

Coffee Roaster interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for a coffee roaster tend to blend practical assessment with conversation. Employers want to see how you think about heat, airflow and time, how you cup and describe coffee, and how you keep a production schedule on track without losing quality.

- **Process and technical:** Questions about roast profiling, machine operation and how you adjust gas, airflow and time to hit a target flavour.
- **Sensory and cupping:** Questions that ask you to describe a coffee, identify faults and explain how you use cupping to make production decisions.
- **Safety and food hygiene:** Questions on HACCP, WHS, machine cleaning, chaff management and record keeping in a food production setting.
- **Scenario and problem-solving:** Questions that put you in a live situation, such as a batch that tastes baked or a roaster that is running behind schedule.
- **Client-facing:** Questions about handling customer feedback on flavour, consistency or delivery, especially with cafe and wholesale accounts.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for a real example of how you have managed pressure, quality or teamwork in a production environment.

Usually a first conversation with the head roaster or production manager, followed by a practical trial on the roaster or a cupping session where you taste and describe samples. Some employers ask you to walk through a roast log or explain how you would adjust a profile. Smaller roasteries may combine the interview and trial into one session.

1. Walk me through your approach to setting a roast profile for a new green bean.

Why they ask

This is the core technical question. Employers want to hear a logical sequence, not just a list of settings, and they want to know you can adapt rather than rely on one profile for every bean.

How to structure your answer

Use a step-by-step walk-through. Start with the green bean assessment, then sample roast, charge temperature, gas and airflow adjustments, logging in software, cupping, and iteration. Finish with how you decide the profile is repeatable.

Example answer

"First I look at the green bean: its density, moisture, screen size and any processing notes. I will run a small sample roast on an Ikawa to get a feel for how it behaves, then set a base profile on the Probat with a charge temperature that suits the bean. I log everything in Cropster so I can see the curve as it develops. During the roast I watch turning point, first crack and development time, adjusting gas and airflow to keep the rate of rise steady. After the batch rests, I cup it alongside the target profile. If it needs more sweetness I might stretch development slightly, and if it tastes flat I look at charge temperature or airflow. Once I have a profile that cups well and repeats across three batches, I lock it in for production."

2. How do you cup and assess a roast to decide whether it meets the target flavour?

Why they ask

Cupping is the sensory check on your work. The interviewer wants to know you can describe what you taste and turn that into a production decision, not just say whether you like it.

How to structure your answer

Describe your cupping method, the attributes you score, how you compare against a reference or target, and what adjustments you would make based on the result.

Example answer

"I set up a cupping with a consistent ratio and water temperature, then taste the batch alongside a reference sample of the same coffee or the agreed target profile. I note sweetness, acidity, body, aftertaste and any faults like baked, papery or underdeveloped flavours. If the batch is close but lacks clarity, I might adjust the airflow earlier in the roast. If it is baked, I look at development time and charge temperature. I record the scores and observations so the next roast has a clear starting point. The goal is not just to pass or fail a batch but to give the production team a specific direction for the next one."

3. What food safety and WHS checks do you run before and during a roasting session?

Why they ask

Roasting involves heat, dust, machinery and food contact surfaces. Employers need to know you take HACCP and WHS seriously and that you can keep records that stand up to an audit.

How to structure your answer

List the checks in order: pre-start, during roast, and end of session. Mention specific hazards like chaff, hot surfaces, ventilation and manual handling, and the records you complete.

Example answer

"Before I start, I check the roaster is clean and free of chaff build-up, the ventilation is working, and the cooling tray is clear. I make sure the green bean storage area is tidy and that any opened bags are sealed and labelled. I put on my PPE, including heat-resistant gloves and eye protection. During the roast I monitor the machine for any unusual noise or smoke and keep the area around the roaster clear. After the session I clean the chaff collector, wipe down surfaces, and log the temperatures and any issues in the HACCP records. If something looks wrong, I stop and report it rather than push through."

4. A batch comes out tasting baked or flat. What do you do?

Why they ask

This is a judgement-under-pressure scenario. They want to see whether you panic, blame the bean, or work through the problem methodically and protect the customer.

How to structure your answer

Show a calm, step-by-step response. Taste the coffee, check the roast log, identify likely causes, decide on the next batch, and manage the affected stock so it does not reach a customer without a decision.

Example answer

"First I cup the batch properly to confirm what I am tasting. Then I pull up the roast log in Cropster and look at the curve: charge temperature, turning point, first crack, development time and rate of rise. Baked flavours often come from a slow start or too much time in development, so I check whether the gas was too low early on or whether the airflow was too high. I will run a small test batch with an adjusted profile to see if I can correct it. Meanwhile I quarantine the affected batch and speak to the production manager about whether it can be blended into a darker roast or needs to be set aside. I do not send it out to a customer without a clear decision."

5. A cafe customer says their last order tasted different from usual. How do you respond?

Why they ask

This tests customer service and your ability to investigate without getting defensive. Cafes rely on consistency, so the interviewer wants to see empathy and a practical process.

How to structure your answer

Use an empathy-and-investigation structure. Acknowledge the concern, ask specific questions, check batch records, offer a cupping or sample, and follow up with a clear outcome.

Example answer

"I would thank them for letting us know and ask a few questions: when they opened the bag, how they are brewing it, and whether the difference is in the cup or the aroma. Then I would check the batch records for their order, including the green bean lot and the roast profile, to see if anything changed. If the profile drifted, I would cup the retained sample against a reference and decide whether to replace the order or adjust the next roast. I would offer to send a fresh sample so we can taste it together and confirm the fix. The important thing is to take it seriously and close the loop with the customer."

6. Tell me about a time you had to manage production pressure while keeping quality high.

Why they ask

This behavioural question looks at how you prioritise when orders are stacking up. Employers want to know you will not cut corners on roast quality just to hit a dispatch time.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result. Set the scene, explain what was at stake, describe the specific actions you took, and finish with what happened and what you learned.

Example answer

"We had a week where a wholesale customer increased their order at short notice and we were already running behind because of a machine service. I was the only roaster on that shift. I sat down with the production manager and we worked out which blends could be roasted back to back without compromising the profile, and which single origins needed a separate session. I prioritised the orders that were due first and used the sample roaster to check a new batch while the main roaster was cooling. I also asked a colleague to handle packing and labelling so I could stay focused on the roast curve. We got the orders out on time, and the customer gave us repeat business. I learned to flag capacity issues early rather than trying to absorb everything myself."