

RESTAURANT · OPERATING STANDARD 120

The Table Drinks Standard

WHO

Servers and runners, checked by the head waiter

WHEN

Every table at lunch and dinner, from the first drink to the last coffee

YOU NEED

Trays with mats, chilled drinks, the coffee machine ready, the milk and sugar set

TIME TO TRAIN

40 minutes, with one live table at lunch

What this standard achieves

Every drink that is not wine reaches the right guest cold or hot as it should be, on a tray, poured in front of them, and the next one is offered before the guest has to look for anyone. Coffee and tea close the meal made to order, with the milk and sugar each guest prefers.

Measured by

01 Drinks on the table within 5 minutes, fresh juice within 8

02 Every drink carried and cleared on a tray

03 Every bottle and can opened and poured at the table

04 Next drink offered within one minute of an empty glass

05 Coffee or tea offered to every table at the end of the meal

06 Milk, a plant drink and three sugars offered with every coffee and tea

07 Every coffee and tea made to order, never kept warm

08 Coffee or tea on the table within 5 minutes of the order

PHASE 1

Before service

STEPS 1–5

- 01 Set the drinks station: two trays with non-slip mats, a bottle opener per server, ice in a clean bucket with a scoop, lemon and lime cut today, and glasses checked against the light.
- 02 Read the fridge thermometer and write it on the log: soft drinks and water between 4 and 6 °C. Turn bottles label forward, oldest date at the front.
- 03 Prepare the coffee machine: purge each group head, pull one test espresso and taste it, and check the grind. Fill the tea boiler and set out the teas with the brewing time of each on the station card.
- 04 Fill the milk and sugar set: cold milk, cream, an oat or soy drink, and three kinds of sugar or sweetener (white, brown and one without sugar). Add lemon slices and honey for tea.
- 05 Learn today's drinks list: every soft drink, juice and alcohol-free drink with its price, and where the coffee and the teas come from. A guest who asks gets an answer, not a guess.

PHASE 2

Take the drinks order

STEPS 6–10

- 06 Check yourself against The Presence Standard before your first table: uniform, name badge, hands, and the occasions and allergies on tonight's list in mind.
- 07 Water is offered and poured as The First Two Minutes Standard sets out. Once it is on the table, offer the other drinks, naming two or three choices.

"While you look at the menu, may I bring you a fresh lemonade, a juice, or a soft drink?"
- 08 Write each drink against the guest's seat number, as The Order Taking Standard sets out, so every glass can be set down without asking whose it is.
- 09 For every soft drink, ask about ice and lemon, and for fresh juice, say how long it takes. Note "no ice" beside the seat number, never at the bottom of the ticket.

"Would you like ice and lemon with your tonic, Ms Haddad?"
- 10 Ring every drink into the POS as soon as it is ordered, with the seat number. Drinks reach the table within 5 minutes of the order, fresh juices within 8.

PHASE 3

Carry and pour

STEPS 11–15

- 11 Carry every drink on a dry tray with a mat, even one glass for a near table. Hold the tray in your left hand at waist height and serve with your right.
- 12 Hold glasses by the stem or low on the base, never near the rim. Set each one down from the guest's right, to the right of the water glass, by seat number.
- 13 For a bottle or a can, put the glass down first, with ice if the guest asked for it. Open the bottle beside the guest and pour slowly down the side of the glass until it is two thirds full.
- 14 Leave the bottle or can on the table to the right of the glass, label facing the guest. Never open or pour it at the station, where the guest cannot see what they are getting.
- 15 Name each drink as you set it down, in a low voice, so the guest can stop you if it is wrong.

"Your sparkling water with lime, Mr Novak."

PHASE 4

Watch the glasses

STEPS 16–20

- 16 Look at every glass on every pass. When a soft drink or juice is empty, offer the next one within one minute: the same again, or something else.

"May I bring you another orange juice, or would you like to try something different?"
- 17 If the guest's own bottle still has some left, top up the glass from it first, and offer a new one only when the bottle is empty.
- 18 Wait for a pause in the conversation before you speak. If the guest is talking, catch their eye and lift the empty glass slightly, so a nod is enough.
- 19 When the bottle of water runs out, show the guest the empty bottle and ask before you open another. Top-ups of water follow The Table Maintenance Standard.

"Shall I open another bottle of still water for the table?"
- 20 Take the empty glass away on the tray when the new drink arrives, or as soon as the guest declines. Never stack glasses in your hand or carry them by the rim.

PHASE 5

Coffee and tea

STEPS 21–26

- 21 When the dessert plates are cleared, or the main course if there is no dessert, offer coffee or tea to every guest, naming the choices and asking how each one takes it.

"May I offer you a coffee or a tea? We have espresso, cappuccino, decaffeinated, and a green tea from Kyoto."

- 22 Write each coffee and tea by seat, with the milk, the strength and decaffeinated or not. A guest who asks for a cappuccino at 22:00 gets one, without comment.

- 23 Make every coffee and tea to order. An espresso leaves the machine for the table within 30 seconds, in a warmed cup. Milk is steamed fresh for each cup and never reheated.

- 24 Brew tea in a pot with the leaves or the bag inside, and the water at the right heat for that tea. Tell the guest how many minutes it needs, and bring a second pot or hot water when it runs low.

"Your tea needs three more minutes, Mrs Tanaka. I've brought a little hot water to add if it gets strong."

- 25 Serve from the right on a saucer, handle at four o'clock and the spoon beside it, within 5 minutes of the order. Set the milk and sugar in the centre of the table, named once.

"There's cold milk, cream and oat milk, and white, brown and sugar-free sweetener."

- 26 When a cup is empty, offer a second coffee or more hot water within one minute, as for any empty glass.

PHASE 6

Clear and record

STEPS 27–30

- 27 Clear glasses, cups and the milk set on the tray, from the guest's right, only when every guest has finished. Never take a cup that still has coffee in it without asking.

- 28 Before the bill is printed, check that every drink on the table is on the POS, the second rounds included. The bill itself follows The Bill Standard.

- 29 Note each guest's preference in the profile: "sparkling with lime, no ice", "decaffeinated with oat milk". On the next visit, offer it by name before the menu.

- 30 At the end of service, clean the coffee machine and steam wands, throw away opened milk and cut fruit, and write the closing fridge temperature on the log.

What to record

On the ticket

- ☐ Drink against the seat number
- ☐ Ice, lemon or none
- ☐ Time ordered
- ☐ Second rounds rung in as served

On the station log

- ☐ Fridge temperature, opening and close
- ☐ Test espresso tasted: time, initials
- ☐ Milk and fruit thrown away at close
- ☐ Faults reported: machine, fridge, ice

On the guest profile

- ☐ Water: still or sparkling
- ☐ Favourite soft drink and how
- ☐ Coffee or tea, and how they take it
- ☐ Drinks they turned down

When the situation changes

The guest asks for tap water

Bring it in a clean carafe with a glass at the same speed as any other drink, and refill it as you would a bottle. Never comment on the choice.

A drink on the list has run out

Say so before the guest chooses, if you know, and offer the closest match by name. Never bring a substitute without asking.

Beer is served in the restaurant

It follows the same rules as a soft drink: chilled glass first, bottle opened and poured at the table, label facing the guest, next one offered at the empty glass.

A guest wants coffee with the main

Bring it with the course. Coffee and tea are served when the guest wants them, not when the menu says.

The coffee machine breaks down

Tell the head waiter at once and the guest before they order. Offer tea, a coffee from the bar or the lounge machine, or a filter coffee, with the time each takes.

A child orders a drink

Ask the parent before serving anything fizzy or with caffeine. Serve in an unbreakable glass with a straw that is not plastic, set where the child can reach it safely.

Common mistakes

MISTAKE

Pouring the soft drink at the station to save a trip. The guest cannot see what is in the glass and has no bottle to top up from.

MISTAKE

Waiting for the guest to ask for a second drink. By the time they look for you, they have decided they will not bother.

MISTAKE

Bringing coffee with one sachet of white sugar and a jug of milk. The guest who takes oat milk or sweetener has to ask, and wait again.

MISTAKE

Keeping a jug of coffee warm on the hotplate for the evening. By nine o'clock it tastes burnt, and it is the last thing the guest drinks.

MISTAKE

Carrying two glasses in one hand, fingers inside the rims. The guest saw it, and will not drink from that glass happily.

MISTAKE

Asking "who had the cola?" at the table. The order was written by seat precisely so that nobody has to answer that.

Check your team

After training (40 minutes, with one live table at lunch), each person answers these without the sheet.

- 01 Within how many minutes do drinks and fresh juices reach the table?
- 02 What goes down first when you serve a bottled soft drink, and where is it opened?
- 03 When is the next drink offered, and what do you do if the guest is talking?
- 04 Name everything in the milk and sugar set.
- 05 How fast does an espresso leave the machine, and how is milk prepared?
- 06 When is coffee or tea offered, and within how many minutes is it served?

Every Drink, How It Arrives

How each drink that is not wine reaches the table, and the time it takes. Keep it at the drinks station where every runner can see it.

Drink	How it arrives	On the table within
Soft drink in a bottle or can	Glass first, poured in front of the guest	5 minutes
Fresh juice	Poured at the bar, carried on a tray	8 minutes
Alcohol-free cocktail	Made to spec, named as it is set down	7 minutes
Espresso	Warmed cup, within 30 seconds of the machine	5 minutes
Cappuccino or latte	Milk steamed for each cup, never reheated	5 minutes
Tea	In a pot, brewing time told to the guest	5 minutes
The next round	Offered at the empty glass or cup	1 minute

How to use this with your team

Read one row at each pre-service briefing this week, and have one server show it at a real table. The head waiter times two tables a night against the last column and reads the result out the next day.

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