

Shipwright interview questions

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What to expect

Shipwright interviews in Australia usually mix a conversation about your trade background with something practical. Yards want to know you can read a plan, work safely around a hauled-out vessel and make sound calls when a repair turns out to be bigger than the survey suggested.

- **Technical craft:** Questions on materials, fastenings, coatings, laminating schedules and how you assess hull condition.
- **Process walk-through:** You are asked to talk through a job in order, from plans and lofting to finished surface, to show how you sequence work.
- **Safety:** Questions on setup before cutting or grinding, confined spaces, working at height, hot work and slipway hazards.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Situations where the scope changes mid-job, the customer pushes back on a recommendation, or a vessel has to be ready for a fixed launch date.
- **Behavioural:** Tell me about a time questions on teamwork, mistakes, supervision of apprentices and working alongside other marine trades.
- **Client-facing:** How you explain repair options, condition findings and cost drivers to owners, skippers and marina managers.

A typical process starts with a short phone or in-person screen covering your trade qualification, tickets and availability. That is followed by a yard or workshop interview with a supervisor or yard manager, often including a walk around vessels in for repair so you can talk through what you would do. Some employers add a short practical task such as reading a set of lines, marking out a joint or identifying faults on a hull section. The final step is usually reference checks and confirmation of your White Card, any marine safety or confined space tickets and, where wharf access is needed, an MSIC.

1. Walk me through how you take a set of hull lines from the plan through to a finished, planked hull.

Why they ask

This is the core craft skill of the trade. The interviewer wants to hear ordered thinking, correct terminology and where you check your work before moving on.

How to structure your answer

Give an ordered walk-through with named stages and checkpoints. Cover plan reading and lofting, setting up moulds or frames, spiling and fitting planks, fastening, then fairing and finishing, and say what you measure at each stage before you commit to the next.

Example answer

"I start with the plan and loft full size so I can check the lines close up and pick up any discrepancies before anything is cut. From the loft I set up the stations or moulds, brace them so nothing moves, and check diagonals and levels. Then I spile each plank off the hull, cut slightly proud, and dry fit before fastening. I work from the garboard up, alternating sides where the shape allows so the hull pulls evenly, and I check fairness with battens as I go rather than waiting until the planking is finished. Once the hull is closed up, I fair it, deal with any fastener heads, then move onto the coating system and the deck structure."

2. How do you decide whether a section of hull is sound enough to repair rather than replace?

Why they ask

Repair versus replace is the judgement call that drives cost, safety and comeback risk. Employers want evidence-based decisions, not guesswork.

How to structure your answer

Set out your criteria first, then the evidence you gather, then how you make and record the call. Mention what would change your mind.

Example answer

"I gather evidence before I decide. That means moisture meter readings across the area and into the surrounding structure, tap testing for delamination or voids, a close look at fastenings for corrosion or movement, and checking whether the damage is local or follows a line of structure. If the surrounding timber or laminate is sound and the damaged section is contained, I cut back to good material and scarf or laminate in a repair. If the readings are high well beyond the visible damage, or fastenings are failing along a run, I would rather replace the section and tell the owner why. I photograph everything and note it on the job sheet so the decision is on record if the surveyor or the owner asks later."

3. Tell me about a time a repair turned out to be bigger than the original survey suggested.

Why they ask

Scope creep on hull work is normal. The interviewer is testing how you communicate, document and keep the job moving when the plan changes.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the situation briefly, explain the task and the deadline, describe the actions you took to assess, document, cost and re-sequence the work, and finish with the outcome for the vessel and the customer.

Example answer

"We had a timber cruiser in for what the survey called a local repair near the stem. Once I opened it up, the rot ran back along two planks and into a frame. The vessel was booked for a launch date three weeks out. I stopped work, photographed and measured the full extent, and got the supervisor and the owner down to look at it the same day rather than sitting on it. I wrote up the extra scope with a revised sequence, brought the laminating and coating forward on the areas we could still access, and moved another job into the gap so the shed was not idle. We replaced the frame and the two planks, and the boat launched four days later than planned with the owner clear on what had changed and why."

4. What does a safe setup look like before you start cutting or grinding on a hull?

Why they ask

Yards carry real hazards: dust, fumes, hot work, confined spaces and unstable vessels on stands. The answer shows whether safety is routine or something you only think about when watched.

How to structure your answer

Work through it as a hazard-first checklist. Cover the vessel, the space, the task and the people, and say who you notify before you start.

Example answer

"First the vessel: I confirm it is chocked and braced properly, that the area is barricaded and that nothing above or below me is going to move. Then the space, so ventilation is running if I am inside a hull or a closed compartment, and I check gas levels before any hot work. For the task itself I match the tool to the job, use the right extraction for dust or fume, and set up screens or blankets so sparks and grindings do not land on other jobs or coating work. I check my own PPE, confirm the fire extinguisher and blanket are within reach, and let the supervisor and anyone working nearby know I am about to start. Hot work permits and confined space procedures get followed as written, not

skipped because the job is small."

5. An owner disagrees with your repair recommendation and wants a cheaper fix. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This is a client-facing question. It tests whether you can hold a technical line without turning it into an argument, and whether you protect the yard from a comeback.

How to structure your answer

Show the sequence: understand what they actually want, explain the risk in plain language, offer legitimate options, and document the outcome. Say where you would escalate or decline.

Example answer

"I start by asking what is driving the request, because sometimes it is budget and sometimes they have been told something different by someone else. Then I explain in plain terms what the cheaper option means over time, using the hull in front of us rather than jargon: what happens if moisture keeps spreading, what it costs to come back, and what it means for the vessel's condition report. If there is a genuinely sound lower-cost option, such as staging the repair or using a different but appropriate material, I will put it up and let them choose. If they want something that would leave the vessel unseaworthy, I say so clearly, note it on the job sheet, and take it to the supervisor before anything is signed off. I do not start work on a repair I know will fail."

6. Describe how you work with other trades during a refit to keep the job moving.

Why they ask

Refits are a coordination problem. The interviewer wants evidence you can sequence your work around electricians, engineers and painters without creating rework.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR, but keep the emphasis on planning and communication. Name the trades involved, the clash you resolved, and what the finished job looked like.

Example answer

"On a refit last year I was doing deck and cabin work while an electrician ran new cabling and an engineer fitted a replacement engine bed. The task was to close up the structure without losing access they still needed. I sat down with both of them before I started and agreed a rough order: I would leave the starboard side panels off until the cable runs were in and tested, then close that side while they moved to port. When the engine bed dimensions shifted slightly, I held off on the engine room bulkhead rather than fitting it and pulling it apart again. We finished with no panels cut open after the fact and the boat went back in the water on the booked date."