

Chef interview questions

careertips.com.au: common questions and what they're really testing

What to expect

Chef interviews mix hands-on technical questions with behavioural ones about managing people and pressure. Expect the panel, often the head chef or venue manager, to probe how you handle a live service as much as how you cook.

- **Process:** Questions about how you plan menus, cost dishes or manage stock, walking the panel through your usual method step by step.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past situations involving staff conflict, training or pressure, looking for a specific example with a clear outcome.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations, like an inspection or a supply shortage, testing judgement and priority-setting under time pressure.
- **Food safety and compliance:** Direct questions on HACCP, temperature control and record-keeping, since this is a compliance-heavy part of the role.

Most chef interviews start with a rundown of your background and current section or menu responsibilities, move into a few behavioural or scenario questions about kitchen pressure and staff management, then finish with practical or compliance questions and sometimes a kitchen walk-through or trial shift.

1. Walk me through how you'd plan a seasonal menu for this kitchen.

Why they ask

Menu planning sits at the centre of the role, and the panel wants to see whether you think about produce availability, costing and customer preference together, not just creativity.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your process in order: how you source ideas, check seasonal produce and supplier pricing, cost the dish, test it, then roll it into service.

Example answer

"I usually start by checking what's in season and talking to my suppliers about what's good and reasonably priced that week. I sketch a few dish ideas around that, then cost each one against a target food cost percentage before I commit. Once a dish is costed, I run it as a special first to see how customers respond and how it holds up under service pace, then decide whether it earns a permanent spot on the menu."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage conflict between staff during a busy service.

Why they ask

Kitchens run on tight coordination under pressure, and the panel wants evidence you can keep a team functioning when tempers or stress run high.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and who was involved, the specific task or problem, the action you took in the moment, and the result for the team and the service.

Example answer

"During a fully booked Saturday night, two cooks on adjoining stations started arguing over ticket timing and it was slowing plating down. I pulled them aside for thirty seconds, reassigned one to run expo temporarily to reset the flow, and told them we'd debrief properly after service. We got through the night without missing tickets, and the next day I worked out a clearer handoff process between

those two stations so it didn't happen again."

3. A health inspector arrives unannounced during peak lunch service. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and knowledge of food safety compliance, both central to the chef role.

How to structure your answer

Talk through the immediate decision, how you balance compliance with keeping service running, and who you delegate to.

Example answer

"I'd greet the inspector myself, hand over to my second to keep service moving, and walk the inspector through the kitchen while answering questions directly. I'd have my temperature logs and cleaning schedules ready since I keep those up to date daily, so there's nothing to scramble for. If they flag anything, I'd address it on the spot rather than waiting until after service."

4. How do you control food costs and reduce wastage in a kitchen?

Why they ask

Budgeting and forecasting are listed as core skills for this role, and cost control directly affects the business's margins.

How to structure your answer

Walk through your practical methods in order, from ordering through to portion control and stocktake.

Example answer

"I order against actual sales forecasts rather than habit, and I check stock levels against upcoming bookings before placing orders. On the line, I standardise portion sizes with recipe cards so nothing goes out oversized, and I use trim and offcuts in staff meals or stocks instead of binning them. Weekly stocktakes help me catch any drift in usage before it becomes a real cost problem."

5. Describe how you'd train an apprentice on a new technique they haven't done before.

Why they ask

Training junior cooks and apprentices is a listed task, and the panel wants to see a teaching approach that fits a fast-paced kitchen, not a classroom.

How to structure your answer

Behavioural, but framed as a general method: explain your usual teaching sequence with a concrete example.

Example answer

"I show the technique myself first while explaining what I'm doing and why, then have them do it under close supervision on a low-risk batch, like prep rather than a plate going out to a customer. I give feedback straight away rather than waiting, and I let them repeat it a few times during quieter periods before they do it solo during service. When I taught an apprentice knife work for breaking down proteins, that staged approach got him confident enough to run it independently within a few weeks."

6. A key delivery arrives short an hour before a fully booked dinner service. What's your next move?

Why they ask

This scenario tests prioritisation and problem-solving when plans fall apart close to service, a realistic pressure point in this role.

How to structure your answer

Scenario, judgement under pressure: state your immediate priority, the options you'd weigh, and the decision you'd make and communicate.

Example answer

"My first move is to check exactly what's missing and how many covers it affects, then call the supplier to see if a partial or late delivery is possible. If not, I'd adjust the menu for the night, either substituting an ingredient in a dish or running it as unavailable, and I'd brief front of house immediately so they can manage guest expectations. Keeping the team informed early stops small shortages turning into service chaos."