

Winemaker interview questions

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What to expect

Winemaker interviews blend technical depth with practical judgement. You will be asked to show you can manage a vintage from intake to bottling, solve fermentation and stability problems, and work with viticulturists and sales teams. Employers want to know you can make consistent wine and keep the cellar compliant.

- **Technical:** Questions on fermentation kinetics, laboratory analysis, blending principles, wine stability and the tools you use, such as Vintrace, WineScan and pH meters.
- **Process:** Walk-throughs of vintage planning, grape intake, ageing regimes and bottling runs, testing whether you can sequence work and anticipate risks.
- **Scenario or judgement:** Hypothetical problems like a stuck ferment, a heat stability failure before bottling, or a quality deviation, probing how you assess options under pressure.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of teamwork, conflict resolution, process improvement and working with viticulturists or sales to adjust winemaking decisions.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions on cellar hygiene, chemical handling, food safety, HACCP and Wine Australia requirements.

A typical process starts with a phone or video screen covering your background and interest in the role. If you progress, you will meet the head winemaker, production manager or cellar supervisor for a technical interview, often including a tasting or blending exercise. Some employers add a site walk-through of the winery and a final conversation with the broader team.

1. Walk me through how you plan a vintage from grape intake to bottling.

Why they ask

This tests your operational grip on the whole production cycle and whether you can coordinate people, equipment and lab work under time pressure.

How to structure your answer

Use a chronological walk-through. Start with pre-vintage preparation, then intake, fermentation, ageing and bottling. At each stage, name the key decisions, the records you keep and how you communicate with the vineyard and cellar team.

Example answer

"I start by reviewing the vineyard sampling results and block history with the viticulturist to map expected intake dates and volumes. I then check tank capacity, barrel availability and lab supplies, and set a cleaning and hygiene schedule. During intake, I record berry chemistry and adjust SO₂ and yeast nutrition as needed. For fermentation, I set target temperature and cap management for each batch and monitor daily with a fermentation monitoring system. Once dry, I taste and analyse for malolactic progress and stability. Before bottling, I run blending trials, check heat and cold stability, and confirm the final blend with the winemaker. I keep everything in Vintrace so the team can see tank and barrel movements."

2. Tell me about a time you had a fermentation problem, such as a stuck ferment or off character, and how you resolved it.

Why they ask

Fermentation problems are common in winemaking. The interviewer wants to see your diagnostic process and how you act without panicking or cutting corners.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Describe the situation and the specific fermentation, the task you faced, the actions you took to diagnose and correct it, and the result in terms of wine quality or process learning.

Example answer

"In one vintage, a red ferment stalled at two-thirds of the way to dry. I checked temperature, yeast nutrition and any temperature shock, then ran a quick analysis for residual sugar and volatile acidity. I decided to rehydrate a fresh yeast culture with nutrients and restart the ferment gradually by adding it to a small volume of the stuck wine first. I also adjusted the cap management to avoid overheating. The ferment finished dry within a week, and the wine passed sensory and stability checks before blending. I documented the incident in Vintrace and changed our nutrient addition schedule for that block the following year."

3. How do you approach blending to achieve a consistent house style across different batches?

Why they ask

Blending is where craft meets consistency. The interviewer wants to know you can assess components, run trials and make repeatable decisions.

How to structure your answer

Describe a structured approach: define the target style, assess each component, run small trials, taste and analyse, then scale up. Mention how you document and communicate the final blend.

Example answer

"I start by clarifying the target style with the winemaker and reviewing previous blend records. Then I taste each component and note fruit intensity, tannin structure, acid and any faults. I run small bench trials with different proportions, tasting them over a few days to see how they evolve. I also check lab numbers for pH, acidity and colour. Once I have a preferred blend, I run a larger trial to confirm it works at scale, then document the final ratios in Vintrace. I share the blend sheet with the cellar team so everyone knows what goes into each tank."

4. A bottling run is scheduled, but lab results show a wine is not heat stable. What do you do?

Why they ask

This scenario tests judgement under pressure. You need to balance production deadlines with quality and compliance.

How to structure your answer

Use a judgement-under-pressure structure: acknowledge the issue, assess urgency and options, communicate with stakeholders, decide and act, then follow up.

Example answer

"First, I confirm the lab result and check how far the wine is from the stability threshold. I immediately inform the bottling supervisor and production manager that we may need to delay. I assess options: fining with bentonite, cold stabilisation if time allows, or rescheduling the bottling run. I taste the wine and run a small fining trial to see if we can treat it without stripping character. If the trial works, I schedule the fining and re-test before bottling. If not, I recommend delaying the run and explain the quality risk. I document the decision and the new test results in Vintrace so the compliance record is complete."

5. How do you ensure compliance with wine standards and food safety requirements in the cellar?

Why they ask

Compliance is non-negotiable. The interviewer wants to see you understand HACCP, Wine Australia requirements and everyday hygiene.

How to structure your answer

Describe your systems and habits: documentation, training, monitoring, corrective actions and audits. Give specific examples of records and checks.

Example answer

"I follow our HACCP plan and Food Standards Australia New Zealand requirements, and I keep records for every addition, cleaning step and analysis in Vintrace. I make sure all cellar staff are trained in hygiene and chemical handling, and I run regular checks on tank and barrel cleanliness. For Wine Australia compliance, I maintain batch records and label details so we can trace every wine from intake to bottling. If I find a deviation, I record it, correct it and review the process with the team. I also prepare for internal and external audits by keeping the lab and cellar documentation up to date."

6. Describe a time you worked with a viticulturist or sales team to adjust a winemaking decision.

Why they ask

Winemakers do not work alone. This tests collaboration and whether you can balance vineyard realities, commercial goals and wine quality.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR. Set the context, explain the decision that needed adjusting, describe how you communicated and collaborated, and give the outcome.

Example answer

"In one vintage, the viticulturist flagged that a block would ripen earlier than expected due to warm weather. The sales team had already planned a promotional release for that wine style. I sat down with both teams to review the ripeness data and taste the fruit. We agreed to pick earlier than originally planned to keep freshness, and I adjusted the fermentation temperature to preserve aromatics. The wine still met the style brief, and the sales team was able to keep the release on schedule. I made sure the decision and the adjusted winemaking plan were shared with the cellar team and recorded in Vintrace."