

Upholsterer interview questions

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What to expect

Upholsterer interviews usually combine a conversation about your trade background with a practical look at your work or a hands-on test. Employers want to see how you handle materials, tools and clients, and whether you can keep a workshop running safely.

- **Process and technical:** Questions that ask you to walk through how you strip, cut, sew and fit upholstery, often with a sample piece or photos in front of you.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past jobs, mistakes, or difficult clients, used to see how you solve problems and communicate.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Questions about a customer request or a material problem, testing how you make decisions on the spot.
- **Safety and workshop practice:** Questions about using staple guns, hot knives, industrial sewing machines and hand tools safely, and how you keep a tidy workspace.
- **Quoting and client-facing:** Questions about estimating a job, explaining options, and managing expectations for restoration or custom work.

A typical process starts with a short phone screen, then an in-person interview at the workshop. You may be asked to complete a practical test, such as cutting foam to a pattern, sewing a seam, or fitting a cover to a frame. Some employers also ask you to bring a portfolio of finished pieces or photos.

1. Walk me through how you approach reupholstering a lounge chair from strip-down to final fit.

Why they ask

This shows whether you understand the sequence of the trade and can plan a job without missing steps.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through structure: start with assessment, then strip-down, frame repair, cutting, sewing, fitting, and final check.

Example answer

"I start by assessing the frame and the existing upholstery. If the springs or webbing are worn, I note that before I strip anything. Then I take photos and label the covers so I can match the pattern later. After stripping, I check the frame for cracks or loose joints and repair them. I cut new foam and padding to shape, then measure and cut the fabric or leather, allowing for seam and pull. I sew the covers on the industrial machine, fitting them inside out first to check the line. Finally I staple or tack the cover in place, working from the centre out so the pattern stays straight, and I steam or press the seams before the client sees it."

2. Tell me about a time you had to repair a piece where the damage was worse than expected. How did you handle it?

Why they ask

This tests problem-solving, honesty and how you keep a client informed when a job changes.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"I once took on a wingback chair that looked like it only needed new covers. When I stripped it, the frame had wood rot along one arm and the springs were shot. I called the client the same day, explained what I had found, and gave them two options: repair the frame and springs, or stop there and refund the deposit. They chose the repair. I replaced the damaged timber, re-webbed the seat, and fitted new padding and covers. The chair came back solid and the client later brought in a second piece."

3. A customer wants a leather cover on a curved chair frame, but the leather is not stretching the way they hoped. What do you do?

Why they ask

This looks at material knowledge, judgement and client communication under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: assess the material, consider alternatives, and communicate clearly.

Example answer

"First I would check whether the leather is the right temper for that curve. Some hides stretch more than others, and a firm leather can fight a tight radius. I would try a small test piece, maybe with a bit of steam and careful pulling, to see how far it moves. If it still will not sit flat, I would tell the customer what is happening and suggest a few ways forward: use a softer hide, add a seam or panel to follow the curve, or switch to a fabric that shapes better. I would show them samples and let them choose before I cut anything."

4. What is your process for measuring and cutting fabric to minimise waste?

Why they ask

This tests efficiency, pattern knowledge and how you handle expensive materials.

How to structure your answer

Process explanation: describe the steps you take from pattern layout to cutting.

Example answer

"I start by checking the pattern against the frame or the old covers, then lay out the pieces on the fabric so the grain and pattern match. If it is a repeating pattern, I match the repeat across seams. I use weights or pins, not too many, and cut with sharp shears or a hot knife for synthetics. For foam, I use a foam cutter or a bandsaw and keep the offcuts for cushions or small repairs. I try to nest the pieces so the offcut is one usable piece rather than several odd shapes."

5. How do you make sure you meet safety requirements when using staple guns, hot knives and industrial sewing machines?

Why they ask

This shows you take WHS seriously and can work safely in a workshop.

How to structure your answer

Safety scenario: identify hazards, describe controls, and mention training or maintenance.

Example answer

"Before I start, I check the tools: the staple gun hose and trigger, the hot knife cord and tip, and the sewing machine guard and needle. I wear the right PPE for each task, like safety glasses when I am cutting or stapling, and I keep my fingers clear of the needle and the knife path. I never disable a guard to save time. If a tool is faulty, I tag it out and tell the supervisor. I also keep the bench clear so I am not reaching over offcuts, and I unplug hot tools when I am not using them."

6. Describe a time you had to quote a restoration job. How did you estimate the cost and materials?

Why they ask

This tests your commercial sense and ability to plan a job from start to finish.

How to structure your answer

STAR or process: describe the job, how you broke down the quote, and how it turned out.

Example answer

"I quoted a restoration of six dining chairs that needed new seats and fresh covers. I inspected each chair and noted that two needed frame repairs. I estimated the fabric by measuring the seat pads and adding for pattern matching, then added foam, webbing, staples and thread. For labour, I allowed time for stripping, frame repair, cutting, sewing and fitting. I wrote the quote with the assumption that the frames were sound, and I told the client I would call if I found anything else. One chair did need extra gluing, so I called and got approval before doing the work. The job came in close to the quote and the client was happy."