

Cake Decorator interview questions

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What to expect

Cake Decorator interviews are practical and portfolio driven. Employers want to see how you finish, how you talk about your work, and whether your food safety habits hold up when the shop is busy.

- **Practical or trade test:** A timed decorating exercise, often piping a border, writing a message or covering a small dummy tier with fondant while the panel watches.
- **Portfolio walkthrough:** Photos of finished cakes, discussed one by one so the interviewer can check your hand skills, colour work and range of styles.
- **Process and technical:** Step by step questions on icing preparation, tier assembly, structural support, airbrushing and edible image printing.
- **Client-facing scenario:** How you handle a design change, a dietary request or a cake that needs repair at the venue.
- **Safety and allergen:** Questions on cross contact, storage, labelling and cleaning between jobs, usually tied to the business food safety program.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of working to deadline, resolving a conflict with a customer or fixing a mistake before it left the shop.

Most interviews run in three stages. A short introductory conversation with the head decorator or bakery manager covers your background and availability, then you walk through your portfolio or a set of photos while they ask about specific cakes. The practical task comes next, usually 30 to 60 minutes with materials supplied, and finishes with a panel chat about food safety, shift patterns and how you would fit the existing team.

1. Walk me through how you would cover a two tier cake in fondant, start to finish.

Why they ask

This is the core hand skill of the role, and the interviewer is checking whether your sequence is reliable under time pressure rather than something you improvise.

How to structure your answer

A sequential walk-through. Talk through preparation first, then covering technique, then assembly and finishing, and name the point where you would stop and let the cake rest.

Example answer

"I bake and chill the tiers first, because a firm cake is far easier to cover. I level the top, trim any dark edges, brush off the crumbs and give each tier a thin crumb coat of buttercream, then let that set so the fondant has something to grip. For the fondant I knead it until it is pliable, roll it evenly on a lightly dusted surface, lifting and turning it so it does not stick, and take it to about three millimetres thick. I roll it onto the pin, drape it over the tier, smooth the top with a pad, then work down the sides and trim the excess at the base with a sharp knife. I let both tiers settle, board and dowel the bottom tier so the top one sits level, stack carefully, and then finish with the piping, edge trim and topper. If the venue is a warm room I add a little more chilling time before transport."

2. Talk us through a cake in your portfolio that you are particularly proud of.

Why they ask

It shows your design judgement and whether you can explain technique, not just produce a photo.

How to structure your answer

Describe the piece. Cover the brief, the hardest technical element, how you solved it and what you would do differently.

Example answer

"The one I keep coming back to is a two tier cake for a couple who wanted a native flower theme and a fairly minimal finish. The hard part was the banksia, because the petals needed fine textured brushwork and the shape had to hold without wires showing. I built it in modelling chocolate over a small armature, let it set overnight, and brushed the colour in layers rather than all at once so the edges stayed soft. I also matched the base colour to their invitation, which meant mixing a few small test patches first. If I did it again I would start the flower two days earlier, because the drying time was tighter than I wanted and it made the rest of the week rushed."

3. Tell me about a time a client changed their design at short notice.

Why they ask

Design changes close to the delivery date are routine in this work, and the interviewer wants to know you can absorb one without cutting corners on quality or safety.

How to structure your answer

STAR. Set the situation and the original brief, describe the change, explain exactly what you did and how you communicated it, then give the outcome.

Example answer

"A client had ordered a three tier cake with a soft pastel finish for a Saturday wedding. On the Wednesday she called to say she wanted a bolder colour scheme and different flowers. I confirmed the change in an email so we both had the same version, and I explained that the tiers were already baked and crumb coated, so only the finish would change. I tested the new colours on a small dummy tier that afternoon so there were no surprises, rebooked my decorating blocks for Thursday and Friday morning, and kept the final assembly to the Friday so the fresh fondant was at its best. The cake went out on time with the revised look, she was happy with it, and she booked us again for a family event. The studio now keeps a dummy tier on hand for exactly this kind of late change."

4. You arrive at a venue and one tier of the cake has cracked in transit. What do you do?

Why they ask

It is a judgement under pressure question. The interviewer is testing whether you can stay calm, protect the client's event and make a sensible call rather than panic.

How to structure your answer

A judgement framework. Assess, stabilise, decide, communicate, then follow up.

Example answer

"First I would stop and look properly rather than start patching straight away. I would check whether it is cosmetic or structural, because a cracked panel of fondant is a repair and a collapsed tier is a rebuild decision. If it is cosmetic, I would take the cake to the coolest spot available, use my repair kit to lift the cracked section, smooth it back with a little fondant and steam, and redo any piping that was disturbed. If it is structural, I would not pretend it is fine. I would set it up as safely as possible, tell the client or the venue coordinator straight away what has happened and what I can do, and let them decide whether to serve it as it is or whether we replace it. Either way I would note what happened and check the transport setup before the next delivery."

5. How do you manage allergens when a customer asks for a gluten free or nut free cake?

Why they ask

Allergen control is a legal and reputational issue for any bakery, and the interviewer needs to hear habits, not intentions.

How to structure your answer

A process answer. Cover consultation, ingredient checking, separation of equipment and surfaces, storage, and what you tell the customer honestly.

Example answer

"I start with the consultation, because I need to know which allergen and how strict the requirement is. I check every ingredient label, including the may contain statements, and if a product is not clearly suitable I find a substitute rather than guess. On the day I work on a cleaned and sanitised bench, use separate bowls, piping bags, nozzles and silicone mats kept for allergen jobs, and I do not use shared fondant that has been handled near nuts or gluten. The finished cake gets boxed and labelled separately and stored away from other stock. I am also honest with the customer about the limits of a small kitchen, and I follow whatever the business food safety program says about what we can and cannot promise."

6. You have three orders due Friday and one of them is running behind. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

Decorators juggle several deadlines at once, and the answer shows whether you plan ahead or only react when something is late.

How to structure your answer

A prioritisation answer. Work out what is fixed, what can be staged earlier, who can help, and how you tell the customer.

Example answer

"I would look at the three orders and work out which parts are fixed and which can move. Cakes that need fresh piping or fresh fruit go last, and anything that can be baked, filled or crumb coated ahead of time moves earlier in the week. I would flag the delay to the person running the front of shop as soon as I knew, not on Friday morning, so they could call the customer while there was still time to adjust the collection. If someone else on the team could take the simpler order, I would hand it over with a clear finish checklist rather than let it sit. If the delay is mine, I would stay back to finish it properly and then look at why it happened, usually a late design change or an underestimate of drying time."