

Production Planner interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for Production Planner roles focus on how candidates build and adjust schedules under real constraints: limited capacity, late materials, and competing priorities from sales and operations. Expect a mix of walk-through process questions, past-experience behavioural questions, and at least one scenario testing judgement when a schedule has to change fast.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to explain, step by step, how you'd build or maintain a production schedule.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about specific past situations, particularly handling disruptions like breakdowns, delays or urgent orders.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing how you'd prioritise and communicate when the schedule is under pressure.
- **Technical:** Questions on the ERP, MES or scheduling software you've used and how you applied it.
- **Stakeholder-focused:** Questions on managing competing demands from sales, procurement and the shop floor.

Most interviews open with a few background questions about your current or most recent planning role, move into a detailed process or technical question to check practical knowledge, then use one or two behavioural or scenario questions to see how you handle pressure and conflicting demands. They typically close with questions about the systems and reporting tools you've used and give you time to ask about the plant's production setup.

1. Walk me through how you'd put together a production schedule for the coming week.

Why they ask

This checks whether you understand the inputs a real schedule depends on and can explain your process clearly, not just name software.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step walkthrough: start with the inputs you'd gather, describe how you sequence and allocate them, then explain how you check and communicate the final plan.

Example answer

"I'd start by pulling demand forecasts and open sales orders from the ERP system, then check raw material availability and any known constraints, like a machine due for maintenance. I'd sequence jobs to minimise changeover time and match labour rostered on each shift, then cross-check the draft against procurement's delivery dates for key components. Once I'm confident it's workable, I'd share it with shop-floor supervisors for a sanity check before locking it in and flagging any risks, like a tight material delivery window, so they're not a surprise later in the week."

2. Tell me about a time a schedule you'd built had to change because of a breakdown or supply delay.

Why they ask

Disruption handling is close to daily work for a planner, so the interviewer wants a concrete example of how you reacted and who you involved.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the situation and the disruption, your task, the specific actions you took to re-plan, and the result once the change was implemented.

Example answer

"A key press went down mid-shift with three days of orders still queued behind it. My task was to keep as many customer delivery dates on track as possible without overloading the remaining lines. I re-sequenced the unaffected jobs to fill the gap, moved a lower-priority order onto a machine with spare capacity, and gave procurement a revised timeline so they could adjust an incoming delivery. The result was that only one order shipped a day late, and I'd flagged that to sales in advance so it wasn't a surprise to the customer."

3. An urgent order comes in that would mean bumping two other confirmed orders. How do you decide what to do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under competing pressures, which is a core part of the role when priorities from sales and operations clash.

How to structure your answer

Judgement-under-pressure structure: state what information you'd gather first, the trade-offs you'd weigh, who you'd consult, and the decision you'd land on.

Example answer

"First I'd check the urgent order's real deadline and margin against the two confirmed orders, including whether either has any flexibility already built in. I'd talk to sales to understand how firm the urgent request actually is and to production to see if there's spare capacity elsewhere rather than a straight swap. If bumping is unavoidable, I'd choose the order with the most schedule slack, update the customer-facing team immediately, and document the change so it's clear why the decision was made."

4. Which ERP or scheduling systems have you used, and how did you use them for capacity planning?

Why they ask

Planners are expected to be hands-on with systems like SAP, Oracle or dedicated APS tools, so this checks practical fluency, not just familiarity.

How to structure your answer

Technical answer: name the systems, describe a specific feature or module you used, and give a concrete example of a planning task you completed with it.

Example answer

"I've worked mainly in SAP for materials and order data, alongside an APS tool for detailed line scheduling. I used the capacity planning module to model different sequencing options when we had two large orders due the same week, comparing labour and machine hours needed against what was rostered. That let me spot an overload on one line early enough to shift some work to a quieter line rather than running unplanned overtime."

5. How do you handle it when sales wants an order prioritised but the shop floor says capacity is already committed?

Why they ask

Planners sit between departments with different priorities, so this checks stakeholder management and communication under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Situational answer: describe your usual approach, then anchor it with a specific example of managing that exact tension.

Example answer

"I try to bring both sides the same data rather than let it become a disagreement about opinions. When this came up over a large repeat customer's order, I showed sales the actual capacity numbers and gave them two realistic options: a slightly later date, or moving a smaller order back. Sales picked the option and I confirmed the new sequence with the shop floor the same day, so both sides had certainty rather than an open argument."

6. How do you use production or capacity utilisation reports to catch problems before they become bigger issues?

Why they ask

Reporting and data analysis are part of the role, and the interviewer wants to see you use metrics proactively rather than just producing them.

How to structure your answer

Explain your regular practice, then give one example where a metric flagged a real issue.

Example answer

"I check capacity utilisation weekly, looking for lines running consistently near their ceiling or well under it, since both point to a planning issue. On one occasion the utilisation report showed one line trending up over several weeks while orders kept slipping. Digging into it showed changeover times had crept up after a product mix change, so I adjusted the run sequence to group similar products together, which brought the line back within target."