

Receptionist interview questions

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What to expect

Receptionist interviews are usually short and practical, focused on how you handle real front-desk pressure rather than abstract theory. Expect a mix of behavioural questions about past situations, scenario questions testing judgement under pressure, and direct questions about the systems you've used.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experiences handling difficult visitors, competing demands or new systems, usually answered using a STAR structure.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Hypothetical busy-period situations to see how you'd prioritise and stay calm when several things happen at once.
- **Technical/systems:** Direct questions about specific software or phone systems you've used, such as PABX, visitor management or Microsoft Office.
- **Client-facing:** Questions probing your tone and approach when representing the organisation to clients, visitors and callers.

Most receptionist interviews are a single conversation with the office manager or team leader, sometimes with a brief practical task such as demonstrating how you'd answer a call or use a booking system. The interview typically opens with background questions, moves into scenario and behavioural questions, and closes with a chance for you to ask about the role and team.

1. Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult or frustrated visitor or caller.

Why they ask

Reception is the first point of contact, so employers need to know you can de-escalate tension without damaging the client relationship.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the specific task or challenge, the action you took to calm things down, and the result for the visitor and the workplace.

Example answer

"A client once arrived furious because their appointment had been double-booked before I started my shift. I acknowledged their frustration straight away, apologised for the mix-up and checked the diary to find the next available slot with the right staff member. I also offered them a seat and a coffee while they waited. They left satisfied, and I flagged the scheduling gap to my supervisor so we could tighten our booking process."

2. Walk me through how you'd handle a situation where the phone is ringing, a visitor has just arrived, and a staff member needs an urgent document from you at the same time.

Why they ask

This tests your ability to prioritise and stay composed when reception duties collide, which happens often in this role.

How to structure your answer

Judgement-under-pressure structure: state your immediate priority and why, then explain how you'd sequence the remaining tasks without leaving anyone unattended for long.

Example answer

"I'd greet the visitor first with a quick acknowledgement so they feel seen, let the phone go to a brief hold or voicemail if the system allows it, then ask the staff member to give me sixty seconds to find

the document. I'd deal with the visitor's basic needs, such as signing in, then return the call as soon as possible. The key is making sure no one feels ignored, even if I can't help everyone instantly."

3. What reception or visitor management software have you used, and how did you pick it up?

Why they ask

Employers want to confirm you can work their specific systems or learn new ones quickly, since most reception software is role-specific.

How to structure your answer

Direct question structure: name the systems, describe your level of use, and give a brief example of learning something new on the job.

Example answer

"I've used PABX phone systems for call routing, Microsoft Outlook for calendar and diary management, and a visitor management system for digital sign-in and badge printing. When I started my last role, the visitor system was new to me, so I worked through the training module in my first week and asked a colleague to check my setup before I relied on it for real visitors."

4. How do you prioritise your tasks when several people need something from you at once?

Why they ask

This checks your time management and ability to make quick, fair decisions during busy periods.

How to structure your answer

STAR or brief process walk-through: explain your general approach, then ground it with a specific example.

Example answer

"I generally deal with whoever is physically in front of me first, since they can't be put on hold the way a phone call can, then work through other requests in order of urgency. One afternoon I had three staff members ask for help at once; I quickly asked each what they needed, handled the two-minute task first, and scheduled the longer one for right after lunch. That way nobody was left wondering if I'd forgotten them."

5. How would you handle confidential mail or documents that come through reception?

Why they ask

Receptionists often handle sensitive paperwork, so employers want to know you understand privacy basics without needing to be told every time.

How to structure your answer

Process walk-through: describe the steps you'd take from receiving the item to it reaching the right person securely.

Example answer

"I'd check the addressee and any confidentiality markings, then place it directly in a locked mail tray or hand it to the relevant staff member rather than leaving it on the front desk. I wouldn't open anything marked private or confidential, and I'd log its arrival if the workplace has a mail register."

6. Tell me about a time you had to learn a new system or process quickly.

Why they ask

Reception tools and procedures change, so employers want evidence you can adapt without much lead time.

How to structure your answer

STAR: outline the situation, what you needed to learn, the steps you took, and how quickly you were operating independently.

Example answer

“When my previous workplace switched phone providers, I had one afternoon of training before the new PABX system went live. I took notes during the session, practised transferring test calls with a colleague, and kept a printed quick-reference sheet at my desk for the first week. By the second day I was handling calls without needing to check the notes.”