

Typist interview questions

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What to expect

Typist interviews are practical and evidence-based. Employers are checking that your accuracy holds up under a deadline and that you can work with their particular documents, whether those are legal correspondence, clinical letters, council reports or student records.

- **Practical skills test:** A short typing or transcription exercise, sometimes with a proofreading component, usually done before or straight after the interview.
- **Process questions:** How you plan a batch of work, set priorities and check your own output before it leaves the desk.
- **Behavioural questions:** Past examples of catching errors, meeting tight deadlines or handling a document you got wrong.
- **Technical and software questions:** Your familiarity with Word styles, Excel registers, Google Docs and transcription tools such as Express Scribe or Dragon Professional.
- **Confidentiality and judgement questions:** How you handle sensitive legal, medical or personal information, and what you do when a recording is unclear.
- **Client and author liaison questions:** How you query unclear content with the person who wrote or dictated it without creating friction.

Most processes start with a phone or video screen of ten to fifteen minutes covering availability, typing speed and software familiarity, then move to an in-person or online interview with the supervisor and sometimes an office manager. Expect a timed typing or transcription exercise, often from a real or simulated document, and a short proofreading check where you mark up errors in a sample. Panel questions typically run through your process for managing a backlog, a behavioural example or two, and confidentiality. Reference checks and, in government or health settings, a police check or working with children check usually follow before an offer.

1. Walk us through how you would handle a batch of audio files that all need to be typed and returned by the end of the day.

Why they ask

This is the core of the job. They want to hear a repeatable method, not just an assurance that you work fast.

How to structure your answer

Walk through it in order: how you assess the batch, how you sequence it, how you handle interruptions, and how you check the finished work before sending it. Finish with what you would do if it became clear you could not finish everything on time.

Example answer

"First I would check the length and quality of each recording so I know what I am dealing with, and flag any that are heavily accented or have background noise, because those take longer. I would type the shortest items first to clear them off the list, then work through the longer ones in order of who needs them soonest, checking with the author if I am unsure about priority. I keep notifications off and batch my queries so I am not interrupting the same person five times. Before sending anything out, I read it back against the source and run a spellcheck, then a slow read of the names, figures and headings, which is where most errors sit. If it became clear I could not finish everything, I would tell the supervisor as soon as I knew, not at five o'clock, and ask which items could wait until the next morning."

2. Tell me about a time you found an error in a document you had already typed and sent out.

Why they ask

It tests honesty and whether you have a real checking process or just hope for the best.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the situation briefly, describe what the error was, explain how you found it and what you did to fix it, then finish with the change you made to your checking routine.

Example answer

"I had typed a set of patient referral letters from dictation and sent them through for signature. Later that afternoon I was filing the audio and noticed the doctor had said one dosage differently to what I had typed, and I had misheard it. I told my supervisor immediately, we pulled the letters before they were posted, and I corrected the one that mattered and reissued the set. After that I started replaying any section containing a number, dosage or date at half speed and reading it back against the typed line, and I marked those spots in the document as I went so I could double-check them at the end. I have not had a dosage error since."

3. This office runs to a house style guide. How would you get up to speed with ours?

Why they ask

They want someone who will follow their conventions rather than reformat documents to their own personal taste.

How to structure your answer

Give a practical onboarding method, then show you understand why consistency matters to the reader.

Example answer

"I would ask for the current guide and read it end to end before I started typing, then keep it open on a second screen while I worked. I would build a one-page cheat sheet of the things I use most, like date format, how correspondence is addressed, heading styles and how figures are written, and pin it where I can see it. I would also ask to see two or three examples of finished documents from each author or department, because a real example often shows things a guide does not spell out. For the first couple of weeks I would get a sample of my work checked before it went out, and once I was confident I would only ask when something genuinely was not covered."

4. You are halfway through transcribing a recording and you cannot make out a name or a set of figures. What do you do?

Why they ask

It is the judgement call that separates a reliable typist from one who guesses. They are listening for whether you would flag it or fill the gap with something plausible.

How to structure your answer

Work through it as a decision: what you try first, how far you go before escalating, and what you leave in the document.

Example answer

"I would replay that section a few times at a slower speed and try noise reduction, because often it is just a matter of hearing it again. If it is still unclear, I would check whether the same name or figure appears elsewhere in the recording or in earlier correspondence, which sometimes resolves it without asking anyone. If it is still not clear, I would leave a highlighted placeholder in square brackets and keep going rather than stopping the whole job, then send one consolidated list of queries to the author at the end. What I would not do is type my best guess. A wrong name or figure on a legal or clinical document causes far more trouble than a short delay while someone confirms it."

5. Which tools do you use for transcription and document production, and how do you get the most out of them?

Why they ask

They need to know whether you will be productive on their software from day one or need to be taught basic functions.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a practical inventory: name the tools, say what you use each for, and give one specific way you use it well.

Example answer

"I use Express Scribe for audio work, mainly because the foot pedal and speed controls let me keep my hands on the keyboard and slow a section without losing my place. For speech recognition I have used Dragon Professional, and I find the key is training it on the vocabulary your workplace actually uses, so names, place names and specialist terms come through correctly. In Word I work with styles and templates rather than manual formatting, which keeps headings and spacing consistent and makes it easy to reformat a document if the style guide changes. I use Excel for workload tracking and correspondence registers, and Google Docs when I need an author to comment directly on a draft. I pick things up quickly and I am happy to learn whatever system you use."

6. This role involves legal and personal documents. How do you handle confidential material day to day?

Why they ask

It is a trust question. Breaches are serious, and they want to hear habits rather than good intentions.

How to structure your answer

Talk through your habits in a normal working day: where documents live, who sees them, what you do at your desk and away from it.

Example answer

"The habit I stick to is keeping confidential work inside whatever system the workplace uses, never on a personal drive, email account or USB. I lock my screen whenever I leave my desk, including for a two-minute trip to the printer, and I do not leave printed drafts or audio files sitting in the tray. I only send documents to the people who are meant to receive them, and if someone asks me for a copy who is not on the list, I check with my supervisor rather than deciding myself. Headphones go on for anything sensitive so it is not playing out loud. I have also worked under the Privacy Act requirements in health settings, so I am comfortable following a documented procedure and asking when something is not covered."