

tea  
scene

# Let the tea flow

Baristas may have the morning coffee rush running like clockwork, but what happens if a tea order is thrown into the mix? Here are seven steps to get café workflow down to a tee.

**A**ny café with a busy period – whether that's the morning coffee run or afternoon pick-me-ups – knows that getting the workflow right means consistently good coffee delivered quickly and efficiently to pre-caffeinated customers.

Unfortunately, too many venues are baffled when an order for tea comes through, unable to integrate leaves and hot water into the rhythm of the coffee requests.

Here are simple steps on how to unite the workflow of all hot beverages and have them work in harmony.

## 1. DEDICATION

It should go without saying that cafés must first dedicate themselves to sourcing, preparing and serving good quality tea. Valuing tea drinkers as you do your coffee customers is essential to understanding why you need to offer the same level of

experience. As with the coffee crowd, tea lovers appreciate quality and consistency and will reward your venue with repeat custom when they know you're doing the right thing.

## 2. EDUCATION

Make sure your staff knows how to make good tea. This is no different to hiring baristas who know how to make good coffee. At the very least, everyone who will ever be expected to make tea should know the basics,



For easy tea preparation in cafés, label tea varieties by its name, ideal amount to serve, steeping temperatures and brewing time.

including the difference between black, green, white and oolong tea, as well as their ideal steeping temperatures and times.

David Lyons, tea consultant at 18ThirtyFour and AASTA Member Concierge, says he always starts with a tea tasting for staff. “This gets them into the habit of offering advice to customers and helping with choices. So many times you ask for a tea and the waiter or waitress says: ‘English Breakfast... um...’ – with knowledge they can do better.”

David also cautions against assimilating the tea and coffee workflow by using the coffee machine to dispense hot water because the temperature is often too hot for most types of tea. “It may be okay for a black tea but it would be better pouring the hot water into a jug, then into the teapot for [more delicate] white, green or oolong teas,” he says.

### 3. PREPARATION

Baristas should have everything at hand to make coffee, and tea-making staff should also have everything within reach to make tea. The coffee machine and the tea-making station does not need to be in the same area. In fact, it’s better if it is not, so as not to interrupt the momentum of baristas.

The tea-making area should contain all the tea you offer, as well as a source of fresh water, a kettle, clean teapots and cups. If you’re lucky enough to have a hot water unit that dispenses a volumetric dosage of temperature-controlled water it will be your best friend to make tea efficiently. It’s also a good idea to clearly label the different varieties of tea with not only the name but also the ideal amount to serve, steeping temperatures and brewing time.

Nathan Wakeford, founder of Chamellia and AASTA President, recommends spending some time in quiet periods separating the tea into single serve packets using resealable bags. This not only saves you time when measuring out a serve, it also prevents the tea from quickly going stale, which occurs when you open and close the container.

He also suggests experimenting with optimum brew times at different times of day. “Ambient temperature can change between morning and afternoon. Mornings are colder so tea brews more slowly,” he says.

### 4. INFORMATION

Educating customers is a timesaver as well. Don’t suffer from ‘what tea do you have?’ syndrome. Make sure tea varieties are clearly displayed and/or listed. A tasting note (fresh and fruity, smoky with a hint of orange etc) also goes a long way to avoid customers asking multiple questions.



Provide additional information on different variations. For example, for English breakfast you could say: ‘Offered with or without milk.’ Of course offer any milk alternatives you may have. Green tea listings may read: ‘Taken without milk.’ You should also consider keeping tea and herbal infusions/tisanes discrete to make the difference clear, as well as heading off any questions about caffeine content.

### 5. EXPECTATIONS

Tea can take longer to make than coffee so manage expectations up front. The server taking the order should flag the waiting period with the tea-drinker while taking the opportunity to emphasise that you do things properly. A simple, ‘that tea requires a four-minute steeping time, are you okay with the wait?’ can be a good way to establish that the tea is in good hands. It will also ensure the customer has been informed of how long it will take. Start preparing tea before any coffee in the same order to keep the wait between as short as possible.

### 6. DELEGATION

Assuming you have more than the barista on shift, let the barista do what they do best – make coffee – and delegate the tea making to someone else. This works best if you have separate tea and coffee-making areas (see Preparation). Having a dedicated tea-maker means baristas don’t need to interrupt their coffee-making workflow and may also be an opportunity to train someone to be a tea specialist.

### 7. INTEGRATION

Half of the time it takes to make tea is actually waiting: waiting for the water to get to the right temperature, and waiting for the leaves to steep. You can use this time to do other things, like serve another customer or prepare any side orders of food. But don’t get too distracted and overheat the water or over brew the leaves. Once you’ve followed the previous six steps and mastered this kind of multitasking, you’ve achieved integration.

All of these points are geared around minimising the disruption an unexpected tea order might cause to a peak-time

coffee-heavy workflow but the same principles apply even when you’re not busy. Tea drinkers, after all, are customers too. When you value quality tea and treat tea and coffee drinkers as equal, you’ll find the tea drinkers will seek you out.

*This article is brought to you by the Australasian Specialty Tea Association ([www.aasta.asn.au](http://www.aasta.asn.au)), which is devoted to providing BeanScene readers with advice on how to promote tea.*

### DRINK HERE OR TAKE AWAY?

It’s hard to imagine a tea bag and hot water in a paper cup is worth \$4.50, but that’s how much some cafés charge tea drinkers for their beverage to-go. Most tea drinkers prefer to sit and spend time drinking tea, but occasionally customers will want takeaway. What to do?

**Make and pour:** This involves you making the tea as you would for a sit-in customer, but instead of giving them a teapot, pour the perfectly brewed tea into the takeaway cup.

**DIY teabags:** Adjust the amount of tea for one cup versus what you might serve in a pot. Place the loose-leaf tea in a disposable filter bag and add hot water at the right temperature. Let the customer know the recommended steep time and let them do the rest.

**Give in to teabags:** Pyramid bags that allow the leaves to expand are best. As with DIY teabags, make sure you add hot water at the right temperature for the type of tea you’re serving. Inform the customer of the ideal steep time and let them do the rest – maybe don’t charge them \$4.50 for the privilege though.



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