Finance Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Finance manager interviews mix technical depth with leadership and judgement. Panels want to know you can run the reporting and treasury mechanics correctly, but they're equally testing whether you can lead a team under deadline pressure and give executives a straight answer on risk. Employers are also probing for genuine readiness to step up from a senior accountant role, not just technical competence.

- **Process and technical:** Questions that walk through how you actually run reporting, budgeting or treasury, checking for real hands-on experience rather than textbook knowledge.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about leading teams, handling conflict or managing a difficult stakeholder, usually answered with a structured story.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical situations, such as a cash flow squeeze or a control failure, testing how you'd think and act under pressure with incomplete information.
- **Strategic and advisory:** Questions about advising non-finance executives, checking whether you can translate numbers into a decision they can act on.

Most finance manager processes run two to three stages: an initial screen (often with HR or the CFO's EA) on background and salary expectations, a technical and behavioural interview with the CFO or hiring manager, and sometimes a final panel with other executives or a short case study on a budgeting or forecasting scenario. Reference checks tend to focus heavily on team leadership and integrity, given the trust placed in the role.

1. Walk me through how you run monthly and statutory reporting from close to board pack.

Why they ask

This checks whether you've owned the reporting cycle end to end, including the parts that go wrong, rather than just reviewing what someone else produced.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walk-through: starting point, key steps in order, where the risks or bottlenecks typically sit, and how you quality-check the output before it goes to executives.

> **Example answer**
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> *“I start the close with a checklist that goes out to the team a few days before month-end so everyone knows what's due and when. Once the ledger's closed, I review the trial balance myself before anything moves into the reporting pack, focusing on accounts that tend to hide errors, like accruals and intercompany. From there I build the management pack in Power BI, linking it back to SAP so the numbers update automatically rather than being retyped. Before it goes to the executive team I sit with my second-in-charge and sanity-check the story the numbers tell against what we know happened in the business that month, because a number can be technically correct and still misleading if it's read on its own.”*

2. Tell me about a time you had to lead a finance team through a period of pressure, such as a tight deadline or a restructure.

Why they ask

People leadership is one of the core tasks in this role, and panels want a real example of how you handle a team under strain, not a general statement about being a good manager.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: set the situation and your role, describe the specific task or problem, explain the action you took, and finish with the result and what you'd do differently.

Example answer

“When our reporting deadlines got pulled forward by a week after a change in group requirements, my team was already stretched. I sat down individually with each person to understand where their real bottlenecks were rather than assuming everyone had the same problem. It turned out two people were duplicating work on reconciliations without realising it, so I split the tasks more clearly and moved one recurring manual process into SAP. We hit the new deadline the following month and the team kept that pace afterwards because the process itself was better, not just because everyone worked longer hours.”

3. Cash flow is tightening and a large supplier payment falls due before a major customer receivable clears. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a realistic treasury scenario that tests judgement under pressure and whether you understand the mechanics of managing cash, not just reporting on it.

How to structure your answer

Frame this as a judgement-under-pressure answer: state your immediate priority, the options you'd weigh, who you'd involve, and how you'd decide, acknowledging the trade-offs rather than pretending there's one obvious right answer.

Example answer

“My first move is to get an accurate, up-to-date cash position rather than working off assumptions, because the size of the gap changes what's sensible to do about it. I'd look at whether the supplier payment terms have any flexibility, and in parallel push on the customer receivable to see if part of it can be brought forward. If neither closes the gap, I'd go to the bank facility, but I'd also loop in the CEO early rather than late, because a short-term cash decision can have relationship consequences with either the supplier or the customer that are worth a conversation before I act unilaterally.”

4. How do you approach budgeting and forecasting for a business with revenue that moves around a lot?

Why they ask

Budgeting and forecasting is a core task for this role, and volatile revenue is a common real-world complication that separates someone who's built a forecast model from someone who's just filled in a template.

How to structure your answer

Answer with a process explanation: how you build the base case, how you handle uncertainty, and how you keep the forecast useful as actuals come in.

Example answer

“I build the budget bottom-up from the drivers that actually move revenue, rather than just growing last year's number by a flat percentage, because that hides the volatility instead of planning for it. I'll run at least a base case and a downside case so the executive team can see what happens if the softer scenario plays out, and I make sure cash flow is forecast separately from the profit and loss budget, because a business can be profitable on paper and still run into a cash problem in a volatile revenue environment. Once we're into the year, I re-forecast on a rolling basis rather than waiting for the next annual cycle, so the numbers stay useful for decisions rather than becoming a historical document.”

5. Describe a time you identified a gap in internal controls. What did you do about it?

Why they ask

Risk and internal controls is one of the specialist skills for this role, and this question checks whether you take ownership of fixing problems rather than just flagging them.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, but weight it toward the action and result, since panels are mainly testing whether you actually closed the gap rather than just noticed it.

Example answer

“An external audit flagged that our payment approval process allowed one person to both raise and approve a payment above a certain threshold, which was a segregation of duties gap. I mapped out who had access to what in the system and worked with IT to split those permissions properly, then wrote a short procedure so new staff would understand the control without having to ask around. I made sure it was fixed and tested before the next audit cycle rather than leaving it as an open finding, because an unresolved control gap tends to get more attention the second time it's raised.”

6. How do you explain financial risk to executives who don't have a finance background?

Why they ask

Advising executives on financial strategy and risk is a core task of the role, and this checks whether you can translate technical detail into something a non-finance leader can actually act on.

How to structure your answer

Answer by describing your communication approach directly: what you cut out, what you lead with, and how you check they've understood before moving on.

Example answer

“I lead with the decision they actually need to make, not the mechanics behind the number, because that's what they came for. If I'm explaining a currency exposure, for example, I'll say what it means for this year's result in plain terms before I explain how we got there, and I use one chart rather than a page of figures wherever I can. I also ask a direct question back to check they've followed the point, because it's easy to nod along to a well-presented number without actually absorbing the risk behind it, and that's the gap that causes problems later.”