

Web Administrator interview questions

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What to expect

Web Administrator interviews combine technical checks with practical scenario questions about uptime, security and incident response. Employers want to know you can keep a site running without hand-holding and that you understand the compliance and security expectations that apply in Australian organisations.

- **Technical configuration and troubleshooting:** Questions about web server software, CMS platforms, cloud services and how you diagnose common faults.
- **Scenario and incident response:** Situations where you have to prioritise, communicate and restore service under pressure.
- **Security and compliance:** How you apply patches, manage access and align with frameworks such as the ACSC Essential Eight.
- **Process and change management:** Your approach to backups, deployments and coordinating changes with developers.
- **Behavioural and teamwork:** How you have worked with other teams, handled handovers and dealt with difficult incidents.

Usually a 30 to 45 minute phone or video screen with a recruiter or hiring manager, then a technical interview with the web or infrastructure team. Some employers include a short practical task, such as diagnosing a simulated outage or explaining how you would harden a WordPress site. Final rounds tend to focus on how you work with developers, marketing and security, and how you stay calm during an outage.

1. How would you troubleshoot a website that is returning intermittent 502 errors?

Why they ask

This is a classic web administrator fault. Interviewers want to see a logical, layered approach rather than random guessing.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your diagnostic process step by step: gather evidence, check logs, isolate the layer, test a hypothesis, and document the fix.

Example answer

"First I would check the monitoring dashboards and error logs for the web server and the application. If the 502s are intermittent, I would look at whether the upstream application is crashing, if the server is running out of memory, or if there are timeouts from the database. I would also check recent changes, like a new deployment or a configuration change. On a WordPress site hosted on AWS, I would review the Nginx error log and the PHP-FPM logs. Once I had a likely cause, I would try to reproduce it in a staging environment and apply a fix, such as increasing the worker connections or rolling back a plugin. After the fix, I would set up a more specific monitor so the same issue is caught earlier next time."

2. You receive an alert that a production site is down at 2am. Walk me through your response.

Why they ask

This tests your judgement under pressure and your ability to follow an incident process without panicking.

How to structure your answer

Use a triage structure: acknowledge and assess, communicate, contain, resolve, and review.

Example answer

"I would first acknowledge the alert and check the monitoring to confirm the site is genuinely down and how widespread it is. Then I would notify the on-call contact or my manager using the agreed channel, so everyone knows I am on it. I would check the basics first: is the server reachable, is the database up, is it a network issue, or has a recent change caused it? If it is a code or configuration fault, I might roll back to the last known good version while I investigate. If it is a security incident, I would follow the incident response plan and isolate the affected systems. Throughout, I would give short, factual updates to stakeholders. After service is restored, I would write a brief incident summary and schedule a review to stop it happening again."

3. Tell me about a time you had to apply a critical security patch under time pressure.

Why they ask

Security patching is a core duty. The interviewer wants to see you balance speed with safety and communication.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the task, the action you took, and the result.

Example answer

"In a previous role, a critical vulnerability was announced for a content management system we used across several client sites. The situation was that we had a short window before exploit attempts started, and I was the main person responsible for patching. My task was to update every site without breaking customisations. I tested the patch on a staging copy of the busiest site first, then created a rollback plan and a backup. I scheduled the production updates outside business hours, did them in batches, and checked each site's key functions afterwards. I also sent a short note to account managers so they could reassure clients. As a result, all sites were patched within the agreed window, and we had no downtime or compatibility issues."

4. How do you manage user access and permissions across a web environment?

Why they ask

Access control is a practical security topic. They want to hear about least privilege and clear processes.

How to structure your answer

Explain your policy first, then how you apply it day to day, and how you handle reviews and offboarding.

Example answer

"My starting point is least privilege: users get only the access they need to do their job. For a web environment, that means separating roles for developers, content editors, and administrators. I keep a record of who has what access, and I use groups rather than individual permissions where possible. When someone joins or leaves, I follow a checklist: create or remove accounts, update group memberships, and check any API keys or deployment credentials. I also run regular access reviews, at least quarterly, and remove anything that is no longer needed. If we use a CMS like WordPress, I limit administrator accounts and use plugins or single sign-on to centralise control. I document the process so it is consistent if someone else covers my leave."

5. How would you explain a planned maintenance window to a non-technical stakeholder who is worried about lost sales?

Why they ask

Web administrators often work with marketing or retail teams. This checks your communication and empathy.

How to structure your answer

Use a client-facing structure: acknowledge the concern, explain in plain language, offer options, and agree on follow-up.

Example answer

"I would start by acknowledging that lost sales are a real worry, and thank them for raising it. Then I would explain in plain terms what the maintenance is for, for example a security update or a server upgrade, and why it cannot wait indefinitely. I would give them the proposed window, usually a low-traffic period, and explain how long the site might be unavailable. If they are still concerned, I would offer alternatives, such as doing the work in stages, using a maintenance page that still shows key information, or scheduling it around a known quiet period. I would also commit to sending a reminder before the window and a confirmation once the site is back up and tested. That way they feel informed and involved rather than surprised."

6. What steps do you take to harden a WordPress installation on AWS?

Why they ask

This is a technical question that combines CMS, cloud and security skills. It shows whether you think in layers.

How to structure your answer

Take a layered approach: server, application, network, and monitoring. Explain each layer briefly.

Example answer

"I start at the server layer: keep the operating system patched, use a minimal set of services, and run the web server as a non-root user. For WordPress itself, I remove unused themes and plugins, enforce strong passwords and two-factor authentication for administrators, and disable file editing from the dashboard. On AWS, I put the site behind a load balancer or CloudFront, use security groups to restrict access, and store backups in S3 with versioning. I also use Cloudflare or AWS WAF to filter malicious traffic, and I set up monitoring for file changes and login attempts. Finally, I keep a staging environment to test updates before they go live. That layered approach means if one control fails, others are still in place."