

Waiter interview questions

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What to expect

Waiter interviews are usually short and practical, focused on how you actually behave during service rather than abstract theory. Expect a mix of quick-fire process questions, a couple of past-experience stories, and at least one scenario question to see how you think on your feet.

- **Process:** Checks whether you understand the mechanics of taking orders, using the POS, and running a section during service.
- **Behavioural:** Past examples of handling complaints, busy periods or teamwork with kitchen staff, usually assessed with STAR-style answers.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations, like a delayed kitchen or an unhappy table, to see how you prioritise and stay calm.
- **Safety and compliance:** Basic food safety, hygiene and allergen knowledge, since these are non-negotiable in hospitality venues.

Most interviews open with a few questions about your availability, RSA status and past hospitality experience, move into behavioural and scenario questions about handling service pressure, and close with a chance for you to ask about rostering, shift patterns and team structure.

1. Walk me through how you take an order and get it to the kitchen without mistakes.

Why they ask

This checks you understand the basic order-to-kitchen workflow and won't cause errors that slow down service.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a clear step-by-step walkthrough: approach the table, confirm any special requests or allergies, write or enter the order, repeat it back, and send it through on the POS or order pad.

Example answer

"I greet the table, take the order item by item, and always confirm any dietary needs or substitutions before writing anything down. I repeat the order back to the table so there's no confusion, then enter it into the POS straight away rather than holding a mental list, so the kitchen gets it in real time and nothing gets missed or delayed."

2. Tell me about a time you dealt with a difficult customer or a complaint about their meal.

Why they ask

Complaint handling is a daily reality in this role and shows whether you can de-escalate calmly rather than get defensive.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation, the specific task or problem, the action you took, and the result for the customer and the venue.

Example answer

"A customer once received a dish with the wrong sauce after I'd taken the order correctly. I apologised straight away, took the dish back to the kitchen myself to explain the mix-up, and offered a drink on the house while the correct meal was remade. The customer ended up leaving happy and mentioned the recovery positively when they paid, which the manager noted at the end of shift."

3. How would you handle it if the kitchen is running fifteen minutes behind and three tables are asking where their food is?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure and how you manage customer expectations when something outside your control goes wrong.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a judgement call: what you'd say to the tables, how you'd prioritise, and how you'd keep the kitchen and the rest of the floor informed.

Example answer

"I'd go to each of the three tables straight away rather than waiting for them to flag it, let them know there's a short delay, and give a realistic timeframe rather than guessing. I'd check with the kitchen on actual timing so I'm not giving false information, and I'd offer something small like a refilled water or bread while they wait. Keeping people informed usually stops frustration building even when the wait itself doesn't change."

4. What do you know about food safety and allergen handling in a restaurant setting?

Why they ask

Food safety and allergen awareness are core compliance requirements in Australian hospitality venues, and getting this wrong has real consequences for customers.

How to structure your answer

Give a knowledge check answer: state the key principle, then back it with a concrete example of applying it.

Example answer

"I know allergies need to be taken seriously every time, not just when a customer flags them loudly. If someone tells me they have a nut allergy, I pass that on clearly to the kitchen and double-check the dish before it leaves the pass if I'm unsure. I also know not to guess about ingredients I'm not certain of, and to check with the kitchen rather than reassure a customer incorrectly."

5. How do you manage several tables at different stages of their meal during a busy sitting?

Why they ask

Section management is central to the role and shows whether you can prioritise without letting any table feel neglected.

How to structure your answer

Answer as a prioritisation walkthrough: how you scan the section, decide what's urgent, and sequence your tasks.

Example answer

"I try to do a lap of my section regularly so I can see who needs their order taken, whose plates are empty, and who's ready to pay, rather than waiting to be called over. I prioritise anything time-sensitive, like clearing a course before the next one arrives, and I batch tasks where I can, like clearing two nearby tables on the same pass rather than going back and forth."