

Viticulturist interview questions

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What to expect

Viticulturist interviews mix practical, on-the-ground questions with judgement calls, since the role involves making time-sensitive decisions across a growing season with real financial consequences. Expect a strong focus on how you monitor and respond to vine and fruit conditions, plus questions about managing seasonal crews and working with winemakers.

- **Process:** Walking through routine vineyard tasks such as monitoring, sampling or scheduling to check practical knowledge and consistency of method.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of managing crews, solving problems under time pressure, or working with winemakers and suppliers.
- **Scenario:** Judgement questions about how you'd respond to a disease outbreak, weather event or harvest timing conflict.
- **Technical:** Questions on soil and tissue testing, fruit composition, irrigation and pest and disease identification.
- **Safety and compliance:** Chemical handling, WHS obligations and accreditation relevant to spraying and machinery use.

Most interviews start with a discussion of your background and the vineyards or regions you've worked in, move into technical and process questions to assess practical competence, then cover a scenario or two to see how you handle pressure. Larger operations may include a second interview or vineyard walk with the vineyard manager or winemaker.

1. Walk me through how you monitor vine health and disease pressure across a block during the growing season.

Why they ask

This checks whether you have a genuine, repeatable monitoring routine rather than reactive habits, which matters given the role's emphasis on ongoing disease and pest surveillance.

How to structure your answer

Describe the routine step by step in order: frequency of block walks, what you look for at each growth stage, how you record and escalate findings, and how that feeds into spray or canopy decisions.

Example answer

"I do a full block walk at least weekly during the growing season, more often around flowering and veraison when disease risk is highest. I check for mildew, botrytis and pest damage on leaves and bunches, and note anything unusual with block and row references. If I find early signs of disease, I flag it immediately rather than waiting for the next scheduled spray review, because a day or two can make a real difference to spread. I keep records season to season so I can compare pressure points across years and adjust my monitoring intensity in problem areas."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a seasonal harvest crew under time pressure.

Why they ask

Harvest coordination and crew supervision are core parts of the role, and pressure during harvest is unavoidable, so employers want evidence you can lead a team through it.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result, focusing on how you organised people and communicated under pressure.

Example answer

"During one harvest, a forecast heat spike meant we needed to bring picking forward by two days across three blocks. I re-rostered the crew, brought in a couple of extra casual pickers I'd worked with before, and split supervision duties with my assistant so both blocks could run at once. I briefed everyone clearly on picking standards before we started, since speed can't come at the cost of fruit quality. We got the fruit off before the heat hit and the winery accepted the full load without any quality knockbacks."

3. A key block shows signs of powdery mildew three weeks before your planned harvest date. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under time and financial pressure, a realistic situation given the role's disease management responsibilities.

How to structure your answer

Explain your decision-making process: how you'd assess severity, weigh treatment options against harvest timing, and who you'd consult before acting.

Example answer

"First I'd assess how widespread the infection is and whether it's on leaves only or reaching the bunches, since that changes the urgency. I'd check the withholding periods on any fungicide options against the planned harvest date, because using the wrong product could delay picking further. If treatment isn't viable that close to harvest, I'd talk to the winemaker about bringing the pick forward or adjusting the sorting process at intake to manage affected fruit. I'd rather lose a small amount of yield than risk the whole block's quality."

4. How do you use soil and tissue test results to guide your fertiliser program?

Why they ask

Nutrient management is a core technical skill for the role, and this checks you can interpret data rather than just follow a set calendar.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a technical explanation: what tests you run, when, and how results translate into specific actions.

Example answer

"I take petiole samples around flowering and follow up with soil tests to check nutrient availability against vine demand. If tissue results show low nitrogen or potassium relative to the growth stage, I'll adjust the fertigation program rather than apply a blanket rate across all blocks. I also cross-check against vine vigour and previous yield to avoid over-fertilising blocks that don't need it, since that just adds cost without improving fruit quality."

5. What's your experience with chemical handling accreditation and WHS requirements around spraying?

Why they ask

Chemical use and machinery operation carry real safety and compliance obligations, so employers need to confirm you meet the accreditation and safe-work standards expected on an Australian vineyard.

How to structure your answer

State your relevant accreditation, then describe how you apply WHS practice day to day.

Example answer

"I hold current ChemCert accreditation and keep it up to date. On site I follow the chemical register and withholding period requirements strictly, use the correct PPE for whatever's being applied, and make sure anyone else handling chemicals or operating the tractor and spray rig has had proper induction. I also keep spray records current in case of an audit or a query from the winery about residue testing."

6. How do you communicate fruit composition data to winemakers to support picking decisions?

Why they ask

The role sits between field management and winemaking, so this checks how well you can translate field data into decisions the winery can act on.

How to structure your answer

Describe the collaborative process: what data you provide, how often, and how you handle disagreement over timing.

Example answer

"I track Baume, pH and titratable acidity through veraison, usually sampling twice a week as harvest gets closer. I send the winemaker a short summary with trend data rather than just a single reading, so they can see where the fruit is heading, not just where it sits today. If there's a disagreement on timing, say I think the fruit needs another few days but the winery wants to pick sooner for tank space, I'll lay out the risk clearly and let them make the call, since it's ultimately their fruit intake to manage."