

Train Controller interview questions

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What to expect

Train Controller interviews assess your ability to manage train movements safely and efficiently, often under time pressure. You can expect a mix of process, behavioural, scenario, technical and safety questions.

- **Process:** Questions that ask you to walk through how you would perform a routine task, such as setting a route or issuing an authority.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for examples from your past experience, using the STAR method to describe how you handled incidents or worked in a team.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement and decision-making under pressure, such as responding to a train breakdown or signal failure.
- **Technical:** Questions about your familiarity with control systems, signalling principles, and rail operating rules.
- **Safety:** Questions that focus on your understanding of regulatory compliance and how you maintain safety in daily operations.

The interview process typically begins with a phone screen, followed by a panel interview with a control centre manager and a safety specialist. You may also complete a practical simulation or psychometric assessment that tests your ability to prioritise and communicate under pressure.

1. Walk me through how you would set a route for a train entering a junction.

Why they ask

This process question tests your knowledge of signalling and control systems, and your ability to follow procedures accurately.

How to structure your answer

Provide a step-by-step walkthrough: confirm the train's location and schedule, check the route is clear on the control system, set the points and signals, communicate with the driver, and monitor the train's progress through the junction.

Example answer

"First, I check the train's schedule and current position on the control system. I verify that the route through the junction is clear of other trains and any maintenance work. Then I set the points and signals using the control system, ensuring they are correctly aligned. I contact the driver via two-way radio to confirm the route is set and the signal is clear. Once the train is moving, I monitor its progress on the screen until it has passed the junction and the route can be reset."

2. Tell me about a time you had to respond to an unplanned incident on the network.

Why they ask

This behavioural question assesses your problem-solving and communication skills in a real incident.

How to structure your answer

Use the STAR method: describe the situation, the task you needed to accomplish, the actions you took, and the result you achieved.

Example answer

"In my previous role, a train stopped unexpectedly between stations due to a mechanical fault, blocking a busy line during peak hour. My task was to restore normal operations quickly while

ensuring safety. I immediately confirmed the train's location and that no passengers were in danger. I contacted the driver to understand the issue and arranged for a rescue train. I also informed signallers to hold other services and updated the control centre. We cleared the line within 35 minutes, and I documented the incident for the shift report. The result was minimal disruption to the network and a safe outcome for everyone involved."

3. A train has stopped unexpectedly between stations and is blocking a busy line. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario question tests your judgement under pressure and your ability to prioritise safety and recovery.

How to structure your answer

Use a structured approach: assess the situation for safety, communicate with the driver and signallers, implement a recovery plan, and keep stakeholders informed.

Example answer

"I would first confirm the train's exact location and whether any passengers or crew are at risk. If safe, I would contact the driver to find out why the train stopped and if it can be moved. I would then set signals to protect the train and hold other services approaching the area. Next, I would coordinate with signallers and maintenance to arrange recovery, such as sending a rescue train or authorising a manual move. Throughout, I would keep the control centre and relevant staff updated. My priority is always safety, then minimising delays for passengers."

4. How do you ensure you remain compliant with rail safety regulations during a shift?

Why they ask

This safety question checks your understanding of regulatory requirements and your commitment to safe working.

How to structure your answer

Explain your approach to compliance: knowing the relevant regulations, using checklists, documenting actions, and staying current with training.

Example answer

"I start each shift by reviewing any safety alerts and confirming that my control systems are working correctly. I follow the Rail Safety National Law and my organisation's operating rules, using checklists for critical tasks like setting routes or issuing authorities. I document all operational events accurately in the shift log. If I'm unsure about a regulation, I refer to the standards or ask a supervisor. I also complete regular refresher training to stay up to date. This approach ensures I maintain compliance and safety at all times."

5. Describe your experience with train control systems like Siemens Controlguide or Westrace.

Why they ask

This technical question assesses your hands-on familiarity with the tools you will use daily.

How to structure your answer

Give specific examples of systems you have used, what you did with them, and how you troubleshoot common issues.

Example answer

"I have used Siemens Controlguide for the past three years to monitor train movements and set routes. In my current role, I use it to manage up to 140 services per shift across a busy network. I am comfortable with its alarm management and reporting functions. I have also worked with Westrace for

interlocking control. When I encounter a system alarm, I follow the standard troubleshooting steps, such as verifying the signal status and checking for any communication faults, before escalating if needed."

6. How do you handle competing priorities when multiple trains are delayed and you need to make quick decisions?

Why they ask

This question tests your time management and problem-solving skills in a high-pressure environment.

How to structure your answer

Describe your method for triaging tasks, communicating with stakeholders, and following procedures to restore order.

Example answer

"I prioritise based on safety and the number of passengers affected. First, I ensure all trains are stopped at safe locations and that no collisions are possible. Then I assess which delays can be resolved quickly and which need more complex recovery. I communicate with drivers and signallers to set a clear order of movements. I keep a mental log of tasks and update the control centre as decisions are made. After the immediate pressure eases, I document the incident and review what could be improved. Staying calm and following procedures helps me manage competing demands."