Surveyor interview questions

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What to expect

Surveyor interviews mix technical questions about instruments and data processing with scenario questions about field judgement, since so much of the job happens on site without a supervisor nearby. Expect a practical focus rather than abstract theory, and be ready to talk through real jobs you've worked on.

- **Process/technical:** Questions about how you run a survey end to end and how you choose between instruments such as theodolites, GNSS receivers and laser scanners for a given task.
- **Scenario/judgement:** On-site problems, like conflicting measurements or access issues, where the panel wants to see how you think under pressure without a supervisor present.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of catching errors, managing deadlines or working with other trades, usually framed as 'tell me about a time'.
- **Safety:** How you manage risk on active construction or mining sites, since surveyors often work ahead of or alongside other trades.
- **Client-facing:** How you communicate results, especially boundary determinations, to clients or builders who may not welcome the answer.

Most surveyor interviews run 30 to 45 minutes with one or two technical staff, sometimes including the firm's registered surveyor. They usually open with your qualifications and registration status, move into a walk-through of your typical fieldwork and CAD process, then test judgement with a couple of site scenarios before finishing on safety and availability for site-based or regional work.

1. Walk me through how you'd set up and run a boundary survey on a new site, from arrival through to the final plan.

Why they ask

This checks whether you actually understand the full survey workflow, not just how to press buttons on an instrument.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a chronological walkthrough: site setup, instrument choice, data capture, office processing, plan output and lodgement.

Example answer

“I'd start by pulling the title and any existing survey marks so I know what I'm meant to be confirming on the ground. On site I'd set up the total station or GNSS receiver depending on how open the site is and how much accuracy the boundary work needs, then take redundant measurements to existing marks so I've got a check on my own data before I trust it. Back in the office I process that data in AutoCAD, compare it against the title dimensions, and if anything doesn't line up I go back and re-check rather than force the plan to match. Once the boundary is confirmed I prepare the plan and report for lodgement, formatted to meet the land registry's requirements.”

2. How do you decide whether to use a total station, GNSS receiver or laser scanner for a particular job?

Why they ask

Tests whether you understand the practical tradeoffs of each instrument rather than defaulting to whatever you used last.

How to structure your answer

Give a short technical comparison, then anchor it with a concrete example of when each choice makes sense.

Example answer

“GNSS is fast for open sites with good sky visibility, like broadacre subdivisions, but it loses accuracy near buildings or under tree cover, so I'd switch to a total station in tight urban or wooded sites. Laser scanning comes in when I need a dense point cloud, for example capturing an existing building facade or complex as-built structure where individual point measurements would take too long. On a recent job with a mix of open paddock and a heavily treed boundary line, I used GNSS for the open sections and picked up the treed boundary marks with the total station to keep accuracy consistent across the whole survey.”

3. You're on site and your GNSS readings don't match the existing survey marks. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a common real-world problem and shows whether you'll trust bad data or stop and investigate.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a judgement-under-pressure response: what you check first, how you escalate, what you decide, and why.

Example answer

“First I'd check the obvious things: satellite geometry, whether I'm getting multipath interference from nearby structures, and whether my base station or correction service is actually solid. If the equipment checks out, I'd switch to conventional total station measurements from the existing marks to get an independent check. If the discrepancy holds up, I'd stop and flag it rather than push ahead, because that usually means either the existing marks have moved or there's an error in the title documents, and either way it needs resolving before anyone builds off that boundary.”

4. Tell me about a time you found an error or discrepancy in survey data before it caused a problem.

Why they ask

Surveyors carry legal and safety responsibility for their measurements, so panels want evidence you catch mistakes rather than just produce numbers.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

“On a subdivision project, the situation was a boundary that looked straightforward on the title plan. My task was to confirm it before the client started earthworks. When I compared my field measurements against the old survey marks, I found a discrepancy of a few centimetres that didn't match normal measurement tolerance. I went back to the historical survey records and found the original mark had been disturbed by previous roadworks. I flagged it to the client and the engaged engineer before any construction started. The result was the client re-positioned the fence line correctly the first time instead of having to move it after the fact, which would have cost far more.”

5. How do you manage safety risks when working on active construction or mining sites?

Why they ask

Surveyors often work ahead of or alongside heavy machinery and other trades, so safety awareness is a genuine screening point, not a box-ticking question.

How to structure your answer

Walk through hazard identification and the controls you apply, grounded in a specific site type.

Example answer

“Before I set foot on an active site I check in with the site supervisor and confirm current work areas, exclusion zones and any moving plant I need to stay clear of. On construction sites that usually means high-vis, hard hat and steel-capped boots as standard, plus staying alert around excavators and cranes since survey work often puts you in blind spots. On a recent job near an active dig, I repositioned my survey line to avoid working directly behind reversing plant, even though it meant an extra trip back to reset the instrument. I'd rather lose ten minutes than take an unnecessary risk.”

6. How do you explain a survey result to a client or builder who disagrees with your boundary determination?

Why they ask

Boundary and setout results can be unwelcome news, and firms want surveyors who can hold their ground professionally without damaging the relationship.

How to structure your answer

Describe your communication approach, including how you back up a technical finding with evidence.

Example answer

“I stick to what the data and title documents show, and I walk them through it rather than just stating the conclusion. If a builder thinks a boundary is in the wrong spot, I'll show them the original title dimensions, the marks I picked up, and how the two line up, so they can see the reasoning rather than just my word against theirs. If there's a genuine ambiguity in the historical records, I say so plainly rather than pretending certainty I don't have, and suggest what further research or re-survey would resolve it.”