

Retail Assistant interview questions

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What to expect

Retail assistant interviews are usually short and practical, run by a store or department manager rather than HR. They focus on whether you can handle customers, keep pace on a busy floor and be trusted with cash and stock, more than on formal qualifications.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience with customers, teamwork or handling a difficult situation, looking for real examples rather than opinions.
- **Scenario/judgement:** A hypothetical situation, such as a complaint or a busy fitting room, to see how you'd handle it on the spot.
- **Process:** Questions about how you'd handle routine tasks like a return, a stocktake or restocking a display.
- **Availability and fit:** Practical questions about hours, weekend and public holiday availability, and how you fit with the team and brand.

Expect a short chat, often 15 to 30 minutes, sometimes on the shop floor itself. It usually opens with a couple of questions about your availability and why you want to work there, moves into two or three behavioural or scenario questions, and closes with a walk-through of rostering, pay and start dates.

1. Tell me about a time you dealt with an unhappy customer.

Why they ask

Handling complaints calmly is central to the role and managers want to know you won't escalate a situation or need constant supervision.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, what the customer wanted, the action you took to resolve it, and the result, including whether the customer stayed satisfied.

Example answer

"A customer wanted to return a jumper past the return window without a receipt. I stayed calm, explained the store policy clearly, and offered a store credit as a middle ground once I confirmed with my supervisor it was allowed. The customer accepted the credit and came back the following week to use it, so we kept the sale instead of losing the customer altogether."

2. How would you handle a queue building up at the register while you're also needed to help a customer on the floor?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure, a daily reality in retail where staffing is often tight.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your decision-making: what you'd prioritise first, how you'd communicate with both customers, and when you'd call for backup.

Example answer

"I'd let the floor customer know I'll be a moment and ask a colleague or the supervisor to jump on a second register if one's free. If no one's available, I'd serve the queue first since people waiting to pay are close to leaving, then return to the floor customer straight away and apologise for the wait. Keeping both customers informed matters more than rushing silently."

3. Walk me through how you'd process a return with no receipt.

Why they ask

Returns and refunds are a daily task and managers want to see you know to follow policy rather than make it up.

How to structure your answer

Give a step-by-step process answer: what you'd check first, what you'd escalate, and how you'd close it out on the POS system.

Example answer

"I'd check if the item can be located on our system through a loyalty card or bank card lookup. If not, I'd explain our store policy on receipt-less returns, which usually means an exchange or store credit rather than a cash refund, and get a supervisor to approve it if it's above a certain value. I'd then process it through the POS as per policy and file any paperwork needed for stock records."

4. Tell me about a time you had to keep a display or section stocked during a busy period.

Why they ask

Restocking and floor presentation are core tasks, and the question checks you can manage them without being told each time.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, focusing on how you prioritised tasks and what the result looked like for the customer experience.

Example answer

"During a weekend sale our best-selling lines kept running low. I started doing regular walk-throughs between serving customers, pulling stock from the back as soon as I noticed gaps rather than waiting for a formal restock round. The section stayed presentable and fully stocked through the whole sale, and we didn't get any customer complaints about empty shelves."

5. What days and hours are you available, including weekends and public holidays?

Why they ask

Retail rosters depend heavily on weekend, evening and holiday cover, so this is a practical screening question, not small talk.

How to structure your answer

Answer directly and specifically, then note any flexibility you have beyond the minimum.

Example answer

"I'm available weekdays after 3pm, and all day Saturday and Sunday. I'm also happy to work most public holidays and can pick up extra shifts during peak periods like Christmas or end-of-season sales with a bit of notice."

6. Why do you want to work in retail, and why here specifically?

Why they ask

Managers want staff who'll stay past the first few busy weeks, so they're checking for genuine interest rather than a stopgap answer.

How to structure your answer

Keep it short and specific: one reason tied to the role itself, one reason tied to the store or brand.

Example answer

"I like the mix of talking to people and staying active on my feet rather than sitting at a desk all day, and I've always found it satisfying to help a customer find exactly what they came in for. I've shopped here myself and like how the team runs the floor, so I think I'd fit in well and learn a lot."

