

Quality Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Quality manager interviews in Australia tend to mix technical questions about ISO 9001 and data with behavioural questions about influencing production teams. Employers want to know you can run an audit, trace a defect to root cause, and get a fix to stick without turning the floor against you.

- **Technical:** Questions on ISO 9001:2015 clauses, audit principles, CAPA, and how you use SPC or other data to spot drift.
- **Scenario:** A production or compliance problem is put in front of you, often with pressure to keep the line running, and you talk through your judgement.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of investigating non-conformances, training staff, or managing a stakeholder who did not want to change a process.
- **Process:** A walk-through of how you plan an audit, run a corrective action review, or verify that a fix has held.
- **Stakeholder:** How you work with production managers, engineers and senior leaders when quality requirements slow down output.

Typically a phone screen with a recruiter or HR, then a technical interview with the quality manager or operations manager. For manufacturing roles, this often includes a site tour and a practical exercise such as reviewing a non-conformance report or audit finding. A final panel may include the production manager and a senior leader, and they will want to see how you balance quality against delivery pressure.

1. Walk me through how you would plan and conduct an internal audit against ISO 9001:2015.

Why they ask

This is the core technical skill for the role. Employers want to hear a structured approach, not just a list of clauses.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: scope and criteria, audit plan, opening meeting, evidence gathering, findings, closing meeting, report and follow-up. Mention how you choose a sample and how you record objective evidence.

Example answer

"I start by confirming the scope and criteria with the area owner, so everyone knows what is being audited and against which clauses or procedures. I review previous audit findings and any recent non-conformances to focus the sample. Then I build an audit plan with times and people, share it in advance, and hold an opening meeting to explain the process. During the audit I talk to operators, watch the task, and check records against what actually happens. I record objective evidence for any gap. At the closing meeting I present findings as draft, so the area owner can correct any factual errors before the report is issued. The report lists non-conformances, observations and opportunities for improvement, and I log corrective actions with owners and due dates. Then I diarise a follow-up to verify the actions have been implemented and are effective."

2. Tell me about a time you investigated a non-conformance and traced it to root cause.

Why they ask

They want to see how you move past the obvious explanation and use a structured method.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Focus on the method you used and what changed after the fix.

Example answer

"A customer complained about a batch of components with inconsistent dimensions. The line manager thought it was operator error on one shift. I pulled the SPC data and saw a slow drift on the same machine over several days, not just one shift. I ran a fishbone with the operators and the maintenance fitter, and we found a worn fixture that was not picked up in the daily check because the check only looked at the finished part, not the fixture itself. I updated the check sheet to include the fixture, added it to the maintenance schedule, and retrained the team on why that check mattered. We monitored the next three batches and the dimensions stayed in tolerance."

3. A production line has started producing out-of-spec parts, but the line manager says it is a minor issue and wants to keep running. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure, your understanding of quality risk, and how you handle a conflict with production.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: contain first, assess risk, communicate, escalate if needed, then investigate and fix. Do not just say you would stop the line without explaining how you would work with the manager.

Example answer

"First I would ask to see the data and the actual parts, because 'minor' needs a definition. If the parts are outside specification, I would explain that we cannot knowingly pass them to the next stage, and I would work with the line manager to quarantine the affected batch. Then I would assess whether the deviation is a safety or regulatory risk, and if it is, escalate to the operations manager straight away. If it is a quality risk but not safety critical, I would still contain it, then agree a short window to investigate root cause with the line stopped or slowed if needed. I would document the decision and the rationale in a non-conformance report, and follow up with a corrective action so we are not having the same conversation next week."

4. How do you use SPC data to decide when a process is drifting out of control?

Why they ask

They want to know you can read a control chart and act on it, not just collect data.

How to structure your answer

Technical explanation: control limits versus specification limits, common cause versus special cause, the rules you use, and what action follows.

Example answer

"I look at whether the process is behaving predictably, not just whether individual points are inside specification. Control limits come from the process itself, so if I see a run of seven points on one side of the centre line, a trend, or a point outside the control limits, that tells me something has changed in the process. I would check the chart against the last setup, any maintenance work, or a change in raw material. Then I would decide whether to adjust the process or investigate further. The key is not to react to every single point, but to act when the chart shows a signal that the process has shifted. I record the finding and the action so we can see whether the same signal comes back."

5. How would you train production staff on a new quality procedure after an audit finding, especially if they are resistant?

Why they ask

Quality managers depend on the floor following procedures. This tests how you influence without authority.

How to structure your answer

Understand the resistance, involve the people doing the work, make training practical, and follow up. Show empathy for production pressure.

Example answer

"I start by listening to why they are resistant. Often it is because a procedure adds time or feels like it is checking up on them. I would explain the audit finding and what could go wrong if we do not fix it, using a real example from the line rather than a clause number. Then I would ask the operators how they would make the new check work in practice, because they usually have a better idea than I do. I would run short toolbox sessions on each shift, not a long classroom session, and I would stay on the floor for the first few days to answer questions. Finally I would check the records after a week to see if it is being followed, and recognise the shifts that are doing it well."

6. Describe how you have led a corrective action review and verified that a fix held.**Why they ask**

CAPA is central to the role. They want to see that you close the loop, not just write the action.

How to structure your answer

STAR, with emphasis on verification and what you did when the fix did not hold the first time.

Example answer

"After a repeat non-conformance on a packaging line, I chaired a corrective action review with production, maintenance and engineering. We agreed the root cause was a sensor that drifted out of alignment when the line was cleaned. The action was to add an alignment check to the start-up procedure and adjust the cleaning method. I assigned owners and dates, and we ran a trial for two weeks. At the follow-up audit, one shift was still skipping the check because the new form was not in the folder. I did not just write another action; I worked with the shift supervisor to put the check into the digital start-up screen, so it could not be missed. After that, the non-conformance did not come back."