

Cook interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for cook roles are usually practical rather than theoretical. Expect the panel, often the head chef or kitchen manager, to focus on how you actually perform during service, handle food safety and work with a team under pressure, sometimes with a short practical cooking or knife skills test on the day.

- **Process:** Questions asking you to walk through how you'd handle a specific kitchen task, from prep through to plating.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience, often phrased as 'tell me about a time', looking for evidence of teamwork and reliability under pressure.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement, such as what you'd do if service backed up or a food safety issue arose.
- **Safety:** Direct questions on food handling, storage and hygiene knowledge, given how tightly regulated commercial kitchens are.

Most interviews open with general background and availability questions (shift work, weekends, public holidays), move into process and safety questions, then a couple of scenario or behavioural questions to gauge how you handle pressure. Some employers finish with a short kitchen trial or practical task, such as a knife skills demonstration or cooking a simple dish.

1. Walk me through how you'd prep and cook a dish during a busy dinner service.

Why they ask

Tests whether you understand kitchen workflow and can organise prep, cooking and plating under time pressure.

How to structure your answer

Step through the process in order: mise en place and portioning, cooking method and equipment used, timing against other orders, and final plating checks.

Example answer

"I'd start by checking my prep list and making sure proteins and vegetables are portioned and ready before service starts. Once orders come in, I read the docket, fire the dish at the right time so it's ready with the rest of the table, and use the grill or stovetop depending on the item. While it's cooking I'm already prepping the next ticket. Before it goes to the pass I check portion size and presentation against the standard, then call it out to the pass so front-of-house knows it's ready."

2. Tell me about a time you had to keep working accurately when service got really busy.

Why they ask

Looks for evidence you can maintain food safety and quality standards under pressure, not just when things are quiet.

How to structure your answer

STAR: describe the situation, your specific task, the action you took, and the result.

Example answer

"During a Saturday dinner rush, we had two large group bookings come in at the same time as our usual walk-ins. I was on the fry station and orders were stacking up. I re-organised my station so proteins ready to fry were grouped together, called out timing to the chef running the pass, and stuck

to my temperature checks even though we were flat out. We got through the rush without sending out a single wrong order or a food safety miss.”

3. What do you know about food safety requirements in a commercial kitchen?

Why they ask

Confirms you understand hygiene protocols and regulatory basics expected of anyone handling food professionally in Australia.

How to structure your answer

Direct knowledge check: name the relevant standards or certificate, then give a concrete example of applying them day to day.

Example answer

“I hold a Food Safety Supervisor certificate and I'm familiar with the requirements under the Food Standards Code. In practice that means checking fridge and cool room temperatures each shift, labelling and rotating stock on a first-in-first-out basis, and keeping raw and cooked food separated during prep to avoid cross-contamination. If I noticed something out of range, like a fridge running warm, I'd flag it to the kitchen manager straight away rather than assume it's fine.”

4. If the kitchen fell behind during a Friday night rush and tickets started piling up, what would you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement under pressure and whether you can prioritise without cutting corners on food safety or quality.

How to structure your answer

Scenario response: state your immediate priority, the trade-offs you'd weigh, and how you'd communicate with the team.

Example answer

“I'd first look at which tickets are oldest and prioritise those, communicating with the chef or the person running the pass so we're working off the same order. I wouldn't skip food safety steps like temperature checks to save time. If I couldn't keep up, I'd say so early rather than let it snowball, so someone could jump in to help on my station.”

5. How do you handle feedback from the head chef when a dish comes back or doesn't meet standard?

Why they ask

Checks how you respond to correction in a hierarchical kitchen environment and whether you can adjust quickly.

How to structure your answer

STAR, focused on your reaction and what changed afterward.

Example answer

“A head chef once sent back a dish because the portion size was inconsistent with the rest of the pass. I asked what the expected weight was, checked my scales, and adjusted straight away. I also started double-checking portions against the spec sheet during quieter moments so it didn't happen again. I'd rather get corrected and fix it than get defensive about it.”

6. What's your availability for shift work, including evenings, weekends and public holidays?

Why they ask

Cook roles almost always involve irregular hours, so employers confirm this early to avoid mismatched expectations.

How to structure your answer

Straightforward factual answer, stated clearly and confidently.

Example answer

"I'm available for evening and weekend shifts, and I'm happy to work public holidays when needed. I understand that's part of the job in hospitality and I've built my schedule around it in previous roles."