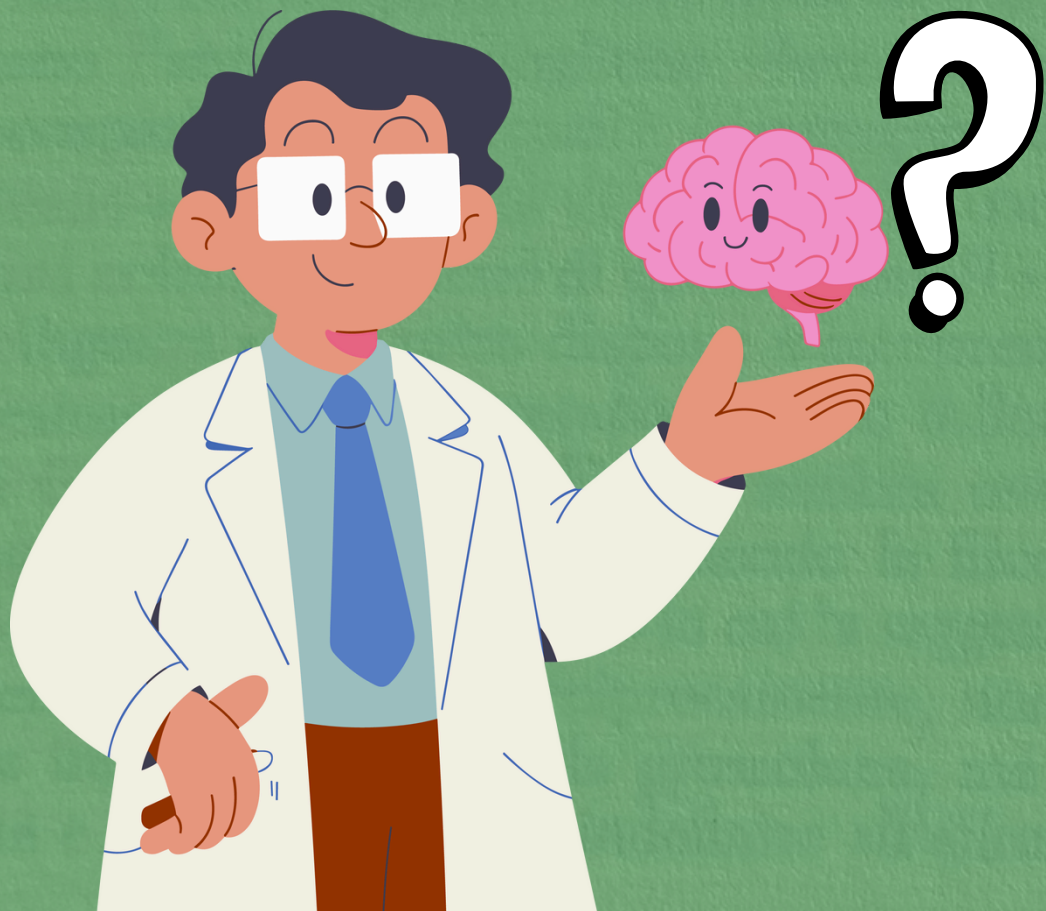


# What do they Actually Ask in Psych RA Interviews?

from someone who just finished  
interviewing



## Psychology Research Assistant (RA) Interviews

### ***“Why do you want this Research Assistant role?”***

#### **What they’re testing:**

- Genuine interest in **this lab**, not just “I need experience”
- Understanding of the **research theme**

#### **How to prepare:**

- Read **2–3 recent papers** from the lab
- Link your interests to *their methods* (not just the topic)

#### **Strong framing:**

“I’m particularly interested in how your team uses [method] to investigate [phenomenon], which aligns with my experience in...”

### ***“Tell us about your experience with data collection or analysis.”***

#### **What they’re testing:**

- Practical competence
- Whether you can work **independently with supervision**

#### **Prepare by:**

- Listing **specific tools** (SPSS, R, MATLAB, REDCap)
- Having **one concrete example** ready

**Tip:** In the UK, **accuracy and reliability** matter more than confidence.

### ***“How do you manage competing deadlines?”***

#### **What they’re testing:**

- Can you survive academic workload pressure?

#### **Prepare by:**

- Describing a **real project timeline**
- Showing prioritisation, not perfection

### ***“Have you worked with vulnerable populations?”***

#### **What they’re testing:**

- Safeguarding awareness

- Ethical sensitivity

**Prepare by:**

- Naming **ethical approvals**, consent procedures, or supervision
- Showing you know when to **escalate concerns**

***“Do you plan to apply for a PhD?”***

**What they’re testing (quietly):**

- Whether you’ll leave soon, or you any have future aspirations

**Best response:**

Express ambition **without making the role sound like a stepping stone**

***“What are your long-term research goals?”***

**What they’re testing:**

- Fit with the lab’s **trajectory**
- Whether you’re PhD-ready

**Prepare by:**

- Articulating **1–2 research questions**
- Linking them clearly to the lab’s focus

***“Which papers from our lab have you read?”***

**What they’re testing:**

- Seriousness and preparation

**Prepare by:**

- Reading at least **two papers**
- Being able to summarise **methods + findings**

***“What statistical methods are you comfortable with?”***

**What they’re testing:**

- Technical readiness

**Prepare by:**

- Being honest but precise
- Saying what you **can learn quickly**

**US tip:** Over-claiming skills is a red flag.

***“Tell me about time research didn’t go as planned.”***

**What they’re testing:**

- Resilience
- Problem-solving

**Prepare by:**

- Using a **mistake** → **learning** → **improvement** structure

***“How do you see yourself contributing to this lab?”***

**What they’re testing:**

- Initiative
- Independence

**Prepare by:**

- Mentioning **specific tasks** (participant recruitment, data cleaning, coding)

***“How would you explain our research to someone with no psychology background?”***

**What they’re testing:**

- Conceptual clarity
- Translation skills (critical for grants, ethics, patients)

**What they want:**

Clear, jargon-free explanation without dumbing it down.

***“What would you do if your data looked ‘too perfect’?”***

**What they’re testing:**

- Research integrity
- Understanding of bias, errors, and replication

**Red flag:** Saying “I’d be happy”

**Green flag:** Mentioning checks, assumptions, re-running analyses.

***“How do you ensure reproducibility in your work?”***

**What they're testing:**

- Open science awareness
- Lab discipline

**Strong prep areas:**

- Clear documentation
- Version control
- Data cleaning logs
- 

***“If the PI asked you to learn a new method quickly, how would you approach it?”***

**What they're testing:**

- Self-directed learning
- Independence

Especially common in **US labs**.

***“What’s a limitation of a study you worked on?”***

**What they're testing:**

- Critical thinking
- Intellectual honesty

They don't want defensiveness; they want **scientific maturity**.

***“How would you handle discovering an error after data collection?”***

**What they're testing:**

- Accountability
- Ethical judgement

Correct answer ≠ fixing it quietly.

Correct answer = **escalation + documentation**.

***“How do you decide what details matter when recording data?”***

**What they're testing:**

- Attention to detail
- Clinical–research judgement

This comes up a LOT in neuropsych and clinical trials.