



BARISTA SCHOOL IRELAND • POCKET GUIDE

CUSTOMER SERVICE IN HOSPITALITY

The habits, words and checklists from your course, in your pocket. Keep it on your phone or pin it up in the staff room.

Notice people

*a hello within
seconds*

Get the order right

repeat it back

Make it the same

every time

Handle problems kindly

*listen, apologise,
put it right, thank
them*

INSIDE: THE EIGHT LESSONS

- 01 What great service looks like
- 02 Greeting, body language and the welcome
- 03 Taking orders and getting them right
- 04 Service at the counter and the table
- 05 Communication: in person, phone and online
- 06 Complaints and difficult moments
- 07 Inclusive service and teamwork
- 08 Your standards every shift

LESSON 1

WHAT GREAT SERVICE LOOKS LIKE

It works in a café, a hotel, a restaurant, a bar or a coffee van. The drinks and the food change. The way you treat people doesn't.

A great coffee served without a smile is an average coffee.

What customers want

Noticed*and welcomed***Understood***the order made right***A reasonable time***and told if there's a wait***Clean***a comfortable place***Kindness***whoever they are***Put right***problems, without a fuss*

The first 10 seconds

Notice people straight away. Eye contact and a hello within seconds, even if you're mid-pour or on the till. A customer who isn't seen starts to feel invisible, and the coffee won't fix that.

Nobody minds waiting once they know they've been seen.

Why it matters

- Customers who have a poor experience rarely say so. They just don't come back, and they tell their friends.
- **Regulars** keep a business going: they come back because of how they're treated as much as what they're served.
- **Word of mouth and reviews** bring in the next customer.
- **Your day is easier** when customers are happy.

Service is everyone's job: every moment counts

The door and the welcome



The order and payment



The drink or food arriving



The table, floor and toilets



The goodbye

LESSONS 2-3

THE WELCOME AND THE ORDER

The greeting: warm and natural, in your own words: “Hi there, what can I get you?” or “Morning! How are you?” **Read the customer:** someone in a hurry wants a quick hello and straight to the order; someone with time may enjoy a chat.

✓ Body language

- Face them, with eye contact and a relaxed smile
- Stand up straight, hands free, open posture
- Stop the chat and give them your full attention

✗ Avoid

- Arms folded, leaning on the counter, or your back turned
- Looking at your phone
- Carrying on a chat with a colleague

When you're busy

- A nod and a smile to the person who just joined the queue.
- “I’ll be with you in just a moment.”
- “Thanks for waiting,” when you get to them.
- Serve people in the order they arrived. Not sure who was first? Ask.

At a table, and the small things

- Go over soon after they sit down, say hello and tell them how it works here.
- Bring menus, and water if that’s your house standard.
- In a hotel, greet guests as they reach reception or the restaurant door, even on the phone.
- Hold the door; point out a free table; a wet coat and umbrella need somewhere to go.

People remember how you made them feel more than what they ordered.

Taking the order

- 1 Listen fully.** Let them finish before you speak or start making anything. Eyes off the machine. Didn’t catch it? “Sorry, was that oat milk?” Asking takes two seconds; a remake takes minutes.
- 2 Repeat it back:** size, milk, anything extra. “So that’s a large oat latte, extra hot, and a cheese toastie.”
- 3 Write it clearly** on the docket or cup, the same way every time. Take a name if it’s busy.

Most complaints start with a misheard order.

LESSON 3

ALLERGIES, THE MENU AND UPSELLING

When a customer mentions an allergy

Take it seriously, every time.

- 1 Listen:** which allergen? Are traces a problem for them?
- 2 Check** the written allergen information or recipe for that exact item. **Never guess**, and never rely on memory.
- 3 Tell the person making it**, clearly and before it's made, and mark it on the docket.
- 4 If you can't be sure, say so.** "I can't guarantee that one" is a good answer. Offer something you can be sure about, or ask your manager.

In Ireland, allergen information for every food and drink must be available in writing before the customer buys. Our Allergen Awareness course covers this in full.

Know your menu

Customers will ask what's in a drink, which milks you have, what's dairy-free or what's good today. Learn the menu, and taste what you can.

If you don't know, say "Let me check for you," and check. Never guess.

Upselling the right way

Share what you know. A word about the coffee or a recommendation turns a sale into a regular.

✓ Do

- One suggestion that suits them: "The scones are just out of the oven. Would you like one with that?"
- Be honest: recommend what you'd enjoy yourself
- Take no for an answer, with a smile

✗ Don't

- Offering every extra each time
- Ringing up a large without asking
- Asking again after a no

LESSON 4

AT THE COUNTER AND THE TABLE

Customers want **speed and care**. A fast drink that's wrong comes back, and the customer waits twice. Work the orders in order, make it the same every time, and never skip a step to save time.

The queue

- ☐ Acknowledge everyone who joins it.
- ☐ Keep it moving: one person takes orders and payment, another makes drinks. Agree who does what before service.
- ☐ Be honest about waits: "It's about ten minutes for hot food at the moment." Tell people **before** they pay.
- ☐ If a drink is delayed, go and tell the customer.

People accept a wait they were told about. A wait nobody mentioned feels twice as long.

Handing over

- **Pour, check, serve.** Right drink, clean cup, no drips.
- **Call it clearly:** "Large oat latte!", with their name if you took one.
- Hold cups by the **handle or the base**, glasses low down, **never by the rim**.
- Handle towards the customer, spoon and napkin if needed.

At the table

- Say what it is as you put it down: "Here's your flat white."
- Take care with hot drinks around people, bags and children.
- **Check back** a couple of minutes after food arrives: "Is everything OK with your lunch?" Then act on the answer.
- Clear empty cups and plates as you pass. Don't hover.

Regulars and names

- Remember their usual, and check: "The usual today?"
- Use their name if they've given it to you. Don't overdo it.
- **Make it the same every time.** A regular's flat white on Friday should taste like Monday's.

Being remembered is one of the main reasons people come back.

LESSON 5

IN PERSON, ON THE PHONE, ONLINE

Tone: how you say it matters as much as what you say. Calm, friendly and clear. Match their pace: slow down for someone who's unsure. Answer the third question in the same tone as the first.

✓ Say

- “Of course.”
- “Let me find out for you.”
- “Thanks for waiting.”
- “What I can do is...”

✗ Avoid

- “That’s not my job.”
- “You should have said.”
- “Calm down.”
- “It’s policy,” on its own.

Say what you can do. Instead of “We’re out,” try “Sorry, we’ve run out of scones, but the brownies are fresh today.”

The phone

- Answer promptly and say the name of the business.
- Smile. It can be heard.
- **Repeat it all back** before you hang up.
- Can’t answer? Take a message, say when someone will ring back, then make sure they do.

Emails and messages

- Reply as soon as you can, within your workplace’s standard.
- Answer the question they asked, briefly and politely.
- Sign off as the business, check dates, times and prices, and read it once before you send.
- Never reply when you’re annoyed. Ask a manager to look first.

Taking a booking

- ☐ Name
- ☐ Date and time
- ☐ Number of people
- ☐ Phone number
- ☐ Any needs: high chair, wheelchair, allergy

Online reviews

Only reply if your workplace asks you to.

- **Do:** thank them, apologise for their experience, invite them to get in touch directly.
- **Never** argue in public, or mention a customer’s name or what they ordered.
- **Never** write reviews of your own workplace, or ask friends to.

Write every reply as if the next hundred customers will read it. They will.

LESSON 6

COMPLAINTS AND DIFFICULT MOMENTS

Most unhappy customers say nothing and don't come back. A customer who complains is giving you the chance to put it right. A problem handled kindly often turns an unhappy customer into a regular.

1**Listen**

*Let them finish.
Don't interrupt.*

2**Apologise**

*Sincerely: "I'm sorry
about that."*

3**Put it right**

*Remake, replace or
offer something else,
as your workplace
allows.*

4**Thank them**

for telling you.

Don't argue about whether it was right. Even if the latte was made perfectly, the customer isn't enjoying it, and that's what counts.

Staying calm

- Try not to take it personally. They're unhappy with the situation.
- Take a breath, keep your voice low and your body language open.
- Don't make excuses, and don't blame the kitchen or a colleague.
- Keep it private: move to a quieter spot if you can.

Get your manager when

- ☐ You can't put it right yourself, or it's beyond what you're allowed to offer
- ☐ The customer asks for a manager
- ☐ Anyone is unwell, injured or having an allergic reaction: get help straight away
- ☐ You feel unsafe

Tell your manager what happened first, so the customer doesn't have to tell the story twice.

Aggressive customers: your safety first**✓ Do**

- Speak calmly and keep your distance
- Keep the counter between you. Step back if they come towards you
- Get a colleague or your manager
- Afterwards, tell your manager and record it

✗ Don't

- Argue back
- Deal with it alone
- Touch them
- Block their way out

112 or 999. If anyone is threatened or in danger, call the Gardaí. Anyone unwell, injured or having an allergic reaction: get help straight away and follow your workplace's emergency procedure. If it's serious, call 112 or 999.

LESSON 7

INCLUSIVE SERVICE AND TEAMWORK

Every customer gets the same respect and the same standard of service. Irish equality law (the Equal Status Acts) says businesses must not treat a customer less favourably because of their gender, civil status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community.

Customer	What helps
Any disability	Ask, don't assume: "Can I help with anything?" Then do what they ask. Speak to the customer, not their companion. Not every disability can be seen.
Wheelchair users	Keep the routes clear and offer a table that suits.
Sight loss	Say who you are, and where you've put things: "Your coffee is just to your right." Read the menu out if asked.
Hearing loss	Face them, speak clearly without shouting, point to the menu or write it down.
Assistance dogs	Welcome. Don't pet, feed or distract a working dog.
Older customers	Give them time. Don't rush them, never talk down to them. Offer to carry a tray to the table.
Children	Say hello: they're customers. Ask the parent where they'd like a hot drink, and keep it out of the child's reach.
Language barriers	Slowly and clearly, simple words, no slang. Louder doesn't help. Point to the menu, the cakes or the card machine. Repeat the order back. With an allergy, show the written allergen information.
Dietary needs	Vegan, vegetarian, coeliac, halal, lactose-free: some are choices, some are medical needs. Same care for every request; check the written information when unsure.

Working as a team

- Customers can see the team, so they notice how you work together. Keep talking: call what you're making and what's next.
- When a colleague is swamped and you're free, offer to help.
- Never argue with or criticise a colleague in front of customers. Sort it out later, in private.
- Hand over clearly at the end of your shift: what's running low, what's been promised to whom.

LESSON 8

YOUR STANDARDS EVERY SHIFT

Tick each day. Customers watch your hands, and they judge how clean the whole place is, kitchen included, by the toilets.

This week	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
READY BEFORE YOU START							
Clean uniform or apron	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hair tied back, nails short and clean, minimal jewellery	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Phone away, out of sight	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fit to work (been sick? told my manager)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In place before the doors open	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
IN FRONT OF THE CUSTOMER							
Cups by the handle or base, never the rim	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tongs or a clean napkin for cakes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Hands washed after tables, bins, toilets; before food and clean cups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Separate cloths for tables and the bar	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
THE FLOOR AND THE TOILETS							
Walked the floor: tables cleared, milk and sugar station tidy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spills mopped at once, wet floor sign out	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Toilets checked on schedule, sheet signed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
THE LAST IMPRESSION							
Thanked and said goodbye to every customer	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Let them leave in their own time; cleared soon after	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

After a hard moment

- Take a breath, or a minute away from the counter if you can.
- Tell your manager what happened.
- Give the next customer a fresh start.
- Afterwards, talk it through as a team: one thing done well, one thing to work on.

The four habits. Notice people, get the order right, make it the same every time, and handle problems kindly.

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General customer service training. Never put yourself at risk with an aggressive customer: step back and get help.

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