

Survey Interviewer interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Survey Interviewer interviews are practical and short. Employers are checking that you can hold a script, sound natural on the phone, handle refusals without taking them personally, and enter data accurately under time pressure. Many conduct a brief phone screen before inviting you to a paid training session or supervised shift where your live calls are monitored.

- **Process:** Walk-throughs of how you run a shift, manage callbacks, or work through a script from start to finish.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of handling difficult respondents, keeping your composure, or sticking to a script you did not agree with.
- **Scenario:** Live judgement questions about consent, upset respondents, or a respondent who does not meet eligibility criteria.
- **Technical and accuracy:** Questions about CATI systems, Qualtrics, data entry checking, and how you keep verbatim and coded responses correct.
- **Compliance and privacy:** How you explain survey purpose, obtain informed consent, and handle personal information under Australian privacy requirements.

Expect a short phone screen covering availability, phone manner and any prior CATI experience. If you progress, there is usually a group or one-on-one interview with a script-reading exercise, a short data entry or typing check, and questions on consent and privacy. Many employers then run a paid training session followed by a monitored shift, and the offer depends on how you perform on live calls rather than on the interview alone.

1. Walk me through how you handle a full interviewing shift, from logging in to finishing up.

Why they ask

The interviewer wants to see that you understand the rhythm of quota-based work and that you manage callbacks, breaks and data checks rather than just dialling until the shift ends.

How to structure your answer

Chronological walk-through. Cover setup, how you plan the shift against quotas and callbacks, how you handle the middle stretch when concentration dips, and what you do at the end to check your records before logging out.

Example answer

"I log in early, check which studies are running and what the quota priorities are, then look at my callback list so the people who asked to be called at a set time are not missed. I start with fresh numbers while I am sharpest and move to callbacks as the times come up. Mid-shift, when concentration drops, I take my scheduled break rather than pushing through, because that is when coding errors creep in. At the end of the shift I review my dispositions, fix any incomplete records, and note anything a supervisor needs to follow up, so my data goes out clean."

2. Tell me about a time you had to keep a respondent engaged through a long or repetitive survey.

Why they ask

Long surveys drive drop-offs. The interviewer is testing whether you can hold someone's attention without changing the script or leading the answers.

How to structure your answer

STAR, with the action and result weighted heavily. Make the result about completing the interview and keeping the response quality intact.

Example answer

"I was working on a health survey that ran close to twenty minutes and had repeated rating questions in the second half. One respondent started giving one-word answers and sounded ready to hang up. I acknowledged that the questions were repetitive, reminded her how far through she was and roughly how long was left, and kept my tone steady and unhurried. She finished the interview, and the answers in the back half were usable rather than straight-lined, which the supervisor noted when reviewing the batch."

3. A respondent becomes angry and says you are wasting their time. What do you do?

Why they ask

Refusals and hostility are part of the job. The interviewer wants to see composure, a clear de-escalation approach, and correct recording of the outcome.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure. Acknowledge the person's position, give them a way out, decide whether to continue or close, then record the disposition correctly. Say what you would not do as well as what you would do.

Example answer

"I would let them finish without talking over them, apologise for the interruption and confirm I will not keep them. If they are still willing, I would explain in one sentence what the survey is for and how long it takes, and let them choose. If they want to end it, I thank them and close the call politely. I would not argue or push, and I would record it as a refusal with the reason, because that affects the response rate and the supervisor needs the accurate picture."

4. How do you keep verbatim answers and coded responses accurate when you are well into a shift?

Why they ask

Data quality is the core of the role. The interviewer is checking your method, not just your good intentions.

How to structure your answer

Method then example. Describe your checking habits, then give a concrete instance where they caught something.

Example answer

"I type verbatim as I go rather than summarising afterwards, and I read back anything I am unsure about before moving on. I use the coding list rather than guessing at a category, and if a response does not fit an existing code I record it as other and note the wording. On one project I caught that I had been mis-coding a set of responses about transport because two options sounded similar, so I flagged it to my supervisor and we corrected the batch before it went to the client."

5. How do you explain the purpose of a survey and obtain informed consent?

Why they ask

Consent and privacy obligations sit behind every interview. The interviewer wants to hear you handle this properly and understand Australian privacy requirements.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step explanation. Cover who you are, the purpose, what happens to the information, how long it takes, voluntariness, and how consent is recorded.

Example answer

"I open by giving my name and the organisation I am calling for, say in plain terms what the survey is about and roughly how long it will take, and make clear that participation is voluntary and they can stop at any point. I explain that their answers are used for research and handled under the Australian Privacy Principles, and I answer any questions before starting. Consent is recorded in the system as required by the script, and if someone is unsure I offer to send information or call back rather than pressuring them on the spot."

6. Tell me about a time you had to follow a script exactly when you disagreed with the wording.

Why they ask

Consistency across interviewers is what makes survey data comparable. The interviewer is testing whether you can follow protocol and raise concerns through the right channel.

How to structure your answer

STAR. The result should show that you complied, the data stayed consistent, and any concern was escalated properly rather than handled by improvising.

Example answer

"On a customer satisfaction study, one question was phrased in a way I thought sounded leading. I read it exactly as written through the shift, because changing wording across interviewers would have made the results unreliable. After the shift I raised it with the project supervisor and suggested an alternative phrasing for the next wave. She took it to the client, and the wording was adjusted for the following round, which meant the fix came through the right process instead of me quietly changing the script mid-project."