

# Wood Machinist interview questions

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## What to expect

Wood Machinist interviews usually combine a conversation about your trade knowledge with a practical look at how you set up machines, read drawings and work safely. Employers want to see you can produce accurate work at pace without taking shortcuts on safety or quality.

- **Technical trade knowledge:** Questions about setting up and operating specific machines, reading drawings, selecting materials and checking tolerances.
- **Safety and WHS:** Questions about hazard identification, safe work procedures and the steps you take before and during machining.
- **Process and quality:** Questions about how you plan a job, check finished parts and deal with defects or out-of-tolerance work.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for a real example of solving a machining problem, working in a team or handling pressure.
- **Scenario or judgement:** Questions that put you in a typical workshop situation and ask what you would do next.

A typical interview starts with a phone or in-person screen covering your trade qualification and recent machining experience. If you progress, you visit the workshop for a face-to-face interview with a supervisor or leading hand. Many employers also ask you to complete a short practical test, such as setting up a saw or machining a sample part to a drawing, so they can see your skills in action.

## 1. Can you walk me through how you set up a panel saw for a cut list?

### Why they ask

This tests your technical process and whether you can organise a job efficiently and safely.

### How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through: review the cut list and drawings, check material, set the fence and blade, adjust for the first cut, then measure and verify before running the batch.

### Example answer

*"First I read the cut list and the drawings to understand the finished sizes and any grain direction. I check the material for defects and confirm it matches the specification. Then I set the saw fence to the first dimension, install the correct blade for the material, and check the blade height and guard. I make a test cut on a scrap piece, measure it with a tape and square, and adjust if needed. Once the first part is correct, I run the batch, checking every few pieces to make sure the fence has not moved and the sizes are still on spec."*

## 2. What steps do you take to manage risk when operating a moulder or spindle moulder?

### Why they ask

Safety is critical around high-speed cutting tools, and employers want to know you do not take chances.

### How to structure your answer

Use a safety-focused answer: identify the hazards, describe the controls you apply, and mention the WHS procedures you follow.

### Example answer

*"Before I start, I check the machine guards are in place and working, and that the dust extraction is connected. I inspect the cutting tools for damage or dullness and make sure they are sharp and*

*balanced. I set the feed rate and depth of cut to suit the material and the tool, and I use push sticks or a power feeder where possible to keep my hands away from the cutter. I also check the emergency stop and make sure the area around the machine is clear. If anything seems unsafe, I stop and report it before continuing."*

### **3. How do you check finished parts against tolerances and drawings?**

#### **Why they ask**

This shows your attention to detail and quality control habits.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Describe a quality process: compare to drawing, use measuring tools, check key dimensions, document and separate non-conforming parts.

#### **Example answer**

*"I work from the drawing and the cutting list, and I use a tape, vernier calipers or a square to check the critical dimensions. I check the first part thoroughly, then check every few parts during the run to catch any drift. I also look for surface finish, squareness and any tear-out. If a part is out of tolerance, I set it aside and adjust the machine before running more. I keep a note of any adjustments so the next person on the machine knows what was changed."*

### **4. Tell me about a time you had to adjust a machine setup because the first parts were out of tolerance.**

#### **Why they ask**

This is a behavioural question that reveals how you troubleshoot under pressure and your problem-solving approach.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Use STAR: describe the situation, the task, the action you took to diagnose and fix the issue, and the result.

#### **Example answer**

*"I was machining a batch of window frames on a moulder, and the first few parts came out slightly oversize on the width. The drawing called for a finished width that was consistently two millimetres over. I stopped the machine and checked the setup. I found the fence had moved slightly because a clamp was not tight enough. I reset the fence, tightened the clamp, and ran a test piece. It was within tolerance, so I ran the rest of the batch and checked every tenth piece. The frames went through assembly without any rework."*

### **5. You are machining a batch of timber components and notice a defect in the raw material. What do you do?**

#### **Why they ask**

This tests your judgement and how you handle material issues without disrupting production unnecessarily.

#### **How to structure your answer**

Use a judgement-under-pressure structure: stop and assess, isolate the affected material, decide if it can be reworked or must be rejected, and communicate with the supervisor.

#### **Example answer**

*"I would stop machining that piece and set it aside. I would check the rest of the batch to see if the defect is isolated or widespread. If it is just one board, I would mark it and put it in the reject bin, then continue with the good material. If several boards are affected, I would let my supervisor know so we can check the delivery and decide whether to use a different pack. I would not try to machine around a defect if it would compromise the finished part, because that just creates more problems later."*

## **6. How do you approach sharpening and maintaining cutting tools, and how do you coordinate that with production?**

### **Why they ask**

Tool maintenance is a core part of the role, and employers want to see you can keep machines running without causing delays.

### **How to structure your answer**

Describe your maintenance routine, how you decide when to sharpen, and how you schedule it around production deadlines.

### **Example answer**

*"I check the cutting tools at the start of each shift and after any long run. I look for dullness, chips or resin build-up. If a tool needs sharpening, I either sharpen it myself on the grinder or send it out, depending on the tool and the workshop setup. I try to do routine sharpening during planned breaks or changeovers so it does not hold up production. If a tool fails mid-job, I stop, replace it with a spare, and then sharpen the old one when I have time. I also keep a log of when each tool was last sharpened so I can predict when it will need attention next."*