

Barista interview questions

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What to expect

Barista interviews are usually short and practical, often including a working trial or on-the-spot demonstration on the café's own machine. Employers are checking technical consistency under pressure as much as personality fit with the team.

- **Technical/process:** Questions about extraction, milk texturing and machine maintenance to check you understand the mechanics behind a good coffee.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience handling difficult customers or busy shifts, looking for evidence of composure and teamwork.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations, like a machine fault mid-rush, to see how you prioritise and problem-solve on the spot.
- **Safety/hygiene:** Questions on food safety and cleaning routines, since cafés are food businesses subject to hygiene regulations.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about building rapport, upselling, or handling feedback, since repeat custom depends on the customer experience.

Expect a short chat about your background first, then a run of practical and scenario questions, and often a short paid or unpaid trial shift on the espresso machine before any offer is made.

1. Walk me through how you'd pull a shot and steam milk for a flat white from start to finish.

Why they ask

This checks whether you actually understand the process, not just the finished product, and whether your technique matches the café's standards.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a step-by-step walkthrough: dosing and tamping, extraction time and volume, milk texture and temperature, then pouring.

Example answer

"I'd dose and level the grounds, tamp evenly, then lock in and start the extraction, aiming for around 25 to 30 seconds for a double shot. While that's running I'd purge the steam wand, then steam the milk to around 60 degrees with a tight, even microfoam. Once the shot's done I'd let the milk settle slightly and pour it in a steady stream to build the flat white, finishing with a simple pour pattern."

2. Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult or unhappy customer.

Why they ask

Front-of-house work means complaints are routine, and the employer wants to see you can stay calm and fix the situation rather than get defensive.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A customer once sent back a latte saying it was too bitter. I apologised, remade it with a fresh shot and checked the grind hadn't drifted too fine, then offered it on the house. She came back the next week and became a regular. The manager later used it as an example of how to turn a complaint into repeat business."

3. It's peak Saturday morning rush and your grinder jams. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and whether you can keep service moving without panicking or ignoring the problem.

How to structure your answer

Explain your immediate priority, your backup plan, and how you'd communicate with the team and customers.

Example answer

"I'd flag it to whoever's on the till straight away so they can manage customer expectations, then check the obvious causes, like a blockage or overfilled hopper. If I can't clear it quickly I'd switch to a backup grinder if there is one, or ask a teammate to help split the workload while I sort it, rather than letting the whole queue back up."

4. What's your process for keeping the espresso machine and work area clean during a shift?

Why they ask

Food safety and hygiene are a genuine part of the job, and the employer needs to know you'll meet basic regulatory standards without being told every time.

How to structure your answer

Describe your routine cleaning tasks and how you fit them around service.

Example answer

"I wipe down the steam wand after every use and purge it to stop milk residue building up. Between rushes I backflush the group heads and wipe the drip tray, and at the end of the day I do a full clean of the machine, grinder and bench, plus check the fridge temperatures for the milk."

5. How do you handle a long queue when people are getting impatient?

Why they ask

This is about managing the customer experience under time pressure, which matters more in this role than in most retail jobs.

How to structure your answer

Frame it as a short scenario answer: what you'd say, what you'd prioritise, and how you'd keep quality consistent.

Example answer

"I'd keep taking orders at a steady pace and let people know roughly how long the wait is if it's more than a couple of minutes, rather than letting them stand there guessing. I'd also call out names or order numbers clearly so people aren't hovering at the counter. Quality doesn't drop just because it's busy, that's when it matters most."

6. What got you interested in coffee, and where do you see this role heading for you?

Why they ask

Employers want some sign of genuine interest, since staff who care about the craft tend to stay longer and improve faster.

How to structure your answer

Keep this conversational rather than formal: a brief personal reason, then a realistic sense of direction.

Example answer

"I got into it working weekends at a local café and liked how much difference small changes in technique make to the final cup. I've been building on that since, working on my latte art and learning more about milk alternatives, and I'd like to keep developing those skills in a busier café environment."