The Barista Instructor Handbook

Teaching and assessing the Barista Training Series

Timothy Walker

First edition, 2026

Book Three of The Barista Training Series



Measured preparation supports useful instruction. AI illustration.

A companion to The Barista's Handbook and The Barista Training Workbook. Practical guidance for preparing lessons, coaching learners and recording evidence of independent performance.

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Training information

This book provides general training information. Follow your café's procedures, equipment manufacturers' instructions and local food-safety and allergen regulations, which take precedence over this book.

About the illustrations

The realistic scenes and drink and equipment images in this book are AI-generated illustrations, not photographs. Use the written quantities and site procedures; appearance does not establish exact quantity, temperature, safety or taste. Diagrams are explanatory, and imagined scenes do not show real people or places.

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Chapter and lesson page references refer to this instructor book. The course teaching map lists all 30 sessions alongside the separate Workbook pages.

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1 How people learn and how to teach

How people learn in a coffee course

A teaching reference with clear boundaries

Start with what your student already knows. A clear explanation, a demonstration they can follow and time to practice will help them turn that knowledge into useful café skills. This chapter helps you plan those moments and check what your student has learned.

Use existing coffee standards honestly

The SCA Coffee Skills Program already offers Barista Skills at Foundation, Intermediate and Professional levels. Its courses and certification have their own authorized delivery arrangements. This series uses its own published Workbook requirements; it does not claim equivalent levels or award SCA credentials. An instructor using another program must follow that program's authorized curriculum and assessments.

A sequence that builds on demonstrated skill

Teach safe station habits and a measured first cup before adding complexity. Tasting follows brewing; controlled espresso precedes milk drinks; latte art follows the drinks it decorates. Use your student's evidence to revisit prerequisites. Completing a session date alone is not evidence that the next practical task is safe.

What instructor competence means here

An instructor needs both sound barista skills and the ability to teach, observe and make fair decisions. Use the teaching trial at the end of this book to review those abilities. Proposed instructor levels or freelance trainer recognition would require separate criteria, observed teaching and a documented review process; this book does not create that credential system.

Give feedback that leads to another useful attempt

Start with what you both saw, connect it to the target and ask what your student noticed. Choose one useful comparison to try next. Have the conversation while the attempt is still fresh enough to examine together.

For example: “Our target was 18.0 g. This dose reads 18.6 g. Show me how you zeroed the basket before the next dose.” This identifies a discrepancy and checks the measurement without claiming that the grinder must be at fault.

If a shot runs faster than your reference while dose and yield match the recipe, pause before adjusting the grinder. Taste it together when safe and ask, “What do you notice?” Check preparation before choosing a change. The shorter time gives you something to investigate; it doesn’t prove a particular taste or cause.

For a useful action: “You noticed that the ticket and cup did not agree and stopped to confirm the order. That protected the handoff.” Specific recognition tells your student which behavior to carry into the next shift.

When several things go wrong, start with the first problem that makes the rest hard to judge. A false tare makes the dose reading unreliable. An unclear order leaves you unsure what drink was wanted. Deal with safety concerns before continuing the exercise.

Keep description and preference separate

Ask your students to describe what they notice before saying whether they like it. “This cup feels lighter and leaves a drier finish” is a comparison. “I would choose the other cup” is a preference. Both can inform service, but neither statement automatically establishes why the coffee changed.

The Handbook’s seven sensory attributes provide a shared starting vocabulary. The SCA Coffee Value Assessment also distinguishes descriptive assessment from an evaluator’s impression of quality. Use that distinction to support clear conversation; these exercises don’t confer SCA certification or reproduce a complete professional cupping protocol. [3]

Your student may describe a real difference using words you wouldn’t choose. Ask whether the cups support the observation. Don’t reward unusual flavor names or agreement with the most confident person in the room. “I can’t confirm a difference” is a useful answer when the comparison doesn’t support one.

Help an overwhelmed learner reset

If a student becomes shaky, loses track of instructions or grows frustrated, pause the task and follow the safe stopping procedure. Move the conversation away from noise when practical. Ask what feels difficult without demanding a personal explanation. Offer a brief break or one smaller practice step; don’t add several corrections at once.

For repeated milk-texturing difficulty, put down the hot jug safely, review one cue, then demonstrate again before another supervised attempt. Build up from one drink to mixed tickets and customer interruptions as control improves. Record assistance as coached practice. A supported recovery does not replace the independent evidence required for assessment.

Session 1 Name and map the bar

Workbook: Session 1, p. 76; W26. Handbook: Chapter 5 and the applicable numbered recipes.

Planning time: briefing ____ min demonstration ____ min practice ____ min debrief ____ min

Before you start: Ask your student what they've brewed before, explain which areas they may enter and confirm who can authorize equipment use.

Objective and introduction

Take your student on a practical walk through the bar so they can name the working areas, find the instructions and explain a safe route. The Workbook requires your student to name the components and explain the safe working route, supported by a station map and equipment and procedure references. This session introduces the setting for later observed work; it does not sign off operation of every item shown.

Preparation and equipment

Choose a period when your student can see the station without obstructing service. Gather a blank sheet for the map, the current equipment instructions, an example order ticket and access to the relevant ingredient and cleaning records. Check with the responsible person which areas may be entered and which equipment can be approached during the lesson.

Ask your student what they have used before. Explain that the map needs recognizable labels and useful routes, not artistic drawing. If movement around a live bar is unsuitable, begin with a diagram and finish the actual-site walk-through under safe conditions before recording completion.

Lesson content: Identify equipment, hazards and instruction locations. Complete the station map.

Instructor demonstration

Follow one ordinary order from greeting and ticket to preparation, final check, handoff and reset. At each transition, identify who owns the next action and how the drink's identity is preserved. Show where a modified order would be confirmed without exposing a customer's private information.

Point out the machine, grinder, scale, milk storage, clean vessels, handwashing facilities, cleaning supplies and waste route as they exist at this site. Identify hot, moving or pressurized equipment from a safe position. Show where to find the authorized fault-reporting and isolation instructions; locating a control does not authorize your student to carry out maintenance.

Open one actual instruction document. Demonstrate how to find the model and relevant procedure. Then show the route for contacting the responsible person when information is missing or contradictory.

Student practice and discussion

Ask your student to draw the station and trace one order in their own words. Have them mark a clean-tool location, a used-tool route, the ingredient information point and the place where an unclear order is held for clarification. Discuss one possible obstruction and how the site would handle it.

Use W06's twelve-component record when the actual equipment is available. Record the component's function and safe-use limit, rather than accepting a label alone. Retain any unfinished component work for the appropriate later practice; don't silently expand Session 1 into independent operation of twelve components.

Ask: "The cup has no clear identifier, and two tickets could match it. What happens next?" An acceptable response is to stop guessing, reconnect the cup with a confirmed order under the site