

Proofreader interview questions

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What to expect

Proofreading interviews usually focus on your attention to detail, your familiarity with style guides and tools, and how you handle tight deadlines and author queries. Employers want to see that you can work accurately under pressure and communicate clearly with clients.

- **Technical and tool-based:** Questions about your experience with Adobe Acrobat Pro, Microsoft Word track changes, PerfectIt and style guides.
- **Process and workflow:** How you approach a proofreading task from receiving the proof to returning corrections.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of catching errors, managing deadlines or dealing with difficult queries.
- **Scenario or judgement:** How you would handle ambiguous errors, conflicting style rules or last-minute changes.
- **Client-facing:** How you query authors and maintain good working relationships.

The interview may start with a brief chat about your background, then move to a practical test where you proofread a short passage against a style sheet. You might then discuss your process, tools and how you handle deadlines. Some employers include a short behavioural interview about past projects.

1. Walk me through your process when you receive a proof to proofread. What steps do you take from start to finish?

Why they ask

This shows how methodical you are and whether you have a reliable system for catching errors.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through: start with reading the brief, then a first pass for content, second pass for technical checks, etc. Be sequential and specific.

Example answer

"First, I read the brief and any style sheet to understand what's expected. I then compare the proof against the final copy, checking for any content that has been dropped or altered. I do a pass for spelling, grammar and punctuation, then a separate pass for formatting: headings, page numbers, captions and cross-references. I use PerfectIt to check consistency of capitalisation and hyphenation. I mark all corrections in Adobe Acrobat Pro, and if anything is unclear, I compile a list of queries for the author. Finally, I do a last check against the style guide before returning the proof."

2. Tell me about a time you caught a significant error that others had missed. What was the outcome?

Why they ask

Behavioural question to assess your attention to detail and impact.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Example answer

"I was proofreading a legal textbook and noticed that a case citation in chapter three did not match the one in the bibliography. I checked the source and found the citation had been transposed. I queried it with the author, who confirmed the error and corrected it before publication. The author later told me that mistake would have undermined the book's credibility, so catching it was important."

3. How do you handle a situation where the author disagrees with a correction you have made?

Why they ask

Client-facing and judgement question.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: acknowledge, explain reasoning, defer to author if appropriate, maintain relationship.

Example answer

"I would first acknowledge their point of view and explain why I made the correction, referencing the style guide or grammar rule. If they still disagree, I would defer to their preference, as the author has final say, but I would note it for future reference. The key is to stay professional and keep the relationship positive."

4. What style guides are you familiar with, and how do you apply them when there is a conflict between the guide and the client's preference?

Why they ask

Technical and process question.

How to structure your answer

Explain your knowledge, then describe a hierarchy: client style sheet overrides the main guide, but flag conflicts.

Example answer

"I regularly use the Australian Government Style Manual and the Chicago Manual of Style Online, and I have worked with in-house style sheets. When there is a conflict, I follow the client's style sheet first, because that is their specific instruction. If the conflict could cause confusion, I would query it with the client and suggest a consistent approach."

5. You have three proofs due on the same day and one author returns a revised manuscript late. How do you manage your time?

Why they ask

Time management and deadline question.

How to structure your answer

Scenario: prioritise, communicate, and stay calm. Describe a plan.

Example answer

"I would assess the deadlines and the length of each proof. I would start with the one that is due earliest or is most time-sensitive. If the revised manuscript comes in late, I would immediately let the author and my manager know, then reprioritise. I might work on the other proofs while waiting, and if necessary, ask for a short extension on the least urgent one. I always keep clients informed so they are not surprised."

6. Why do you want to work as a proofreader, and what do you think is the most important skill for the role?

Why they ask

Motivation and fit question.

How to structure your answer

Personal motivation and then a clear statement of the key skill, with brief justification.

Example answer

"I enjoy the satisfaction of making text clean and accurate, and I like the variety of working across different subjects. The most important skill is attention to detail, because a single missed error can

undermine a publication's credibility. But you also need to be able to manage your time and communicate well with authors."