

Illustrator interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Illustrator interviews centre on your portfolio and how you actually work, not just what you can produce. Expect the panel to probe your process from brief to final artwork, how you handle feedback and revisions, and whether you can manage client relationships and deadlines as a freelancer or in-house artist.

- **Portfolio and technical review:** Questions about specific pieces in your portfolio: the brief, your software or media choices, and the decisions behind the final artwork.
- **Process:** Questions about how you move a project from concept sketch through revisions to delivery.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about handling difficult feedback, tight deadlines, or client disagreements.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement when a client goes quiet, a brief changes late, or scope creeps.
- **Client-facing and business:** Questions about pitching, pricing, and managing multiple client relationships, especially for freelance or agency-facing roles.

Interviews usually open with a walkthrough of your portfolio, moving into process and behavioural questions about how you handle briefs and feedback. A scenario question testing judgement under a deadline or client-management pressure often follows. Freelance or agency roles typically close with practical questions on pricing, availability, and how you find and retain clients.

1. Walk me through your portfolio and how you developed one piece from the original brief to the final artwork.

Why they ask

This lets the panel see your actual process rather than just the finished result, and checks you can talk through creative decisions clearly.

How to structure your answer

Walk through it chronologically: the brief and constraints, the concept sketches or thumbnails you produced, why you chose a particular direction, the media or software used for the final piece, and what changed along the way.

Example answer

"One piece I'd point to is an editorial illustration for a magazine feature. The brief asked for something that captured the tone of the article without being too literal, so I started with three quick concept sketches to give the art director options. Once a direction was approved, I moved into Procreate for the digital painting, working in layers so I could adjust colour and composition separately. The first draft came back with notes on the figure's pose, so I reworked that section and kept the rest of the composition, which saved time on the second round. The final file was delivered as layered artwork so the designer could adjust text placement around it."

2. Tell me about a time a client or art director wanted revisions you disagreed with creatively.

Why they ask

Illustrators regularly have to balance their own creative judgement against a client's brief and feedback, and panels want to see you can do this professionally.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the specific creative disagreement, the action you took to resolve it, and the result for the project and the relationship.

Example answer

"I was illustrating a children's book spread and the publisher wanted a character redesigned in a way I felt weakened the composition. Instead of pushing back outright, I put together two quick alternative sketches, one closer to their note and one that kept my original intent but addressed their underlying concern about readability. I explained the reasoning behind each. They chose a version close to my alternative, and the book went to print on schedule. It taught me to treat feedback as a problem to solve rather than an instruction to follow exactly."

3. How do you manage your time when you're working on several client projects with overlapping deadlines?

Why they ask

Time and deadline management is core to this role, especially for freelance or contract illustrators juggling multiple briefs at once.

How to structure your answer

Describe your actual system: how you plan, prioritise, and communicate with clients when things get tight, with a concrete example.

Example answer

"I block out project timelines as soon as a brief is confirmed, working backwards from the delivery date to set milestones for sketches, first draft, and revisions. If two projects overlap heavily, I flag realistic timeframes with both clients upfront rather than overpromising. On one occasion a revision request on one project ran longer than expected, so I let the other client know a day in advance rather than missing their deadline without warning. Being upfront early has kept client relationships solid even when schedules get tight."

4. A client has approved your concept sketches, but two weeks before the deadline they go quiet during the revision stage. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and how you protect a project timeline when a client isn't responsive, a common real-world scenario for illustrators.

How to structure your answer

Talk through your decision-making under the time pressure: what you'd do first, how you'd escalate if needed, and how you'd protect the deadline and the relationship.

Example answer

"I'd send a clear follow-up outlining exactly what I need from them and by when to keep the deadline achievable, rather than a vague check-in. If there's still no response after a reasonable window, I'd proceed with the artwork based on the last approved direction and feedback, noting clearly that further changes may affect the timeline. I'd also flag the delay to whoever manages the project on my end, so the deadline risk isn't a surprise. Keeping a paper trail of my attempts to get sign-off protects both the schedule and my working relationship with the client."

5. Which software or media do you use for concept sketching compared with finished artwork, and why?

Why they ask

This checks genuine familiarity with the tools of the trade, since illustrators move between traditional media and packages like Photoshop, Procreate, Illustrator, and CorelDRAW depending on the brief.

How to structure your answer

Give a direct technical comparison: what you use at each stage and the practical reason for the choice, not just a list of software names.

Example answer

"For concept sketches I usually work quickly in Procreate or on paper, because speed matters more than polish at that stage and I want to show a client several directions without over-investing in any one. Once a direction is approved, I move into Photoshop for painted illustration work or Illustrator when a brief needs cleaner vector shapes, such as for icon-style or editorial spot illustrations. For anything heading into a layout, I'll export files in a format InDesign or Figma can place directly, which saves back-and-forth with the designer."

6. How do you price your illustration work and pitch to new clients?

Why they ask

For freelance or contract-based illustration roles, panels want to know you understand the business side, not just the creative work.

How to structure your answer

Explain your approach in plain terms: how you scope a job, what you base pricing on, and how you find and approach potential clients.

Example answer

"I scope pricing based on usage rights, timeline, and complexity rather than a flat rate, since a piece for one-off editorial use is priced differently to something a client wants ongoing commercial rights to. When pitching, I lead with a small, relevant selection from my portfolio rather than sending my whole body of work, and I tailor the email to what I can see the client actually needs based on their brief or past projects. Repeat clients usually come from being reliable on deadlines and easy to work with during revisions, so I treat every project as a chance to build that relationship, not just deliver the one piece."