

ONLINE COURSE

BARISTA INTERMEDIATE

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LESSON 7: TROUBLESHOOTING AND REAL-WORLD SCENARIOS

Troubleshooting Common Coffee Issues

When your espresso runs too fast, there are a few possible causes. It might be that your grind size is too coarse, your dose is too low, or your tamping is too light. A shot that runs too quickly will often taste thin and under-extracted, lacking sweetness and balance. To fix this, start by adjusting your grind size to be slightly finer. You could also increase your dose a little to create more resistance to the water, and make sure you are applying a firm, even tamp so the coffee bed is compact and level.

If your espresso runs too slowly, it is usually the opposite problem. The grind might be too fine, the dose too high, or you may be tamping with too much force. This can cause over-extraction, leading to bitter and heavy flavours. In this case, adjust your grind a little coarser, reduce your dose slightly, and ease up on your tamp pressure.

When espresso tastes sour, this is often a sign of under-extraction. The coffee has not brewed long enough or the grind is too coarse, meaning the sweeter and more balanced flavours have not had time to develop. To correct this, make the grind a little finer, allow the shot to run for slightly longer, and if needed, raise your brew water temperature by one or two degrees.



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If espresso tastes bitter, that is a sign of over-extraction. The water has pulled out too many of the harsher compounds from the coffee. This can happen when the grind is too fine, the brew time is too long, or the temperature is too high. To address this, coarsen the grind slightly, shorten the brew time, or lower the water temperature.

Sometimes milk can separate or appear bubbly. This usually happens when it has been overheated, stretched for too long, or is not fresh. Overheating damages the proteins in milk, stopping it from blending smoothly with the espresso. The solution is to monitor your milk temperature carefully, keep stretching to just the first few seconds, and always start with fresh milk straight from the fridge.

If your grinder clogs or retains coffee, it may be because the beans are very oily, there is static build-up, or old coffee is stuck in the burr chamber. This slows down grinding and affects freshness. The fix is to brush out the burrs regularly, run grinder cleaning tablets when needed, and avoid using extremely dark, oily roasts if possible.



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HANDLING CUSTOMER REQUESTS

A professional barista adapts without making the customer feel like they are being difficult. Examples:

- o **Customer asks for extra hot milk:** Acknowledge their request, steam milk to a slightly higher temperature, but be mindful not to scorch it. You can also pre-heat the cups, by placing the cups on top of your espresso machine, rinse it with warm water, or blast steam using your steam wand for a second or two.
- o **Customer wants “stronger” coffee:** Offer options — a smaller milk-to-espresso ratio, a higher dose, or a double shot.
- o **Customer requests plant-based milk:** Understand that different milks steam differently; adjust your stretching and spinning accordingly.

Handling Complaints with Professionalism

1. **Listen without interrupting** — let the customer explain the issue fully.
2. **Acknowledge and apologise** — even if you believe you followed the recipe perfectly.
3. **Offer a solution** — remake the drink, offer a different option, or refund if necessary.
4. **Stay calm and polite** — your body language and tone matter as much as your words.

Never blame the coffee beans, the equipment, or another team member in front of the customer. Keep it professional.



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HOMework

TROUBLESHOOTING DRILL

- o Pull an espresso shot that is intentionally too fast, then fix it.
- o Steam milk that is too foamy, then correct your technique for silky microfoam.
- o Roleplay a customer asking for an unusual request (e.g., half-strength latte with extra hot oat milk) and adapt your workflow accordingly.

