

Lifeguard interview questions

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What to expect

Lifeguard interviews test judgement under pressure as much as technical knowledge. Panels want to see that a candidate can maintain vigilance for long stretches, act decisively in an emergency, and still handle the public calmly when enforcing rules. Expect a mix of scenario questions, direct process checks, and a practical or in-water assessment alongside the interview.

- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical emergencies or competing incidents used to test prioritisation and decision-making under time pressure.
- **Process:** Direct questions about scanning technique, rescue sequence, and equipment checks to confirm the candidate knows the mechanics of the role.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about real rescues, difficult patrons, or working in a team, usually answered with STAR.
- **Safety/compliance:** Questions on maintaining certifications, equipment checks, and following facility safety procedures and logs.
- **Client-facing:** Questions on managing the public, including enforcing rules and de-escalating conflict without appearing hostile.

Most lifeguard interviews open with qualification and certification checks, move into scenario and behavioural questions, and often finish with a practical swim test or in-water rescue demonstration, sometimes on a separate day. Panels are usually the facility's aquatics manager or duty manager, occasionally with a senior lifeguard present.

1. Talk me through how you scan a pool or beach area during a shift.

Why they ask

Confirms the candidate actually uses a structured scanning method rather than passive watching, which is the core skill of the job.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: describe the scanning pattern, timing, blind spots to watch for, and how attention shifts between zones and individuals.

Example answer

"I break my zone into sections and scan in a steady 10-second sweep, moving from the shallow end through to the deep end and back, paying extra attention to areas near ladders, drop-offs and where weak swimmers tend to gather. I check for behaviour that signals distress, like vertical bobbing or a swimmer going quiet, rather than just watching for splashing. Every 10 to 20 minutes I also do a full-body posture check on myself so I don't tunnel-vision on one part of the pool."

2. You're patrolling a busy pool and see one swimmer struggling in the deep end while another child is climbing over a safety barrier near the plant room. What do you do?

Why they ask

Tests prioritisation and risk judgement when two hazards appear at once, a realistic scenario in a crowded facility.

How to structure your answer

Judgement-under-pressure: state the immediate priority, justify it against the level of risk, then explain how the second issue gets managed without abandoning the first.

Example answer

"The swimmer in distress is the immediate drowning risk, so that's my priority. I'd blow my whistle and signal for backup or radio another lifeguard to deal with the barrier issue while I enter the water for the rescue. If no backup is available, I'd still go to the swimmer first because the barrier situation, while dangerous, doesn't have the same immediate risk of drowning. Once the rescue is secured, I'd address the barrier and file an incident report on both."

3. Tell me about a time you had to perform a rescue or respond to a medical emergency.

Why they ask

Looks for concrete evidence the candidate has actually executed a rescue or emergency response, not just trained for one.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action taken, result, including how the person was afterwards and what was logged.

Example answer

"During a busy public swim session, I noticed a swimmer stop moving and start sinking near the middle of the pool. I blew my whistle, entered the water, and brought them to the surface using a rescue tube, then got them to the pool edge. They were conscious but had swallowed water, so I kept them calm, checked their breathing, and monitored them until the duty manager arrived. I logged the incident with time, description and outcome straight after, and the swimmer was fine after a short rest."

4. How do you handle a patron who repeatedly ignores water safety rules after being warned?

Why they ask

Checks the candidate can enforce authority firmly without escalating conflict, a common friction point with the public.

How to structure your answer

Behavioural with a de-escalation angle: describe the approach, the tone used, and the fallback if the behaviour continues.

Example answer

"I start by explaining the rule and the specific risk it's there to prevent, not just quoting the rule itself, because people often comply once they understand why it matters. If they ignore a second warning, I'm firmer and direct, and I'll involve the duty manager if needed rather than getting into an argument on the pool deck. Ultimately safety comes before being liked, but staying calm and clear usually gets compliance without a scene."

5. What's your routine for checking rescue equipment and the AED before a shift?

Why they ask

Confirms the candidate treats equipment checks as a non-negotiable safety step, not an afterthought.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: list what gets checked, how often, and what happens if something is faulty or missing.

Example answer

"At the start of every shift I check the rescue tube and buoys are in their designated spots and undamaged, confirm the first aid kit is stocked, and check the AED's indicator light and battery status. If anything is missing or faulty, I report it to the duty manager immediately and note it in the equipment"

log before starting my patrol, because I won't rely on gear I haven't personally verified."

6. Describe a time you had to coordinate with paramedics or other emergency services during an incident.

Why they ask

Tests communication skills and the ability to hand over accurate information under pressure, which affects response time.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action including specific information relayed, and the result of the coordination.

Example answer

"After a swimmer hit their head on the pool edge and lost consciousness briefly, I called triple zero while a colleague kept the area clear. I gave the operator the patient's condition, breathing status and our exact location within the facility, then had a colleague meet the ambulance at the entrance to guide them straight to the scene. That handover meant paramedics reached the patient within a couple of minutes of arriving on site."