Optical Mechanic interview questions

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

What to expect

Optical Mechanic interviews focus on your practical skills with lens surfacing, edging and frame adjustment, as well as your attention to detail and ability to work to deadlines in a laboratory or retail optical setting.

- **Technical:** Questions about your hands-on experience with lens grinding, edging, lensmeters and frame warmers.
- **Process:** Walk-throughs of how you set up and complete a lens job from prescription to finished glasses.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of catching errors, managing time and working with others.
- **Scenario:** How you would handle equipment faults, difficult frames or urgent jobs.
- **Safety:** Your approach to WHS and housekeeping in an optical laboratory.

Interviews usually start with a phone or video screen with a recruiter or lab manager, then move to an in-person interview at the laboratory or store. You may be asked to complete a practical test, such as edging a lens or adjusting a frame, and to talk through your process while you work.

1. Walk me through your process for surfacing and edging a prescription lens from start to finish.

Why they ask

To see if you understand the full workflow and can follow specifications accurately.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: start with the prescription, then lens selection, surfacing, edging, fitting and final checks.

Example answer

“First, I review the prescription and frame specifications. I select the correct lens blank and enter the job details into the laboratory software. Then I set up the surfacing equipment, grind and polish the lens to the required power, and verify it on the lensmeter. Next, I use the automated edger to cut the lens to the frame shape, checking the bevel and size against the frame. After edging, I fit the lens into the frame, check the optical centre and pupil distance, and make any adjustments with the frame warmer. Finally, I clean the lens, do a final inspection and pass the job to quality control or the customer.”

2. Tell me about a time you caught a mistake in a lens job before it went out.

Why they ask

To assess your attention to detail and how you handle quality issues.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

“In my last lab, I was edging a pair of progressive lenses for a customer. When I checked the lensmeter reading before fitting, I noticed the axis was off by a few degrees. I stopped the job, rechecked the prescription and found that the wrong blank had been loaded for one lens. I flagged it to my supervisor, reordered the correct blank and re-cut the lens. The customer received their glasses on time and without any issues. I always verify each lens on the lensmeter before edging because catching a mistake early saves time and keeps customers happy.”

3. What would you do if the automated edger started producing lenses with incorrect bevels?

Why they ask

To see how you troubleshoot equipment faults and keep production going.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: stop, assess, troubleshoot, escalate, document.

Example answer

“I would stop the edger immediately to prevent more lenses being ruined. I would check the last few lenses and see if the bevel problem is consistent or occasional. I would inspect the edger's settings, the grinding wheel and the chuck for wear or debris, and clean or adjust as needed. If I couldn't fix it quickly, I would notify my supervisor and the maintenance team, and use a backup edger if available. I would document the fault and any lenses affected so we could rework them. Safety and quality come first, so I would not keep running a faulty machine.”

4. How do you ensure you meet turnaround times when multiple jobs are due at once?

Why they ask

To assess your time management and ability to prioritise in a busy lab.

How to structure your answer

Process: prioritise, batch similar jobs, communicate, monitor progress.

Example answer

“I start by checking the due times and prioritising jobs that are urgent or for customers who are waiting. I batch similar jobs together, for example, all the single-vision lenses that need edging, to save setup time. I keep my workstation organised so I can move quickly between tasks. I also communicate with the team and the front counter if a job might be delayed, so expectations are managed. Throughout the day, I check my progress against the schedule and adjust as needed. That way I keep jobs moving and meet deadlines.”

5. Describe your experience with lensmeters and frame warmers.

Why they ask

To confirm your technical comfort with essential optical tools.

How to structure your answer

Technical: describe the tool, how you use it, maintenance.

Example answer

“I use a lensmeter, also called a vertometer, to verify the power, axis and optical centre of every lens before and after edging. I calibrate it regularly and keep the lens rest clean. For frame warmers, I use them to soften plastic frames so I can adjust the bridge, temples or end pieces without cracking the material. I always heat the frame evenly and test the fit gently. I also maintain the frame warmer by cleaning the beads and checking the temperature. These tools are essential for getting a comfortable, accurate fit.”

6. What's your approach to maintaining a safe and clean optical laboratory?

Why they ask

To check your commitment to WHS and good housekeeping.

How to structure your answer

Safety: identify hazards, follow procedures, keep clean, report issues.

Example answer

“I follow WHS procedures for the lab, including wearing safety glasses when grinding or edging, and keeping the workspace clear of clutter. I clean the equipment after each use, especially the edger and surfacing machines, to prevent dust and debris build-up. I store chemicals and lens blanks correctly and dispose of waste in the right bins. I also check that guards and emergency stops are working, and I report any hazards or equipment faults straight away. A clean and safe lab is more efficient and produces better quality work.”