

Bartender interview questions

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What to expect

Bartender interviews mix quick practical checks with questions about how you handle real service pressure. Expect the interviewer to probe your drink knowledge, your judgement around responsible service of alcohol, and how you cope when the bar is three deep and everyone wants served at once.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through how you'd actually make a drink or run a section of the bar, checking technique and speed.
- **Scenario / judgement:** Situational questions about refusing service, handling conflict, or managing a problem patron, testing decision-making under pressure.
- **Behavioural:** "Tell me about a time" questions drawing on past shifts to check how you've actually handled difficult customers or busy periods.
- **Compliance and safety:** Direct questions on RSA obligations, liquor licensing rules, and food safety and hygiene practices relevant to bar work.
- **Client-facing:** Questions on building rapport and reading customers, since repeat business often depends on how the bartender treats people.

Many venues start with a short chat about availability and RSA certification before moving into scenario and behavioural questions with the venue manager or head bartender. It's common to be asked to do a short trial shift or a practical test, like making a couple of standard drinks, either at interview or as a follow-up step.

1. Walk me through how you'd make a mojito during a busy Friday night service.

Why they ask

Checks that you know standard technique and can talk through it clearly, and gives a sense of your pace under pressure.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step walkthrough: ingredients and measures, method in order, garnish and presentation, then how you'd adjust the process if six more orders came in at once.

Example answer

"I'd start by building the drink in the glass: mint leaves gently pressed with a little sugar and lime, then the measured rum using a jigger so I'm consistent every time, top with soda and give it a quick stir. If orders are stacking up I'll batch the muddling step for a few glasses at once rather than doing each one from scratch, but I never skip the measure, because pouring accurately protects both the drink quality and the till."

2. A regular who's clearly had enough to drink asks you for one more. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Tests judgement around RSA obligations and liquor licensing compliance, and whether you can de-escalate without losing the customer relationship entirely.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: read the situation, state the decision clearly, manage the immediate reaction, then note any follow-up (colleague, manager, offering water or a taxi).

Example answer

"I'd let them know clearly but politely that I can't serve them another drink, and offer a water or to call them a cab instead. If they push back I'd stay calm rather than get drawn into an argument, and if it looked like it might escalate I'd flag it to a supervisor or security straight away. Regulars usually come back once they've cooled off, and being consistent about it actually builds trust over time."

3. Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult customer.

Why they ask

Behavioural question checking how you actually behave under real conflict, not just how you say you'd behave.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

"A customer once complained loudly that his cocktail was made wrong, though I'd made it to the standard recipe. Rather than argue, I asked what he'd expected and remade it slightly sweeter to suit his taste, at no charge. He calmed down within a minute and ended up tipping well on the way out. It taught me that being right about the recipe matters less than getting the customer to a good outcome quickly."

4. What's your understanding of RSA requirements and liquor licensing rules that apply to this venue?

Why they ask

Direct compliance check, since RSA certification and licensing knowledge are non-negotiable for the role.

How to structure your answer

Knowledge check: state your certification status, then cover the key obligations (refusing intoxicated or underage patrons, trading hours, ID checks) in your own words.

Example answer

"I hold a current RSA certificate and renew it as required. In practice that means checking ID for anyone who looks under 25, refusing service to patrons showing signs of intoxication, and being aware of the venue's licensed trading hours so we're not serving past close. I also know that as staff we can be held personally responsible if we knowingly serve someone who's intoxicated, so I take that part seriously."

5. How do you keep queue times down at the bar while still making customers feel looked after?

Why they ask

Checks how you balance speed with the front-of-house service and rapport-building that keeps customers coming back.

How to structure your answer

Trade-off explanation: describe the tension between the two goals and the specific habits you use to manage both at once.

Example answer

"I try to acknowledge everyone waiting with eye contact or a quick word as soon as they arrive at the bar, even if I can't serve them immediately, so they know they haven't been forgotten. Then I work through orders in the sequence people arrived, keeping movements efficient rather than chatty when it's slammed, and saving the longer chats for quieter moments. Regulars especially notice when you remember their usual order, and that costs no extra time."

6. Describe a time you helped a teammate get through a rush.

Why they ask

Behavioural question checking teamwork and awareness of the bar as a shared station rather than an individual job.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, task, action, result.

Example answer

“During a big trivia night the other bartender fell behind on a large round of drinks while I'd cleared my section. I jumped over to help pour and garnish half the order without being asked, so we got the round out together instead of the customer waiting twice as long. We finished the shift on time and she returned the favour the following week when I had a big table order.”