

Photography Assistant interview questions

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What to expect

Photography assistant interviews usually mix a practical conversation about kit and lighting with questions about how you behave on a busy set. Employers want to know you are calm, organised and safe, and that you can read a room without being asked.

- **Technical equipment and lighting:** Questions about camera settings, light placement, modifiers and troubleshooting gear.
- **Process and workflow:** Questions about file backup, card rotation, tethered capture and studio preparation.
- **Behavioural and reliability:** Questions that ask for examples of when you noticed a problem, stayed late or stayed calm.
- **Scenario and judgement under pressure:** Questions about last-minute changes, tight schedules and competing requests.
- **Client and crew communication:** Questions about working with clients, models and freelancers on set.
- **Safety and logistics:** Questions about location kits, cables, sandbags, weather and safe studio practice.

The first conversation is often a short phone or in-person chat about your portfolio, the gear you know and your availability. If you progress, you may be asked to a studio or location walkthrough, then a trial assist day where you set up lights, pack down and manage files under real time pressure. Some employers ask for references from photographers you have assisted before.

1. Walk me through how you would set up and test a two-light portrait setup in the studio.

Why they ask

This tests your technical lighting knowledge and whether you can work from a brief without hand-holding.

How to structure your answer

A clear step-by-step walk-through: power and safety first, then light placement and modifiers, then camera settings and test frames, then a final check against the brief.

Example answer

"I would start by checking the studio power, taping down any cables and making sure the stands are weighted and out of walkways. I would position the key light first, usually a Profoto head with a softbox at about 45 degrees to the subject, then set the fill or reflector on the opposite side to control the shadow. Once the lights are on, I would meter the key and fill, set the camera to a safe shutter speed and sync speed, and take a few test frames. I would check the histogram and the catchlights, adjust the power or modifier until the look matched the brief, and then confirm with the photographer before the subject stepped in."

2. Tell me about a time you noticed a problem with a shoot setup before the photographer did.

Why they ask

This looks for proactive attention to detail and whether you act without creating drama on set.

How to structure your answer

STAR: the situation, the task, the action you took, and the result for the shoot.

Example answer

"On a product shoot for a small retail client, I was setting up the backdrop when I noticed a crease that was catching the edge of the frame. The photographer was still talking through the shot list with the client, so I did not interrupt. I re-hung the backdrop, taped the lower edge and ran a test frame on the tethered screen. When the photographer turned around, I showed the frame and explained what I had changed. The shoot started on time and we did not have to stop later to fix the background."

3. A client asks for a backdrop change and an extra lighting look with ten minutes left before the next booking. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and how you balance a client request against a hard deadline.

How to structure your answer

A judgement under pressure structure: acknowledge the request, assess the time and the next booking, propose the most realistic option, and keep the photographer and client informed.

Example answer

"I would first check the clock and the next booking, then tell the photographer quietly what is possible. If we have ten minutes, I would suggest one quick change, maybe a seamless paper swap, rather than a full lighting rebuild. I would start moving the backdrop immediately, keep the client comfortable by explaining the plan, and pack down the previous setup as we go. If the next booking arrives, I would make sure the studio is safe and the client knows what is happening, then reset properly once the room is free."

4. How do you manage file backup and naming during a shoot when cards are filling up and the photographer is shooting tethered?

Why they ask

This checks your digital workflow and whether you understand that losing files is worse than missing a shot.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step process answer that covers card rotation, tethering, backups and naming conventions.

Example answer

"Before the shoot I set up a folder structure on the laptop and a backup drive, with a naming convention that includes the client, date and card number. During the shoot, every card that comes out of the camera goes straight to the backup drive and a second drive, then the card is formatted only after both copies are verified. If the photographer is tethered, I keep an eye on the capture folder, check that files are landing, and rename or move them into the right subfolder at natural breaks. If a card gets low, I swap it early rather than waiting for it to fill, so we never risk losing the last few frames."

5. Describe how you would prepare a location kit for an outdoor editorial shoot, including what you check before leaving the studio.

Why they ask

This tests logistics, safety and whether you can anticipate what a location will throw at you.

How to structure your answer

A checklist walk-through, grouped by power, lighting, camera, weather and safety.

Example answer

"I would start with the shot list and talk to the photographer about the location, the time of day and the look. I would pack the camera bodies, lenses, batteries, cards and a backup body, then lighting that

suits the location, usually battery-powered Profoto heads, stands, sandbags and modifiers. I would check the weather forecast and pack rain covers, gaffer tape, a reflector, a multi-tool and a first aid kit. Before leaving, I would test every light and trigger, confirm the batteries are charged, and make sure the cases are packed so nothing heavy can move around in transit."

6. How would you handle a model or crew member who is running late and the client is on set?

Why they ask

This looks at client-facing composure and whether you can solve a problem without blaming anyone.

How to structure your answer

A calm communication structure: stay with the client, gather facts, offer a clear next step, and avoid blaming anyone.

Example answer

"I would keep the client comfortable first, offer them a drink and let them know we are aware of the time. I would quietly check my phone for messages from the model or crew member and find out how far away they are. If there is a delay, I would talk to the photographer about what we can shoot in the meantime, maybe detail shots or a lighting setup that does not need the model. I would not say anything negative about the person who is late, and once they arrive I would help them settle in quickly so the shoot can move on without more fuss."