

Nail Technician interview questions

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

What to expect

Nail technician interviews are usually part conversation and part practical demonstration. Employers want to see how you handle clients, how seriously you take hygiene, and whether your hands are as good as your answers.

- **Technical and practical skills:** Questions about prep, product choice, shaping and enhancement application, often followed by a hands-on trial on a model or the interviewer themselves.
- **Hygiene and infection control:** Sterilisation routines, autoclave use, single-use items, and how you handle a client with a possible nail or skin condition.
- **Client-facing and consultation:** How you take a brief, manage expectations, handle colour or shape disagreements, and recommend aftercare and retail products.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of difficult clients, busy periods, mistakes and how you fixed them.
- **Salon operations:** Booking systems, rebooking clients, managing your column, stock, and whether you are comfortable with social media or front desk work.

Expect a short phone or in-person screen first, covering your experience, availability and whether you have a client base to bring. The second stage is typically a practical trial in the salon, often half a day, where you work on a model or real clients while the owner or senior technician watches your prep, timing and hygiene. There is usually a paid trial shift before an offer, and questions about pay rates, commissions and whether you would work as an employee or as a contractor with your own ABN.

1. Walk me through how you set up and complete a gel manicure, from the client sitting down to them leaving.

Why they ask

This is the core technical question. The interviewer is checking your prep, your timing, and whether hygiene is built into your routine rather than added on at the end.

How to structure your answer

Use a chronological walk-through. Cover consultation and nail assessment, hand washing for you and the client, sanitising the work surface, tool selection and sterilisation status, cuticle work, shaping, plate prep and dehydration, base, colour and top coat, curing, aftercare advice, and rebooking. Name your time per step so they can see you understand a column.

Example answer

"I start by checking the client's nails and asking what they want and whether anything has changed since last time, like a new medication or a nail that has been sore. We both wash or sanitise hands, and I sanitise the table and lay out a fresh towel. My tools are either freshly sterilised from the autoclave or single-use, and I keep a separate dish for anything used on a client with a known condition. I do the cuticle work and shaping first with hand tools, then switch to the e-file only if the client wants a smoother finish. I buff the plate lightly, dehydrate it, and go in with a bond coat, two colour coats and a top coat, curing each as I go. Before they leave I explain how to look after the set, what oil to use, and I book their next appointment so they are not trying to get in at short notice."

2. Tell me about a time a client was unhappy with their nails. What did you do?

Why they ask

Every technician has a set that lifts, chips or does not match what the client pictured. They want to know you own the problem and keep the client.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the situation and what the client wanted, describe what you did on the day and afterwards, then the result, including whether the client came back.

Example answer

"A regular client asked for a short almond shape and I took it a bit shorter than she wanted on one hand. She did not say anything at the time but messaged the salon that evening. I called her the next morning, apologised without making excuses, and offered to reshape the set free of charge at a time that suited her. When she came in I reshaped both hands to match, checked the length against a photo she brought, and talked through how I would handle the shape next time so we were both clear before I started. She stayed with me and started booking her next appointment before she left, and I now confirm shape and length with a photo before I pick up a file."

3. A client sits down with redness and swelling around one nail and asks for a full acrylic set. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This is a safety and judgement question. The wrong answer, like covering it up or working over it, ends the interview.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a sequence of decisions under pressure. Identify what you are seeing, explain what you will and will not do, tell the client clearly, refer them on, and record it.

Example answer

"I would stop before starting anything. Redness and swelling around the nail can point to an infection or an allergic reaction, and applying product over it would trap it and make things worse. I would explain to the client that I cannot do the set today because their nail needs to be looked at first, and suggest they see a pharmacist or their GP. I would offer to do a manicure on the other hand, or book them in for a future date, so they are not walking out with nothing. I would note what I saw in their client record, sterilise or dispose of anything that touched the area, and if it looked like a reaction to product I had used previously, I would flag that so we can review the brand."

4. What does your sterilisation routine look like between clients, and how do you know it has been done properly?

Why they ask

Hygiene is the part of the job that can close a salon down. Interviewers want specifics, not a general claim that you are clean.

How to structure your answer

Describe the sequence, then the evidence. Walk through the full loop: used items to contaminated area, cleaning, autoclave cycle, storage, and the records that back it up.

Example answer

"Anything that has touched a client goes straight into the contaminated tray, never back on the trolley. Metal tools get washed to remove product residue, dried, then bagged and run through the autoclave. I check the cycle indicator and log the date, cycle and the tools in the batch, so if anyone asks later I can show exactly what was sterilised and when. Files, buffers and anything porous are single-use and go in the bin. Freshly sterilised tools stay in their sealed pouch or covered tray until the client is seated. Table surfaces and the hand basin get wiped between every client, and I do a proper clean of the whole station at the end of the day."

5. You are running behind and your next client is already waiting. How do you manage it?

Why they ask

Salons run to the minute and a technician who cannot manage their column costs the business bookings. This tests composure and honesty.

How to structure your answer

Talk through your judgement call in the moment: acknowledge the client, give a realistic timeframe, decide what to trim, and protect the service you are still delivering.

Example answer

"I would go out and speak to the waiting client straight away rather than letting them sit there guessing. I would give them a realistic time, not an optimistic one, and apologise once. If the delay came from something outside my control, like a colour not curing properly or a client turning up late, I would say so briefly without blaming anyone. I would look at what I could safely trim from the current service, maybe skip nail art that was optional, and keep the consultation and prep short but complete, because that is where quality comes from. If the delay would push into another booking, I would ask the front desk to call the next client and let them know, and I would stay back if the salon needed it."

6. How do you recommend aftercare products or retail to a client without it feeling pushy?

Why they ask

Retail and rebooking are part of how salons make money, and employers want someone who can recommend naturally without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Explain your consultative approach, then give a concrete example of how you framed a recommendation and what happened.

Example answer

"I only recommend something if it directly solves a problem the client has mentioned or that I can see. If someone's cuticles are dry and their gel is lifting at the edges, I will show them the cuticle oil I have already used on them during the appointment and explain when to apply it, morning and night, and why it makes the set last longer. I hand them the bottle, let them read it, and tell them the price. If they say no, I move on and mention it again another time. That approach has worked better for me than a script, because clients come back and ask for the oil by name, and regulars often pick up a file or a top coat while they are at the desk paying."