

ISO Auditor interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for ISO auditor roles usually combine technical knowledge checks with scenario-based questions and behavioural probes. Employers want to see that you understand the standards, can gather objective evidence, and can handle the client-facing side of auditing without losing your independence.

- **Technical:** Questions about ISO standards, audit principles, non-conformance classification and the audit process.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Situations where a client pressures you, evidence is unclear, or you need to make a call under time pressure.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of dealing with difficult stakeholders, tight schedules or challenging audit findings.
- **Process:** Walk-throughs of how you plan, conduct and report an audit from start to finish.
- **Client-facing:** How you manage resistance, explain findings and maintain a professional relationship without compromising the audit.
- **Regulatory and safety:** Awareness of WHS legislation, accreditation requirements and the role of JAS-ANZ or Exemplar Global.

Typically two stages. First a screening interview with HR or a recruiter covering your background and availability. Then a technical panel with a lead auditor or certification manager, often including a written or case study exercise. Some employers ask you to review a sample audit report or sit a short standards quiz. Final interviews may involve a regional manager and focus on client management and travel flexibility.

1. Walk me through how you would plan and conduct an ISO 9001 surveillance audit for a manufacturing client.

Why they ask

This tests your technical knowledge and your ability to follow a structured audit process from start to finish.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through. Start with pre-audit preparation (reviewing the previous audit report, scope and documentation), then the opening meeting, site tour, interviews and sampling of records. Finish with how you document findings, hold the closing meeting and issue the report.

Example answer

"First I would review the previous audit report and any open corrective actions, then confirm the scope and audit criteria with the client. I would prepare a checklist based on ISO 9001 clauses and the client's own procedures. On site, I would hold an opening meeting to explain the purpose and process. I would tour the facility to see operations in practice, then interview staff at different levels and sample records such as production logs, calibration certificates and training records. I would look for evidence that the management system is implemented effectively, not just documented. Any gaps I find I would note as non-conformances or observations, with objective evidence. At the closing meeting I would present the findings clearly and agree on timeframes for corrective action. Finally I would write the audit report and schedule a follow-up if needed."

2. You are auditing a client and you find a non-conformance that could affect their certification. The client pressures you to downgrade it to an

observation. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Assesses your integrity, independence and ability to withstand pressure while maintaining a professional relationship.

How to structure your answer

Use a judgement under pressure structure: acknowledge the client's concern, explain the standard and your obligation, hold your position, and offer a constructive path forward such as discussing the evidence or escalating through proper channels.

Example answer

"I would listen to the client's concern and explain why the finding was raised, pointing to the specific clause and the evidence I collected. I would make clear that I cannot change a non-conformance to an observation just because it is uncomfortable; my role is to report objectively against the standard. I would offer to walk through the evidence with them so they understand the basis for the finding. If they still disagreed, I would explain the appeals process through the certification body and document the conversation. I would also remind them that addressing the issue properly will strengthen their system and help them maintain certification in the long run."

3. Tell me about a time you had to deliver difficult feedback to a client about a non-conformance.

Why they ask

Behavioural question to see how you handle sensitive conversations and whether you can be firm but constructive.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Keep the situation brief, focus on your actions and the outcome.

Example answer

"At a previous certification body, I was auditing a construction client for ISO 45001 and found that incident reports were not being reviewed by management as required. The safety manager was defensive and said they were too busy. I sat down with him and explained the specific clause and the risk: without management review, the same incidents could recur. I offered to show him a simple tracking method that other clients used. He agreed to implement it, and at the follow-up visit the reviews were up to date. The client passed their recertification and later told me the change had improved their safety culture."

4. How do you ensure your audit findings are objective and evidence-based?

Why they ask

Tests your understanding of audit principles and how you avoid bias or personal opinion.

How to structure your answer

Give a methodical explanation: use of checklists, sampling, triangulation of evidence, and documentation. Mention AS/NZS ISO 19011 principles.

Example answer

"I rely on the audit criteria and standard requirements, not on personal preference. I use checklists and audit protocols to keep the scope consistent, and I sample records and interview staff to gather evidence from multiple sources. Before I write a finding, I ask myself whether I can point to a specific document, observation or statement that supports it. I record the evidence in my working papers so another auditor could review it. I also follow the principles in AS/NZS ISO 19011, particularly independence and evidence-based approach. If something is unclear, I ask follow-up questions rather than assuming."

5. How would you handle a situation where a client's staff are resistant to being interviewed during an audit?

Why they ask

Client-facing question to see your interpersonal skills and how you keep an audit on track without confrontation.

How to structure your answer

Use a de-escalation and communication structure: stay calm, explain the purpose, build rapport, involve a manager if needed, and document any limitations.

Example answer

"I would stay calm and explain that interviews are a normal part of the audit and help me verify how the system works in practice. I would reassure them that I am not there to blame individuals, but to check the system. If someone was still reluctant, I would ask their manager to help arrange a short meeting, or I would rely more on document review and observation. I would note any limitations in the audit report, because if I cannot gather enough evidence, that affects the audit conclusion. Most people become more cooperative once they understand the process."

6. What is the difference between a major and a minor non-conformance, and how do you decide which to raise?

Why they ask

Technical standards question to check your knowledge of classification and its impact on certification.

How to structure your answer

Define each type, give examples, and explain your decision criteria based on risk, systemic failure and the standard's requirements.

Example answer

"A major non-conformance is a failure that affects the capability of the management system to achieve its intended results, or a significant breakdown of a required process. For example, if a manufacturer has no calibration records for measuring equipment used in final inspection, that is major because it undermines product conformity. A minor non-conformance is an isolated lapse that does not indicate a systemic failure, such as a single training record missing a signature. I decide based on the evidence: how widespread the issue is, whether it points to a breakdown in a core process, and whether it could lead to product or service failure. I also consider the standard's clauses and any accreditation body guidance. I document the rationale so the decision is transparent."