

Cinema and Theatre Manager interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for cinema and theatre manager roles usually blend operational process questions with behavioural and scenario-based questions. Employers want to see that you can run a venue in real time, handle staffing pressure and keep patrons safe.

- **Process and operations:** Questions about how you roster staff, manage box office reconciliation, schedule films and live shows, and keep daily operations on track.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for examples of leading a team, resolving patron complaints or managing a difficult shift.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Questions that put you in a live venue situation, such as a sold-out screening with a technical fault or a staffing shortage.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions about liquor licensing, WHS, RSA, incident reporting and working with children requirements.
- **Client and community facing:** Questions about how you work with distributors, promoters, private event clients and local community groups.

The interview usually starts with a conversation about your venue experience and how you handle the daily rhythm of screenings or performances. You may then move to behavioural and scenario questions, often with a venue tour or a meet-and-greet with front-of-house staff. Some employers include a short practical exercise, such as reviewing a roster or talking through a compliance issue. The final part is usually your chance to ask questions about the venue's programming, team structure and upcoming events.

1. Walk me through how you build a roster for a week that includes a major film release, a live show and a private function.

Why they ask

Employers want to see that you can plan ahead and balance competing demands on a busy venue calendar.

How to structure your answer

A process question like this needs a step-by-step walk-through: start with the programming calendar, map peak periods, allocate skills, build in breaks and standby cover, then check labour budget and award conditions. Finish by explaining how you communicate the roster and handle changes.

Example answer

"I start with the programming calendar for the week. I map the major release sessions, the live show call times and the private function bump-in and bump-out. Then I list the skills I need: projection, bar, front of house and ticketing. I check who has RSA, first aid and any specific training for the live show. I build the roster in Deputy, making sure no one is on a shift that breaks award conditions, and I add standby cover for the release weekend. I share the draft with the team lead, then publish it four days out. If a screening sells out, I can move a standby staff member to the busiest area without calling someone in at the last minute."

2. Tell me about a time you dealt with a patron complaint that could have escalated.

Why they ask

They are testing your customer service judgement and whether you can turn a complaint into a positive outcome without losing control of the venue.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the task, the action you took and the result. Focus on how you listened, what you did to resolve the issue and what you changed afterwards to prevent it happening again.

Example answer

"A patron complained that a live show started late because of a technical issue. She had travelled from interstate and felt the delay ruined her evening. My task was to resolve it without disrupting the rest of the audience. I listened, apologised, and offered her a complimentary ticket for a future performance and a drink voucher. I also checked with the production team and announced a clear revised start time to the whole audience. After the show, I wrote an incident note and changed our pre-show technical check to start fifteen minutes earlier. The patron came back to a later show and thanked us for how we handled it."

3. A sold-out screening is about to start and the projector fails. What do you do?

Why they ask

This shows how you think under pressure, communicate with patrons and recover a session when something goes wrong.

How to structure your answer

This is a judgement-under-pressure question. Walk through your immediate priorities: patron safety and communication first, then technical recovery, then compensation and follow-up. Show that you can delegate and keep the venue calm.

Example answer

"First, I would make sure the front-of-house team knows what is happening and that we have a clear announcement. I would go to the cinema and tell the audience there is a technical issue, that we are working on it, and give a realistic time frame. Meanwhile, I would call the projectionist or technical support. If we cannot fix it within ten minutes, I would offer refunds or transfers to another session and open the box office for that. I would also check whether another screen is free and move the audience there if possible. After the session, I would log the fault and review our projector maintenance schedule."

4. How do you ensure your venue meets liquor licensing and WHS requirements across a busy weekend?

Why they ask

Compliance is a core part of the role, and employers need to know you understand licensing conditions, RSA and WHS in practice.

How to structure your answer

This is a technical compliance question. Structure your answer around the systems you use: RSA checks, incident reporting, safety walk-throughs, licensing conditions and staff training. Give specific examples from your experience.

Example answer

"I start with the roster: every bar shift has at least one person with a current RSA, and I keep copies of certificates in the staff file. I do a safety walk-through before the weekend rush, checking fire exits, aisle lighting and bar equipment. I brief the duty manager on any licensing conditions that apply to that weekend, such as a late-night event or a private function. During service, I expect staff to log incidents in our register and tell me immediately about any refusal of service or injury. After the weekend, I review the incident log and adjust training or signage if needed."

5. How would you work with a film distributor or a live promoter to schedule a season or a one-off show?

Why they ask

Venues rely on good relationships with distributors and promoters, so they want to see you can manage those conversations and keep schedules realistic.

How to structure your answer

A client-facing question like this should cover relationship management, clear communication and practical venue constraints. Outline how you gather requirements, negotiate dates and times, confirm technical needs and keep all parties informed.

Example answer

"I would start by understanding what the distributor or promoter needs: release dates, holdover expectations, technical specs and marketing support. Then I would check our venue calendar against existing film sessions, live shows and private events. I would confirm the available screens, session times and any staffing or licensing requirements. I would put the agreement in writing, including cancellation terms and box office reporting. During the season, I would send weekly attendance reports and flag any changes straight away. After the run, I would debrief with the promoter to see what worked and what could improve."

6. Describe how you train and motivate a front-of-house team that works across cinema and live performance.

Why they ask

This question looks at your people leadership and whether you can build a team that works confidently across cinema and live performance.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR to describe a specific team you led, the training you put in place and the result. Include how you set standards, give feedback and recognise good work.

Example answer

"At my last venue, the front-of-house team had a mix of experienced cinema staff and new casuals who had never worked a live show. I created a short induction that covered ticketing, ushering, bar service and accessibility seating. I paired new staff with a buddy for their first three shifts and checked in after each one. I also started a pre-show briefing where we ran through the running order, any VIPs and the plan for interval service. Within a month, the new casuals were confident on live show nights, and our customer feedback scores for service went up. I made sure to thank people publicly when they handled a difficult patron well, which kept morale steady during a busy season."