

Kitchen Hand interview questions

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What to expect

Kitchen hand interviews are usually short and practical, often run by a head chef or kitchen manager rather than HR, and may include a paid trial shift as part of the assessment. Expect a mix of questions about hygiene habits, pace under pressure and how you take direction, since this role works closely under supervision.

- **Process:** Questions checking you know standard cleaning, sanitising and food handling routines, since these are done repeatedly every shift.
- **Behavioural:** Questions about how you've handled busy periods, feedback or teamwork in a kitchen or similar fast-paced setting.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations testing judgement around food safety risks or stock issues, since kitchen hands often need to flag problems quickly.
- **Safety:** Questions on WHS and food safety knowledge relevant to handling knives, chemicals and raw ingredients.

Most interviews run 15 to 30 minutes, often on-site in or near the kitchen. Expect a brief chat about your availability and experience, a few scenario or process questions, and sometimes an offer of a short trial shift to see how you handle real service conditions.

1. Walk me through how you'd clean and sanitise a cutting board between tasks.

Why they ask

Checks that you understand basic hygiene routines and won't need constant reminders once on shift.

How to structure your answer

Step-by-step walkthrough: describe the process in order, from clearing food scraps through to sanitising and drying, mentioning any standards or checks you'd apply.

Example answer

"I'd scrape off any food scraps first, then wash the board in hot soapy water, rinse it, and sanitise it with the chemical solution provided, leaving it for the required contact time before wiping dry with a clean cloth. If it's been used for raw meat, I'd use a separate board or colour-coded system if the kitchen has one, so there's no cross-contamination risk before it's used for anything else."

2. Tell me about a time you had to keep up during a busy or high-pressure shift.

Why they ask

Kitchen hands need to maintain pace and accuracy during service without cutting corners on hygiene.

How to structure your answer

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

Example answer

"During a Saturday dinner rush, three stations needed prep restocked at once and the dishwasher was backed up. I prioritised getting clean plates and utensils back to the line first since that was holding up service, then worked through the prep list station by station. We got through the rush without any station running out of what it needed, and the head chef mentioned afterward that the flow held up better than expected."

3. If you noticed a colleague using a board that had touched raw chicken to then cut vegetables, what would you do?

Why they ask

Tests judgement on food safety risk and whether you'd act appropriately rather than let it slide.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: state the immediate action you'd take, then how you'd escalate or follow up, balancing tact with food safety priority.

Example answer

"I'd say something straight away, since cross-contamination is a serious risk, and ask them to stop and get a clean board rather than waiting until later to mention it. I'd also let the supervisor know so any vegetables already cut could be checked or discarded if needed. It's not about calling someone out, it's about making sure nothing unsafe goes out to a customer."

4. What do you know about food safety responsibilities for kitchen staff in Australia?

Why they ask

Confirms baseline knowledge of hygiene obligations under the Food Standards Code, even without formal certification.

How to structure your answer

Direct knowledge check: state what you know plainly, then give a practical example of applying it.

Example answer

"Kitchen staff need to follow safe food handling practices under the Food Standards Australia New Zealand Code, things like correct storage temperatures, avoiding cross-contamination, and personal hygiene like handwashing and covering cuts. In practice that means checking fridge temperatures during shift, storing raw and ready-to-eat foods separately, and reporting anything that looks off with stock rather than using it anyway."

5. Tell me about a time a chef or supervisor corrected how you were doing something. How did you respond?

Why they ask

Kitchen hands work under close supervision, so employers want to know you take direction well without getting defensive.

How to structure your answer

STAR: situation, the correction given, your response, and the outcome or what you learned.

Example answer

"Early on, a chef pulled me up for stacking prep containers in a way that blocked airflow in the walk-in fridge. I thanked him for the heads up, fixed it straight away, and started checking storage layout as part of my regular routine after that. It was a small thing but it showed me how much attention to detail matters in a working kitchen."

6. A delivery arrives and two boxes of stock look damaged or the seal is broken. What do you do?

Why they ask

Checks whether you'd follow proper stock-checking procedure rather than accepting deliveries without question.

How to structure your answer

Process walkthrough with judgement call: describe the checking steps, then the decision point and who you'd involve.

Example answer

"I'd check the delivery against the order first, then inspect any damaged packaging closely before accepting it. If the seal's broken or the product looks compromised, I wouldn't accept that item, I'd note it on the delivery docket and flag it to the supervisor or manager so they can decide whether to reject it or contact the supplier. I wouldn't just store it and deal with it later, since that risks unsafe stock ending up in use."