

Sous Chef interview questions

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What to expect

Sous chef interviews combine practical assessment with conversation. Employers want to see how you run a service, lead a team and handle food safety under pressure. Expect questions about your technical skills, your experience with kitchen operations, and your approach to managing people.

- **Process:** Questions about how you organise a service, manage prep lists and delegate tasks.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for a specific example from your past, often about teamwork, conflict or service recovery.
- **Technical:** Questions on cooking techniques, food safety, HACCP and kitchen equipment.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test your judgement, such as equipment failure or a stock shortage.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions about hygiene, allergen management and record keeping.
- **Leadership:** Questions about training, rostering and managing kitchen staff.

Typically starts with a phone or in-person interview with the head chef or venue manager. If that goes well, you'll be invited to a trial shift, which may include a practical cooking task and a working interview on the line. Some larger venues add a formal panel with HR and the executive chef. The trial is your chance to show your skills in a real service.

1. Walk me through how you run a dinner service from prep to close.

Why they ask

This shows whether you can organise a kitchen under pressure and whether your process matches the venue's pace and standards.

How to structure your answer

A chronological walk-through: prep and briefing, service, and close-down. Keep it structured but conversational, and highlight where you check quality, communicate with the pass and manage timing.

Example answer

"I start by reviewing the prep list and checking that every section is set up. I hold a short briefing before service to run through specials, dietary requirements and any VIP tables. During service, I stay on the pass or float between sections, calling orders and checking plates before they go out. If we get a rush, I reallocate staff to the busiest sections and keep communication clear. After service, I supervise the clean-down, check stock levels for the next day, and log any wastage or equipment issues before I leave."

2. Tell me about a time you had to manage a kitchen team when service went wrong.

Why they ask

They want to see how you handle pressure, lead a team and fix problems in real time without losing your cool.

How to structure your answer

STAR: Situation, Task, Action, Result. Pick a specific example and focus on what you did and what changed.

Example answer

"We had a power outage during a busy Friday dinner service. The kitchen went dark and we lost the ovens. I quickly checked the gas burners were still working, moved what I could to the stovetop, and

told the front of house to stop taking new orders for 15 minutes. I reassigned staff to cold dishes and salads, and we kept the pass moving. We got through service with only a few delayed tables, and I wrote up an incident report the next day. The head chef used it to update our emergency plan."

3. How do you ensure HACCP compliance in a busy kitchen?

Why they ask

Food safety is non-negotiable. They need to know you understand the principles and can apply them when things are hectic.

How to structure your answer

Explain the key steps you take: temperature checks, record keeping, personal hygiene and corrective actions. Use a practical example of how you embed it in daily routines.

Example answer

"I build HACCP checks into the daily routine. Every morning I check fridge and freezer temperatures and record them. I make sure all staff know the critical limits and what to do if something falls out of range, like moving stock or discarding it. I keep logs for cooking, cooling and reheating, and I do spot checks during service. If I see a gap, I correct it straight away and note it. I also run short refreshers for new staff so they understand why we do it, not just that we do it."

4. You arrive for a shift and the walk-in fridge is running warm. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests your judgement under pressure and whether you prioritise food safety over convenience.

How to structure your answer

A judgement-under-pressure structure: assess the risk, take immediate action, communicate and document. Show you can make a call quickly and follow food safety rules.

Example answer

"First I check the actual temperature with a probe thermometer, not just the gauge. Then I check the temperature of the food inside. If the fridge is above 5 degrees, I move what I can to a working fridge or freezer, or into coolers with ice. I check how long it's been warm by looking at the last temperature log. I tell the head chef immediately and we decide what can be kept and what needs to be discarded. I record everything in the HACCP log and call the maintenance team. Safety comes first, so if there's any doubt, we throw it out."

5. What's your approach to training new kitchen staff on food safety and hygiene?

Why they ask

Sous chefs are responsible for training and rostering, so they need to know you can bring new people up to standard.

How to structure your answer

Explain your training method: demonstrate, supervise, check understanding and follow up. Give an example of how you've done it.

Example answer

"I start with a walk-through of the kitchen: where handwash stations are, how we store food, and what the colour-coded boards mean. Then I demonstrate a task and watch them do it. I explain the why behind each rule, like cross-contamination or temperature danger zones. I check they've got it by asking them to talk me through it or by spot-checking their work. I also pair them with an experienced staff member for their first few shifts. If someone struggles, I give them more time and specific feedback rather than just correcting them in the moment."

6. How do you manage rostering and staff shortages when someone calls in sick?

Why they ask

This role involves rostering and keeping the kitchen running. They want to see you can plan ahead and react calmly.

How to structure your answer

A process and prioritisation answer: how you plan rosters, what you do when someone is away, and how you communicate. Focus on solutions and teamwork.

Example answer

"I build rosters with a bit of slack for busy periods and I cross-train staff so people can cover more than one section. If someone calls in sick, I first check if anyone on the current shift can stay back or swap. I look at the bookings and decide if we can run with a slightly leaner team or if I need to call someone in. I keep the head chef informed and adjust the prep list so we focus on the most important tasks. I also follow up with the person who was sick to make sure they're okay and to plan for their return."