

# Textile Designer interview questions

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## What to expect

Textile design interviews are portfolio-led, but they go well past whether the work looks good. Employers are testing whether you understand how a design behaves once it leaves your screen and hits a mill, a printer or a garment factory. Expect the conversation to move between your creative process, your technical decisions and how you handle the people who make the fabric.

- **Portfolio and process walkthrough:** A guided tour of two or three projects, probing how you research, develop and refine a print or weave rather than just the finished artwork.
- **Technical and production knowledge:** Questions about repeat construction, colour separation, print methods, fabric behaviour and spec writing. These separate designers who have been near a production line from those who have not.
- **Scenario and problem solving:** A live problem sourced from real production, such as a colourway that will not strike evenly or a delivery date that has moved. They want your judgement under pressure.
- **Behavioural and collaboration:** Stories about working with buyers, garment techs, mills and licensing partners, including disagreements about direction.
- **Trend and commercial judgement:** How you decide which trends to translate for a particular market, price point and season.
- **Client-facing:** How you present work, take feedback and manage a client's expectations when their request is not achievable in the fabric they have chosen.

Most interviews open with a portfolio walkthrough, often with a design lead and someone from production or sourcing in the room. Technical questions follow, usually anchored to a project you have just shown. Larger labels may add a short design brief or a paid trial task set against a real range, and a second interview with a buyer or product manager. Smaller studios often run one long conversation with the owner and a technical person rather than a panel.

## 1. Walk us through your portfolio and pick one design you keep coming back to.

### Why they ask

This is the standard opening. They are checking whether you can talk about your work in terms of decisions and constraints, not just aesthetics.

### How to structure your answer

Context in one sentence, then brief, research, development, the production constraint you hit, and the outcome. Finish with what you would change now. Keep it to about three minutes unless they ask for more.

### Example answer

*"The one I keep coming back to is a coastal-inspired print range for a resortwear label. The brief was broad, just a summer story with a natural palette, so I spent the first week on research: rock pools, lichen textures, and a set of old screen-printed textiles from a museum archive. I started with loose gouache studies, then scanned them and cleaned them up in Photoshop before rebuilding the repeat in Illustrator. The scale was the hard part. The print looked lovely at A3 but disappeared on the fabric, so I tested it at three scales on a cotton voile and a viscose crepe and settled on a larger repeat for the crepe and a finer one for the voile. Running it across two base cloths meant two spec sheets, which taught me to design with the fabric in mind from the start. If I did it again I would test on cloth earlier rather than working flat for so long."*

## **2. Take us through how you build a repeat that will survive a rotary screen print run.**

### **Why they ask**

Technical credibility. A rotary screen press has tolerances that a home printer does not, and they want to know you design within them.

### **How to structure your answer**

Answer in order of operation. Start with the repeat structure, move to colour separation and ink limits, then land on how you proof and test. Name your tools and the points where things usually fail.

### **Example answer**

*"I start with the repeat structure itself and decide early whether it is a full drop, half drop or a brick, because that changes how much the eye notices the repeat line. I build the tile in Illustrator at final print size rather than scaling up at the end, then run the colour separation in NedGraphics so I can see how many screens it needs. I keep the number of colours realistic for the press and avoid fine isolated detail that will fill in or drop out. Registration is the usual failure point on a rotary press, so I keep an eye on how much the design relies on tight alignment between screens and build in a little tolerance rather than designing something only a digital printer could hold. Then I proof it on the actual base cloth at the actual scale, not on paper, and adjust ink coverage and mesh if the colour reads differently on fabric than it does on screen."*

## **3. A mill tells you the colourway will not strike evenly on the base cloth, and you are three weeks out from delivery. What do you do?**

### **Why they ask**

A realistic production scenario. They are watching how you triage, who you tell, and whether you reach for a fix that damages the range.

### **How to structure your answer**

Acknowledge the deadline first, then ask the two or three questions that determine your options, then set out your options in order of what protects the delivery date. Finish with what you tell the client and when. Judgement under pressure, not a perfect answer.

### **Example answer**

*"First I would want to know why it is striking unevenly. Is it the dye lot, the weave of the base cloth, or the ink coverage in my artwork? Those lead to different fixes. If it is coverage, I can simplify the worst areas and re-proof quickly. If it is the cloth, I would ask the mill what base cloths they can run within the window and whether a small shade shift is acceptable on any of them. My order of preference is: adjust the artwork if the mill can re-proof inside the window, switch base cloth if the range can carry it, then shift the colourway to a simpler two-colour version of the same design. I would tell the buyer as soon as I know the options rather than waiting for a clean answer, because three weeks is enough to make a decision but not enough to sit on it. What I would not do is quietly approve a patchy strike-off and hope it reads as texture in the finished garment."*

## **4. Tell me about a time a client or buyer wanted changes to a design you felt strongly about.**

### **Why they ask**

Collaboration and self-management. Textile designers defend their work constantly, and the answer shows whether you can do it without becoming difficult or caving immediately.

### **How to structure your answer**

STAR. Situation, task, action, result. Spend most of your time on the action, including how you actually handled the conversation and what you conceded.

### **Example answer**

*"I had a licensing partner who wanted a floral print scaled down significantly for a bedding range. My instinct was that it would turn into visual noise on a large bed, so I did not just say yes. I asked what problem they were solving, and it turned out their retail buyer thought the original scale photographed too large on the packaging. So the issue was the packaging, not the bedding. I mocked up both scales on a bed setting and on the packaging template, showed them side by side, and suggested keeping my original scale for the product and cropping into the design for the packaging shot. They took it. The range sold through on the original scale and the packaging still worked. The lesson was to find out what the client is actually worried about before defending the artwork."*

## **5. How do you decide which trends to translate into a range for a specific market?**

### **Why they ask**

Commercial judgement. Good textile designers are not just trend chasers, they read a market and a price point and design to it.

### **How to structure your answer**

Give a reasoning framework rather than a list of trends. Start with the market and price point, then evidence, then test small before committing the range.

### **Example answer**

*"I start with the market and the price point, because that sets the fabric and the print method before anything else. A direct-to-consumer brand at a higher price point can carry a complex screen print on a silk blend, while a mass range needs something that reproduces cheaply on a poly cotton. Then I look at evidence rather than just forecasts. I use trend services for direction, but I weight my own data more heavily, so sell-through from last season, buyer feedback and what is actually moving in the stores I can walk into. I pick two or three directions that feel right for the brand, design a small capsule against each, and put them in front of the buyer early. That way the range commits to the direction with the strongest response instead of betting the whole season on one trend."*

## **6. How do you work with a manufacturer or garment tech to get a design into production?**

### **Why they ask**

Process question. They want to know you can hand over something a factory can actually run, and that you stay involved after the handover.

### **How to structure your answer**

Walk through the workflow from artwork to bulk. Name the documents you produce, the handover points and how you handle queries once production starts.

### **Example answer**

*"I hand over a spec sheet that covers the repeat size, colour references, fibre composition, base cloth and finishing, plus the separated artwork files. Before that goes anywhere I sit down with the garment tech to check that the print layout works with the pattern pieces, because a repeat that looks fine flat can land badly across a seam or a dart. Once the mill has it, I expect a strike-off and I review it against the approved artwork in daylight, not on a monitor. Where there is a variance I decide whether it is within tolerance or whether we adjust, and I put that decision in writing so everyone has the same version. During bulk I stay contactable for queries, because most problems are cheaper to fix in the first week than in the last."*