Wool Buyer interview questions

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What to expect

Wool buyer interviews are practical and commercial at the same time. Employers want to know you can read a fleece and a catalogue, hold a limit under pressure on the sale floor, and keep a grower on side when the market turns against them.

- **Technical and fleece assessment:** Questions about yield, micron, staple strength, colour and contamination, and how you turn test data into a buying decision.
- **Process and sale-day preparation:** How you prepare for an auction, set limits, manage multiple lines and work with brokers and store staff.
- **Behavioural negotiation:** Past examples of negotiating price or terms with growers, brokers or clients, usually explored with STAR-style follow-ups.
- **Client-facing advisory:** How you explain market conditions, reserve prices and timing to growers who may not follow the market closely.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Discrepancies between sample and test results, contested lines, or a grower pushing for a price the market will not carry.
- **Commercial and data:** How you use sale results, market reporting platforms and your own records to set limits and advise clients.

Expect a short phone screen first, covering your background and what you know about the wool trade. The main interview is usually face to face with a buying manager or senior buyer, often with a broker or grower services person in the room. It commonly includes a practical component: a table of samples or a sale catalogue to talk through, sometimes followed by a sale-day or wool store walk-through so the employer can see how you work around fleece and how you deal with growers and store staff. Reference checks tend to focus on grower relationships and your reliability on the sale floor.

1. Walk me through how you assess a line of fleece before you bid on it.

Why they ask

This is the core technical question. The employer wants to see a repeatable method, not a lucky eye, and to hear that you weigh test data against what you can see and feel.

How to structure your answer

A step-by-step technical walk-through in the order you actually do it: catalogue and test results first, then physical inspection, then comparison against similar lines, then your limit.

Example answer

“I start with the catalogue and the test results together, because the numbers tell me the yield, micron and contamination before I touch anything. Then I get hands on the sample: staple length and strength, colour, and how much vegetable matter is sitting through the fleece, because contamination is what costs most further down the chain. If a line is showing tenderness or a bit of cot, I note it and mark it down before I set a limit, not after the hammer falls. After that I compare it against other lines of similar type in the same sale, so I know what I am actually competing against and whether the value is really there for my client.”

2. Tell me about a time you negotiated a price where the grower wanted more than the market was offering.

Why they ask

Negotiation sits at the centre of the job, and growers remember how they were treated. The interviewer is testing both your commercial spine and your client manner.

How to structure your answer

STAR, with the emphasis on the action: how you framed the market evidence, what you offered, and how you left the relationship.

Example answer

“A grower I had bought from for years brought me a line late in the season and wanted a price well above what comparable lots had made that week. I understood why, they had put real work into the preparation. I sat down with them and went through the sale results for similar types from the past few sales, and I was upfront that I could not get near their number without losing money on the on-sale. I offered a price at the top of the range I could justify, and we agreed to put the line into the next sale instead, with a reserve we set together. It did not make their original figure, but it cleared above reserve and they have kept bringing me their clip, which matters more over a career than one trade.”

3. You are on the sale floor and you notice the sample in front of you does not match the test results in the catalogue. What do you do?

Why they ask

Sale days move fast and mistakes get expensive. This question tests whether you notice problems, act in the right order, and know when to stop buying.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: immediate action, verification, communication to the right people, decision, and follow-up after the sale.

Example answer

“I would stop and look properly before I bid on anything else. If the sample shows faults the test results do not reflect, or the other way around, I would get the broker's attention and ask for the line to be checked, because that discrepancy affects every buyer in the room. If it cannot be resolved before the lot comes up, I simply do not bid. There is no upside in buying a line you cannot value, and there is plenty of downside if the clip turns out to be tender or contaminated when it lands at the processor. After the sale I would put it in writing to the broker so there is a record, and flag it with my client so nobody is surprised later.”

4. How would you explain a soft market to a grower who needs to sell this week?

Why they ask

Growers often know their sheep better than they know the market. This question tests whether you can advise clearly and honestly without hiding behind jargon.

How to structure your answer

Advisory structure: acknowledge the situation, lay out the evidence plainly, present the realistic options, give a clear recommendation, and offer a follow-up.

Example answer

“First I would acknowledge the pressure they are under, because if they need to sell this week, a lecture about waiting is not useful. Then I would show them the evidence in plain terms: what similar lines have made in the last few sales, how many buyers were active, and where the demand is sitting for their particular type. I would lay out the real options, selling now at the market, setting a reserve and taking the risk, or holding and carrying the cost of storage. My recommendation would depend on their cash position, and I would say so directly. Then I would follow up after the sale with the actual results, so the next conversation is based on what happened rather than what we guessed.”

5. How do you prepare for a sale day?

Why they ask

Buyers run several lines at once under time pressure. This question is about organisation, limits and how you avoid emotional bidding.

How to structure your answer
A process walk-through covering the days before the sale, the morning of, and how you manage yourself once bidding starts.

Example answer

“I start a couple of days out, going through the catalogue and the test results and marking the lines that fit my clients' specifications. I set a limit for each one before sale day, based on comparable results and what the on-sale can carry, and I write it down so I am not making it up in the moment. On the morning I get to the store early, inspect the samples I am serious about, and check whether any lots have been withdrawn or re-offered. Once the sale starts, I work to my limits and I do not chase a line past them, because there is always another sale. At the end of the day I reconcile what I bought against the limits and note anything that surprised me, which sharpens the next week's figures.”

6. How do you use data and market reporting to set your buying limits?

Why they ask
Buying is a commercial job, not just a classing job. The interviewer wants to see that you track the market systematically and can justify a number.

How to structure your answer
Technical and analytical: what inputs you use, how you build a view, how you set and test the limit, and how you adjust when the market moves.

Example answer

“I keep my own record of sale results by type, micron and yield, and I cross-check that against the market reporting platforms and the broker summaries, because one source alone can give you a skewed picture. From there I build a view of where each type is trading and where the demand is coming from, whether that is a particular exporter or a processor with specific requirements. That view turns into a limit for each line, and I test it against what the on-sale can realistically carry. If the market moves during a sale, I adjust for the remaining lots rather than clinging to the figure I set on Monday, but I do not move a limit just because the bidding got lively.”