

Identifying Common Bartending Problems

Identifying Common Bartending Problems – Quick Reference Notes

1. Inconsistent Drink Quality

Symptom	Typical Causes	How to Spot It	Quick Fix
Varying strength or flavor from one pour to the next	- Uncalibrated jiggers or free-pour technique	- Guests comment “this is weaker/stronger than usual” - Tasting notes differ noticeably	- Standardize all measurements (use jiggers for every pour)
	- Inaccurate measurement of syrups, bitters, or mixers		- Train staff on proper free-pour timing (e.g., 2-second pour for a standard shot)
	- Inconsistent ice size		- Keep ice uniform (use a dedicated ice bin or crusher)
Over-dilution	- Ice melts too quickly (small cubes, warm ice)	- Cocktails taste watery or lose intended balance	- Use large, clear ice cubes for shaking/stirring
	- Shaking too long or stirring too slowly		- Follow recipe timing (e.g., 10-12s for a stirred spirit-forward drink)
Under-dilution	- Not enough ice, or ice is too cold and melts slowly - Shaking/stirring stopped early	- Drink feels “sharp” or “over-alcoholic”	- Verify ice quantity (fill shaker to the brim) and temperature (store ice in a cooler, not freezer)

2. Poor Presentation

Issue	Root Causes	Visual Cues	Remedy
Sloppy garnish placement	- No garnish prep station - Rushed service	- Garnish crooked, wilted, or missing	- Pre-portion garnishes in a dedicated tray - Train staff on “garnish check” before serving

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Issue	Root Causes	Visual Cues	Remedy
Cloudy or “wet” glass	- Glass not chilled - Water droplets on rim	- Glass looks foggy, drinks appear diluted	- Store glasses in a fridge or ice bucket - Dry rims with a clean cloth before pouring
Incorrect glassware	- Forgetting specific glass (e.g., coupe vs. rocks)	- Guest expects a Martini in a coupe but receives a rocks glass	- Keep a visual guide of glass types near the bar - Use a “glass checklist” during prep

3. Speed & Efficiency Breakdowns

Problem	Common Triggers	Warning Signs	Simple Solutions
Bottleneck at the speed rail	- Too many bottles in one spot - Staff not familiar with layout	- Orders pile up, bar backs out	- Arrange bottles by frequency of use (top shelf for “core” spirits) - Use a “speed rail cheat sheet” for quick reference
Long wait for fresh ice	- Ice bin too small or melting quickly	- Customers hear “ice, ice, ice” repeatedly	- Rotate ice bins every 30?min - Keep a backup bin on standby
Over?reliance on manual calculations	- Staff calculating ratios on the fly	- Pauses mid?order, inconsistent pours	- Print recipe cards with clear measurements - Use measured pour spouts for high?volume drinks

4. Stock & Inventory Issues

Symptom	Typical Cause	Detection	Immediate Action
Running out of a popular spirit mid?shift	- No real?time inventory tracking - Over?ordering of less ?used items	- “Sorry, we’re out of ...” appears repeatedly	- Implement a simple