

Music Therapist interview questions

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What to expect

Music therapy interviews combine clinical knowledge, practical judgement, and interpersonal skills. Employers want to understand how you assess clients, design sessions, and work within a team, as well as how you handle challenging situations and maintain professional standards.

- **Clinical knowledge:** Questions about assessment methods, therapeutic techniques, and goal setting for different client groups.
- **Behavioural:** Questions asking for examples of how you have engaged clients, worked in a team, or handled a difficult situation.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical client situations that test your clinical judgement, safety awareness, and ability to adapt in the moment.
- **Process:** Questions about how you plan, facilitate, and evaluate a music therapy session from start to finish.
- **Professional practice:** Questions about documentation, supervision, instrument maintenance, and ethical boundaries.

Interviews often begin with a phone or video screen, followed by a panel interview with a clinical manager and a multidisciplinary team member. You may be asked to walk through a session plan or respond to a client scenario. Some employers include a short practical demonstration or a discussion of your musicianship and how you use it therapeutically.

1. How do you assess a new client's functional needs and strengths through musical and non-musical methods?

Why they ask

This question assesses your clinical assessment skills and your understanding of the music therapy process from referral to goal setting.

How to structure your answer

Define your assessment approach, describe the methods you use, and give an example of how you apply findings to goal setting.

Example answer

"I start with a referral and file review, then use a combination of non-musical observation and musical experiences like instrument playing or singing to gauge responses. I look at communication, motor skills, emotional regulation, and social interaction. For instance, with a client who had a stroke, I observed their ability to grasp a mallet and follow rhythm, and their vocalisations. I documented these and collaborated with the speech pathologist to set goals around breath support and expressive language."

2. Tell me about a time you worked with a client who was initially resistant to music therapy. How did you engage them?

Why they ask

This behavioural question explores your empathy, adaptability, and client-centred approach when faced with resistance.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the task, the action you took, and the result.

Example answer

"In an aged care setting, a resident refused to join group sessions, saying he wasn't musical. I started by bringing a small percussion instrument to his room and playing familiar songs quietly, not asking him to participate. Over several visits, he began tapping his foot, then joined in with a shaker. Eventually he attended a group session and shared stories about songs from his youth. His daughter later told me he seemed more engaged and less isolated."

3. You are facilitating a group session and one client becomes agitated and disruptive. How do you respond?

Why they ask

This scenario tests your safety awareness, de-escalation skills, and clinical judgement under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Assess the situation, ensure safety, adapt the intervention, and follow up with documentation and team communication.

Example answer

"I would first stay calm and use a quiet, steady voice. I might lower the music or switch to a familiar, calming song. I would check if the client needs a break or has an unmet need like pain or discomfort. If agitation continues, I would gently offer to step outside with a support worker. After the session, I would document the incident and discuss with the team to review triggers and adjust future sessions."

4. Walk me through how you plan and facilitate a music therapy session for a client with dementia.

Why they ask

This process question assesses your session design, goal orientation, and practical skills with a specific client group.

How to structure your answer

Outline your goal setting, session structure, implementation, and evaluation steps.

Example answer

"I start by reviewing the care plan and any notes from the team. Goals might include reducing anxiety and increasing social interaction. I choose songs from the client's era, use a simple structure: greeting song, a familiar singalong, an instrument activity, and a goodbye song. I watch for responses and adapt tempo or volume. Afterward, I document engagement and share observations with the nursing team."

5. How do you collaborate with multidisciplinary teams and document client progress?

Why they ask

This question looks at your communication, documentation practices, and ability to work as part of a care team.

How to structure your answer

Describe your communication channels, documentation practices, and give an example of collaboration.

Example answer

"I attend care plan meetings and use electronic health records to write session notes that are clear and goal-focused. I make sure to use language that other disciplines understand, avoiding music jargon. For example, I worked with an occupational therapist on a client's fine motor goals; we agreed I would use instrument holding to practise grasp, and I would report back on progress. That helped us track small improvements together."

6. How do you maintain instruments and resources, and what does professional supervision mean to you?

Why they ask

This question assesses your hygiene practices, infection control, self-care, and commitment to reflective practice.

How to structure your answer

Explain your maintenance routine, your approach to supervision, and why they matter for safe and effective practice.

Example answer

"I clean instruments after each session with appropriate wipes, and I have a schedule for deeper cleaning. I keep adaptive instruments in good repair so clients can use them safely. Supervision is essential for me to reflect on challenging cases and manage emotional load. I meet monthly with a senior music therapist to discuss client work and my own professional development. This helps me stay grounded and provide better care."