

Photo Lab Technician interview questions

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What to expect

Photo Lab Technician interviews are practical and customer-focused. Employers want to know you can run the machines without waste, spot colour problems before a job leaves the bench, and handle a queue of orders with a calm manner.

- **Technical:** Checks your knowledge of film processing, minilab operation, colour correction and printer calibration.
- **Safety and chemical handling:** Covers safe handling of photochemicals, darkroom ventilation, SDS and WHS obligations.
- **Client-facing:** Tests how you explain print quality, colour differences and turnaround times to customers.
- **Process and workflow:** Looks at how you organise a queue of orders, manage inventory and keep jobs moving.
- **Scenario:** Presents a fault or a difficult order and asks you to think through the fix under pressure.
- **Behavioural:** Asks for examples of past work with tight deadlines, attention to detail or customer service.

Usually a short interview with the lab manager or owner, then a walk-through of the lab. You might be asked to colour correct a test file, mount a print or talk through a film processing run. Some employers set a small practical task at the printer or in the darkroom.

1. Walk me through how you would process a roll of C-41 film from start to finish.

Why they ask

This checks whether you understand the chemistry, timing and quality checks, not just how to press a button.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step walk-through: film handling, chemical temperatures, timing, drying, scanning and checking density and colour before printing.

Example answer

"First I check the film is 35mm or 120 and note any push or pull request. I load the tank in the darkroom or use the minilab's film feeder, then run the developer, bleach, fix and wash steps at the right temperature. I check the chemical levels and top up the developer if the replenishment rate is due. After drying, I cut the negatives, sleeve them and scan a test strip to check density and colour. If the scan looks flat or has a colour cast, I adjust the scanner profile before I print the index sheet."

2. What steps do you take to handle photochemicals safely and keep the darkroom compliant?

Why they ask

Photo labs use developer, bleach and fixer, so employers need to know you can work safely and follow WHS rules.

How to structure your answer

A safety walk-through: hazard identification, controls, documentation and what you do in a spill.

Example answer

"I always check the safety data sheets before I decant or mix anything. I wear gloves and eye protection when handling developer, bleach and fixer, and I keep the darkroom ventilated. I label every container and never mix chemicals in an unmarked bottle. I check the silver recovery unit and the pH of the fixer, and I log the replenishment so the next person knows what's been done. If there's a spill, I follow the spill kit procedure and report it to the supervisor."

3. A customer says their prints look too dark compared to their phone screen. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This is a common counter conversation and shows how you balance customer expectations with technical reality.

How to structure your answer

A client-facing judgement structure: listen, diagnose, explain, offer a fix, and follow up.

Example answer

"I'd ask to see the phone and the print side by side, then check if the phone screen brightness is turned up. I'd explain that screens are backlit and prints rely on reflected light, so some difference is normal. Then I'd offer to reprint one image with a slight density adjustment, show them the difference, and if they're happy, reprint the set. If it's a colour cast rather than density, I'd check the printer profile and the paper type before running the job again."

4. Tell me about a time you had to manage a large batch of orders with a tight deadline.

Why they ask

Labs get busy around holidays and events, so employers want to see how you organise work under pressure.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"Before Christmas, the lab took in a big run of photo books and canvas prints from a local school. The orders all needed to be ready by the last day of term. I sorted the jobs by paper type and finish so I could group the printing and avoid constant setup changes. I checked each book's spine and trim before moving it to the next stage, and I kept the counter staff updated on which orders were ready for pickup. We got the whole batch finished by the deadline and the school came back the next year."

5. You notice the minilab printer is leaving a faint line on every print. What do you do?

Why they ask

Fault-finding on the spot shows whether you can protect print quality without wasting paper or chemistry.

How to structure your answer

A scenario structure: stop, diagnose, fix, test, escalate if needed.

Example answer

"I'd stop the current job and pull the last few prints to see if the line is on every image or just one paper size. I'd check the print head for dust or a clog and run a nozzle check. If that doesn't clear it, I'd clean the rollers and check the paper path for a scratch. I'd run a test print on scrap paper before restarting the customer's job. If the line persists, I'd log the fault and call the service technician rather than keep printing bad copies."

6. Give me an example of a time you caught a mistake that would have affected a customer's order.

Why they ask

Attention to detail is the core skill in a photo lab, and this question looks for proof that you check your own work.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A customer brought in a USB stick with family photos for a large print. When I opened the files, I saw two images were only 72 dpi and would print blurry at the size they wanted. I called the customer and explained the issue, then suggested a smaller print size for those two or a different crop that would work. They chose the smaller size and were happy with the result. It saved a reprint and kept the order on time."