

Ultimate Operating Theatre Assistant Interview Guide

Comprehensive Preparation Manual for Public and Private Hospital Interviews



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INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive Preparation Manual for Public and Private Hospital Interviews

The role of an Operating Theatre Assistant (OTA) is one of the most important support positions within the perioperative environment. Modern hospitals seek candidates who demonstrate patient-centred care, infection control awareness, teamwork, manual handling competence, communication skills, and the ability to work safely under pressure.

Whether interviewing with Queensland Health, Mater Health, Ramsay Health Care, Healthscope, St Vincent's, UnitingCare, or a regional hospital, interview panels are generally assessing the same core capabilities:

What Interview Panels Are Looking For

- ✓ Patient Safety
- ✓ Infection Prevention
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Communication Skills
- ✓ Professionalism
- ✓ Reliability
- ✓ Manual Handling Knowledge
- ✓ Workplace Safety Awareness
- ✓ Adaptability
- ✓ Compassion

SECTION 1: THE MOST COMMON OPENING QUESTIONS

Question 1

Tell us about yourself.

What they want:

- Confidence
- Communication
- Motivation

Strong response:

"I am passionate about healthcare and supporting patients through what can often be a stressful experience. I enjoy working within team environments, have strong attention to detail, and am particularly interested in perioperative services because of the teamwork, patient focus, and opportunity to contribute to positive surgical outcomes."

Question 2

Why do you want to become an Operating Theatre Assistant?

Strong response:

"I enjoy practical hands-on work while supporting patient care. The operating theatre environment appeals to me because every team member contributes to patient safety and successful surgical outcomes. I am motivated by working in a fast-paced environment where teamwork and professionalism are highly valued."

Question 3

What do you know about the role?

Key points:

- Patient transfers
 - Theatre preparation
 - Cleaning
 - Equipment movement
 - Infection control
 - Positioning assistance
 - Supporting nurses and surgeons
-

Question 4

Why should we employ you?

Strong answer:

"I bring a strong work ethic, reliability, excellent communication skills, and a genuine commitment to patient care. I understand the importance of teamwork, safety, and infection control and would contribute positively to the perioperative team."

Question 5

What are your strengths?

Examples:

- Teamwork
- Reliability
- Adaptability
- Communication
- Time management

SECTION 2: TOP 50 OPERATING THEATRE ASSISTANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General Questions

1. Tell us about yourself.
 2. Why do you want this role?
 3. What do you know about our hospital?
 4. Why do you want to work in theatre?
 5. What interests you about perioperative services?
 6. What are your strengths?
 7. What are your weaknesses?
 8. How do you manage stress?
 9. How do you prioritise tasks?
 10. Describe your ideal workplace.
-

Teamwork Questions

11. Describe a time you worked in a team.
 12. How do you support colleagues?
 13. What makes a successful team?
 14. How would you handle a difficult colleague?
 15. What would you do if someone was struggling?
 16. How do you communicate under pressure?
 17. What role do you usually take in a team?
 18. Tell us about a successful team project.
 19. How would you support new staff?
 20. Why is teamwork important in theatre?
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Manual Handling Questions

21. Explain safe manual handling.
 22. What is a manual handling risk?
 23. How would you transfer a patient safely?
 24. What would you do if equipment was unavailable?
 25. How do you prevent injury during transfers?
-

Infection Control Questions

26. What is infection control?
 27. Why is hand hygiene important?
 28. What are standard precautions?
 29. What PPE may be required in theatre?
 30. What would you do if sterile equipment became contaminated?
-

Safety Questions

31. What is patient safety?
 32. What would you do if you identified a hazard?
 33. Explain risk management.
 34. What is a near miss?
 35. How would you report an incident?
-

Communication Questions

36. Describe effective communication.
37. How do you handle misunderstandings?
38. How do you communicate with anxious patients?
39. How would you escalate concerns?
40. What would you do if instructions were unclear?

Professionalism Questions

41. Describe professional behaviour.
42. What is confidentiality?
43. Why is patient dignity important?
44. What would you do if you made a mistake?
45. How do you maintain accountability?

Behavioural Questions

46. Tell us about a difficult situation.
47. Describe a workplace challenge.
48. Tell us about a conflict.
49. Describe a time you showed initiative.
50. Describe a time you exceeded expectations.

SECTION 3: BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Queensland Health commonly uses behavioural interviewing.
Use the STAR method:

S = Situation

T = Task

A = Action

R = Result

Example Question

Tell us about a time you dealt with a difficult person.

Strong STAR Response:

Situation:

A customer became upset during a busy period.

Task:

My responsibility was to assist while maintaining professionalism.

Action:

I listened calmly, acknowledged concerns, and worked toward a solution.

Result:

The situation de-escalated and the customer left satisfied.

Example Question

Tell us about a time you worked under pressure.

Panel is assessing:

- Calmness
- Prioritisation
- Communication

SECTION 4: CLINICAL SCENARIO QUESTIONS

These questions assess judgement rather than clinical expertise.

Scenario 1

You notice water on the floor outside theatre.

What do you do?

Strong answer:

Stop and assess the risk. Ensure patient and staff safety, place warning signage if available, report the hazard immediately, and follow local procedures to have the spill cleaned.

Scenario 2

You notice a patient becoming increasingly anxious.

Strong answer:

Provide reassurance, remain calm, communicate respectfully, and notify the nurse if concerns continue.

Scenario 3

You notice a patient transfer is unsafe.

Strong answer:

Stop the transfer if safe to do so, communicate concerns immediately, obtain additional staff or equipment, and ensure patient safety before continuing.

Scenario 4

You see contamination of sterile equipment.

Strong answer:

Inform the perioperative nurse immediately, isolate the affected item, and ensure replacement sterile equipment is obtained.

Scenario 5

You discover missing equipment before surgery.

Strong answer:

Escalate immediately, locate replacement equipment, communicate with the theatre team, and minimise delay where possible.

SECTION 5: INFECTION CONTROL QUESTIONS

These are among the most common OTA interview topics.

Question

Why is hand hygiene important?

Strong response:

Hand hygiene reduces the transmission of microorganisms and is one of the most effective ways to prevent healthcare-associated infections.

Question

What are standard precautions?

Answer:

- Hand hygiene
- PPE
- Safe waste disposal
- Sharps safety
- Environmental cleaning

Question

What PPE may be required in theatre?

Examples:

- Gloves
- Gowns
- Masks
- Eye protection

Question

What would you do if blood splashed onto your skin?

Answer:

Follow local exposure protocols, wash the area, report immediately, and seek appropriate follow-up.

SECTION 6: MANUAL HANDLING QUESTIONS

Question

What is safe manual handling?

Strong response:

Using techniques and equipment that minimise injury risk to staff and patients while maintaining safe movement practices.

Question

What would you assess before moving a patient?

Answer:

- Patient weight
- Mobility
- Pain
- Equipment required
- Number of staff required

Question

Why are slide sheets used?

Answer:

To reduce friction, improve patient comfort, and minimise injury risk to both staff and patients.

Question

When would you use a hoist?

Answer:

When risk assessment indicates manual transfer would be unsafe.

SECTION 7: TEAMWORK QUESTIONS

Question

Why is teamwork important in theatre?

Strong response:

Every member contributes to patient safety. Effective teamwork improves communication, efficiency, and clinical outcomes.

Question

How do you handle disagreements?

Answer:

Remain respectful, focus on facts, communicate professionally, and prioritise patient care.

Question

What would you do if a colleague was overwhelmed?

Answer:

Offer assistance where appropriate, communicate supportively, and escalate concerns if necessary.

SECTION 8: CONFLICT RESOLUTION QUESTIONS

Question

Describe a conflict you have experienced.

Interview tip:

Avoid blaming others.

Focus on:

- Communication
- Resolution
- Professionalism

Question

A colleague speaks rudely to you. What do you do?

Strong response:

Remain professional, avoid escalating the situation, address concerns respectfully, and seek support if required.

Question

You disagree with a team member.

Strong response:

Discuss professionally, focus on patient safety, and follow organisational escalation pathways if required.

SECTION 9: QUEENSLAND HEALTH INTERVIEW EXAMPLES

Queensland Health interviews often focus on values-based recruitment.

Common themes include:

Patient Focus

Example:

Tell us about a time you provided excellent customer service.

Teamwork

Example:

Describe a situation where teamwork was critical.

Integrity

Example:

Tell us about a time you admitted a mistake.

Accountability

Example:

Describe a situation where you took responsibility.

Safety

Example:

Tell us about a workplace hazard you identified.

SECTION 10: PRIVATE HOSPITAL INTERVIEW EXAMPLES

Private hospitals often place greater emphasis on:

- Customer service
 - Patient experience
 - Flexibility
 - Efficiency
 - Professional presentation
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Ramsay Example

Question:

How would you provide excellent patient care?

Mater Example

Question:

What does compassionate healthcare mean to you?

Healthscope Example

Question:

How would you contribute to a positive team culture?

St Vincent's Example

Question:

Describe how your values align with patient-centred care.

SECTION 11: THE PERFECT OTA ANSWER FRAMEWORK

When unsure:

SAFETY

Patient safety first.

TEAMWORK

Collaborate with colleagues.

COMMUNICATION

Escalate concerns early.

POLICY

Follow procedures.

PATIENT CENTRED CARE

Protect dignity and comfort.

A strong OTA answer almost always contains these five elements.

SECTION 12: QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEW PANEL

Always ask questions.

Examples:

- What does success look like in this role?
 - What training opportunities are available?
 - How is competency assessed?
 - What qualities do your best theatre assistants demonstrate?
 - What are the biggest challenges facing the department?
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FINAL INTERVIEW SUCCESS FORMULA

The strongest Operating Theatre Assistant candidates consistently demonstrate:

- ✓ Safety awareness
- ✓ Infection control knowledge
- ✓ Strong communication
- ✓ Manual handling understanding
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Professionalism
- ✓ Reliability
- ✓ Compassion
- ✓ Accountability
- ✓ Desire to learn

Remember: interview panels are not looking for a future surgeon. They are looking for a safe, dependable, professional team member who can contribute positively to the perioperative environment. Candidates who consistently link their answers back to patient safety, teamwork, communication, infection prevention, and professionalism will generally perform strongly in both Queensland Health and private hospital OTA interviews.