and take responsibility.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the situation briefly, describe what you actually did and said, and finish on the outcome, including what changed in the shop afterwards.

Example answer

"A regular customer collected a woollen coat and came back the next morning saying a mark near the cuff was still there, and she felt the fabric had gone slightly dull. I apologised without arguing about it, took the coat back and looked at it with her. The mark was an old oil stain the care label warned against treating heavily, so I explained that treating it harder risked the nap of the wool, and offered either another light treatment at no charge or a credit if she was not happy with the result. She chose the light treatment, and it came back looking better than it had the first time. After that I started noting on the docket when we had been cautious with a stain, so the counter could explain it at collection rather than after the customer got home."

3. A customer brings in a beaded silk dress with a fresh ink mark and a care label that says dry clean only. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This is a judgement question. The wrong answer is either to refuse everything or to charge ahead, and the right answer is to slow down, test and talk to the customer before you commit.

How to structure your answer

Work through it out loud in order: assess, test, decide, communicate, document. Show that you know when to stop and ask for help.

Example answer

"First I look at the whole garment, not just the mark. Beading can be glued or sewn and it can be damaged by solvent, so I check the trim and the seams before anything else, and I read the care label in full because dry clean only can still mean a specific process. I would test the ink treatment on an inside seam or an inconspicuous hem, see how the dye and the beading react, and only then decide whether it is safe to treat. If there is any risk to the beading, I would ring the customer before doing anything and explain the options clearly: a cautious treatment that may leave a faint mark, or a referral to a specialist who handles couture pieces. Whatever we agree on goes on the docket, so there is no argument later."

4. How do you work out what a stain is, and what do you do when you genuinely cannot tell?

Why they ask

Spotting is the skill that separates a competent drycleaner from someone who just loads a machine. Employers want to know you have a method and that you are honest about the limits of it.

How to structure your answer

Explain your method in a simple order, then spend most of the answer on the case where you are unsure, because that is where they will judge you.

Example answer

"I start with what I can see and smell. A dark ring that has spread and feels stiff is usually a tannin, something greasy that has darkened the fabric is oil based, and white or yellowish marks often mean a protein stain or an old one that has set. I confirm it by testing a small amount of the agent on an inside seam and watching how the fabric behaves. If I still cannot tell, I do not guess with a strong chemical. I treat it as gently as I can, clean the garment normally, and tell the customer honestly at collection that the mark may lift further with a second attempt or that it may be permanent. Fabric

damage cannot be undone, so I would rather under-treat and re-clean than take a chance on someone's favourite jacket."

5. What does safe solvent handling look like in your day to day work?

Why they ask

Dry cleaning involves regulated chemicals and confined workrooms. Any employer with a licence to protect will test whether you take that seriously.

How to structure your answer

Give a short routine in order: before, during, after. Mention the safety data sheet, personal protective equipment, ventilation, spills and reporting faults, and keep it practical rather than reading out a policy.

Example answer

"Before I start I check the machine, the door seals and the solvent level, and I read the safety data sheet for anything new I am using so I know the exposure limits and what to do if it touches skin. During the shift I keep the lid closed, use gloves and eye protection when I am handling solvent or spotting agents, and keep the workroom ventilated. If there is a spill I contain it with the spill kit rather than hosing it down, and I follow the store's disposal procedure for used solvent and filters. If a machine is leaking or the still is not recovering properly, I shut it down, tag it and report it the same day. It is not worth running a machine that is not right to get an order out on time."

6. Tell me about a time you had a large amount of work and a tight deadline. How did you get through it?

Why they ask

Stock takes, hotel contract loads and the pre-holiday rush all compress into the same few days. They want to know you can prioritise without dropping quality.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, but keep the emphasis on how you decided what went first and how you kept the quality up under pressure.

Example answer

"We had a hotel contract that turned around on a Monday and, on the same weekend, a local school sent through a late order of blazers before a presentation. I sorted both loads by what actually had a hard deadline, put the blazers through first because the school needed them on the Monday morning, and told the hotel contact early that their order would be ready by the afternoon rather than the usual morning. I set up the press so the finishing was done in one pass rather than moving between stations, and I kept the spotting bench clear so nothing sat waiting. Both orders went out on time and the school came back the following term. The main thing was telling the customer early rather than letting them find out on the day."