

Shearer interview questions

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What to expect

Shearer interviews are usually shorter and more practical than a typical office interview. A contractor or station manager wants to know you can handle the physical pace, keep sheep safe and calm, and fit into a shed team that often works long, physically demanding days together. Expect some questions to be asked on the phone before you're even asked to turn up for a trial run.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through how you actually shear and handle a sheep, step by step.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience working under physical strain, meeting tallies, and getting along with a shed team.
- **Scenario/judgement:** Situational questions testing how you'd respond to an animal welfare issue or injury mid-shear.
- **Technical:** Questions on maintaining and troubleshooting shearing equipment, blades and combs.
- **Lifestyle/logistics:** Questions about your willingness to travel between stations and work seasonal, irregular hours.

Many shed interviews start with a phone call covering your experience and availability, followed by a short in-person or on-farm conversation. For less experienced shearers, a practical trial on a small mob is common before any formal offer, since tally and technique speak louder than a resume in this trade.

1. Walk me through how you position and restrain a sheep to shear it safely and efficiently.

Why they ask

This checks whether you actually know shearing technique, not just that you've stood near a shed before.

How to structure your answer

Describe it as a straight step by step walkthrough: catching the sheep, tipping it into position, the sequence of blows, and how you release it at the end.

Example answer

"I catch the sheep from the pen and tip it back onto its rump against my leg so its weight is supported and it can't kick freely. I start with the belly and crutch area to clear any dags, then move through the standard blow sequence up the side, across the back and down the far side, keeping the skin taut with my free hand so the comb doesn't nick it. Once the fleece is off in one piece I let the sheep up gently and push it through to the counting pen before picking up the next one."

2. Tell me about a time you had to keep working through a physically demanding day and still hit your tally.

Why they ask

Shearing is sustained, repetitive, physically taxing work, and the interviewer wants proof you can pace yourself over a full run, not just a single sheep.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"On a hot run late in the season the shed was short-handed and the mob was heavier than usual, which slowed everyone down. My task was to keep pace with the rest of the team without cutting

corners on technique. I focused on keeping my movements efficient rather than rushing, took my scheduled smoko breaks to recover, and stayed hydrated through the afternoon. I finished the day close to my usual tally and didn't have any quality issues flagged by the classer."

3. A ewe becomes agitated and you nick her skin partway through a blow. What do you do?

Why they ask

Animal welfare is central to this role, and the interviewer wants to see calm, correct judgement under pressure rather than panic or covering it up.

How to structure your answer

Frame your answer around immediate action, then follow-up reporting: what you do in the moment, then what you do afterwards.

Example answer

"I stop shearing immediately and check the extent of the cut. If it's minor I apply the shed's wound treatment and keep the sheep calm before letting it go to a holding pen for observation rather than back with the main mob. If it looks serious I call the overseer straight away rather than trying to manage it myself. I'd also slow down on the next couple of sheep to check my technique hasn't slipped, since one nick is often a sign I need to reset my grip or angle."

4. How do you maintain your handpiece, combs and cutters during a shed run?

Why they ask

Blunt or poorly maintained gear slows the whole shed down and increases the risk of injuring the sheep, so this checks your practical equipment knowledge.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a technical explanation covering routine checks and what triggers a change.

Example answer

"I check the tension on my handpiece regularly through the day and listen for changes in the motor sound that might mean something's loose. I swap cutters when they start dragging rather than cutting cleanly, since forcing a blunt cutter through wool is what leads to nicks. I keep a spare set of combs and cutters ready so a change takes seconds, not minutes, because every stoppage costs the shed time."

5. How do you handle disagreements with the contractor or other shearers over pen allocation or pace?

Why they ask

Shed teams work in close quarters for long hours, and friction over pens, pace or pay is common, so the interviewer wants to see you can resolve it without disrupting the shed.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, focusing on the resolution and what you'd do differently if anything.

Example answer

"I once felt the pen rotation was giving me consistently heavier-woolled sheep than the others. Rather than letting it build up, I raised it directly with the contractor at the next break and asked how the rotation was being decided. It turned out to be unintentional, and the contractor adjusted the roster for the next few days. Handling it calmly and early meant it didn't affect how I worked with the rest of the team."

6. This role often means travelling between stations, sometimes for weeks at a time. How do you manage that?

Why they ask

Shearing work is seasonal and mobile, and employers want to know you can commit to the travel and irregular hours the job actually involves.

How to structure your answer

Answer plainly with your practical approach to logistics and commitment.

Example answer

"I plan around the shearing calendar and keep my gear and vehicle ready to move between properties with short notice. I'm upfront with contractors about which runs I can commit to for the season so there's no confusion, and I budget for the travel and accommodation costs that come with working away from home for stretches at a time."