

School Laboratory Technician interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for school laboratory technician roles are usually run by the head of science or faculty coordinator, sometimes with a business manager or laboratory manager present. They focus on whether you can run a safe, well-organised laboratory and work calmly alongside teachers and students.

- **Safety and compliance:** Questions about chemical storage, risk assessments, safety data sheets, waste disposal and how you keep the laboratory audit ready.
- **Technical and practical:** Questions about preparing practicals, calibration, equipment maintenance and the instruments and software you have used.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Spills, breakages, unsafe requests or short-notice changes, used to see how you think under pressure in a room full of students.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of stock problems, equipment failures, competing requests or working with teaching staff.
- **Working with people:** How you communicate with teachers and students, and how you handle several requests arriving at once.

Often a single panel interview of 30 to 45 minutes, usually at the school, followed by a tour of the laboratories and preparation areas. Some schools add a short practical task, such as identifying a piece of equipment, reading a safety data sheet or explaining how you would set up a named practical. Expect questions to move from your background, to safety and technical knowledge, then to scenarios and how you work with teachers.

1. Walk us through how you would prepare for a practical class involving a hazardous chemical, from the teacher's request through to pack-up.

Why they ask

This tests whether you understand the full workflow of a school laboratory, not just the setup, and whether safety is built into every step.

How to structure your answer

A process walk-through: start with the request and risk assessment, move through sourcing, labelling, setup, supervision support, then pack-up, waste and record keeping. Keep it in order and name the checks at each stage.

Example answer

"I would start with the teacher's request and check the practical against the risk assessment in RiskAssess, confirming the concentration and volume needed and whether a fume cupboard or personal protective equipment is required. Then I would check the chemical register and safety data sheet in Chemwatch, confirm we have enough stock and that it is within date, and prepare the diluted solution in the prep room, labelling each container clearly with the chemical name and concentration. I would set out the equipment with only what students need, place spill kit and eyewash within reach, and brief the teacher on anything unusual. During the class I stay contactable and refill or replace items as needed. Afterward I collect waste into the correct labelled container, clean and return glassware, and note any stock used so the register stays accurate."

2. A student knocks over a beaker of concentrated acid during a practical. What do you do?

Why they ask

Schools need to know you will act immediately and correctly in a live room, and that you understand the difference between a minor spill and one that requires evacuation.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: immediate safety first, then containment, then cleanup, then reporting. Say what you do in the first few seconds before anything else.

Example answer

"My first priority is people. I would tell students to step back from the area, check whether anyone has been splashed and if so send them straight to the eyewash or safety shower while the teacher supervises. Then I would alert the teacher so the class can be moved if needed, and assess the size of the spill. For a small spill I would use the spill kit, neutralising and absorbing the acid with the correct agent, working from the outside in and wearing the right gloves and eye protection. For anything larger or unknown I would evacuate the room and follow the school's emergency procedure. Once it is contained I dispose of the waste through the correct chemical waste stream, restock the spill kit, and report the incident so it can be recorded and reviewed."

3. Tell me about a time you picked up a problem with equipment or stock before it affected a class.

Why they ask

This role is largely about preventing disruption, so employers want evidence that you notice things early and act rather than wait.

How to structure your answer

STAR: the situation in the laboratory, the task of keeping practicals running, the action you took, and the result for teachers and students.

Example answer

"We had a set of digital balances that were drifting between readings, and a couple of teachers had started avoiding them in favour of a single working unit, which was slowing down their practicals. I ran a check against a calibration mass and found two balances were outside tolerance and one needed a replacement power supply. I tagged the faulty units, arranged the calibration service, and set up a simple log so each balance was checked before use. Two classes had to share equipment for a fortnight, but after that the whole set was reliable and teachers stopped working around the problem. I now include that check in the start-of-term routine."

4. How do you keep chemical registers, safety data sheets and disposal records accurate and ready for an audit?

Why they ask

Compliance paperwork is a core part of the job, and interviewers want to hear a repeatable system rather than good intentions.

How to structure your answer

Describe your actual method: what you record, how often, in what system, and how you cross-check it. Show the routine, not just the principle.

Example answer

"Everything starts from the chemical register in Chemwatch, which I treat as the single source of truth. When stock comes in I add it to the register the same day with the quantity, location and date received, and I make sure the safety data sheet is current and attached. When something is used or disposed of, I record it against the same entry so the numbers reconcile. I do a physical stocktake at the start and end of each term, including the prep room cupboards and the flammables cabinet, and I reconcile the shelf against the register rather than trusting the paperwork alone. Disposal records go into the same system with the date, method and waste contractor details, so if an inspector or the

department asks, I can produce a full history quickly.”

5. A teacher asks you to set up a practical you think is unsafe or cannot be resourced, with twenty minutes' notice. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This probes how you balance safety and being helpful, and whether you can say no to a colleague without damaging the working relationship.

How to structure your answer

A scenario judgement structure: assess the request, identify the specific concern, communicate it clearly with an alternative, and follow up so the teacher still gets a workable practical.

Example answer

“I would take the request seriously and check what specifically is driving it, because sometimes a practical can be adjusted rather than cancelled. If the concern is safety, such as a chemical that is not approved for that year level or equipment that is not working, I would explain the exact issue rather than just saying no, and suggest an alternative that teaches the same concept with what we have. If it is a resourcing problem, I would tell the teacher honestly what is missing and how long it would take to get it, and offer a scaled-down version for that lesson. I would never set up something I believe is unsafe just to avoid an awkward conversation, but I would make sure the teacher has a workable option before the class starts.”

6. Several teachers ask you for equipment or help at the same time. How do you decide what to do first?

Why they ask

The role sits between multiple teachers with competing needs, so interviewers look for someone who prioritises openly rather than quietly pleasing one person.

How to structure your answer

Behavioural: use a past example, describe how you triaged the requests, how you communicated your decision, and what the outcome was for the classes involved.

Example answer

“At my current school, three teachers would regularly send requests first thing in the morning for the same period. I started asking them to lodge practical requests a week ahead on a shared template, which let me see the whole week and batch the preparation. When requests still clash, I prioritise by safety and by which class cannot run at all without the equipment, then by how long the setup takes. I tell each teacher what I can do and when, rather than leaving them guessing, and I offer to bring something over mid-lesson if that works. Since we moved to the weekly template, last-minute requests have dropped and teachers know what to expect from me.”