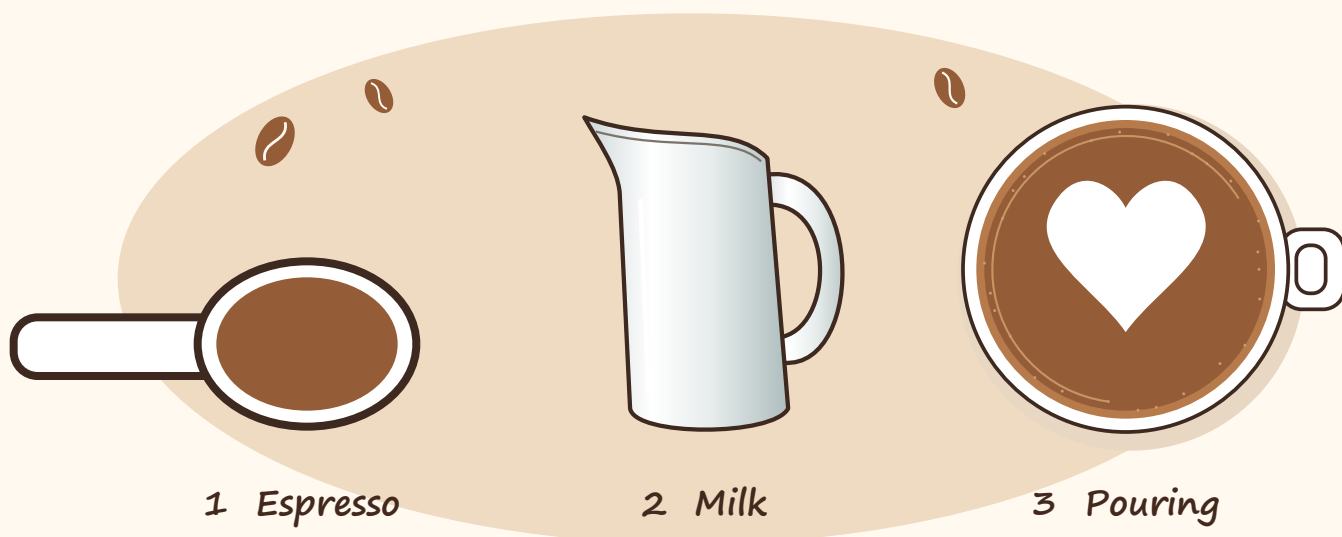


PRACTICAL TRAINING GUIDE

SPCC

Barista Competition Guide

Brewing and espresso / Milk / Pouring



Build a repeatable routine

Use this guide to practise the core skills for the SPCC Fiji Barista Championship. Learn each movement slowly, check the result, then combine the skills into a complete drink routine.

Learn to adjust grind size and judge espresso by time, appearance and taste. Then practise smooth milk and a controlled pour. Use the exercises, diagrams and self-checks to build confidence.

Check the official event brief for required drinks, equipment, judging criteria and time limits. Practice targets in this guide are teaching examples.



BEFORE YOU START

Prepare for your practice

Read the event brief so you know what you will make and how much time you will have. Use this guide to build your skills one step at a time.

How to use the guide

Brewing and espresso, pages 3 to 4. Learn how grind size affects the shot. Use time, appearance and taste to guide small adjustments.

Milk, pages 5 to 9. Learn the two steaming movements, listen to the sounds, check texture and record repeatability.

Pouring, pages 10 to 11. Control the height and flow, then practise a simple heart.

Full routine, page 12. Combine the skills using the confirmed event brief.

Before you begin

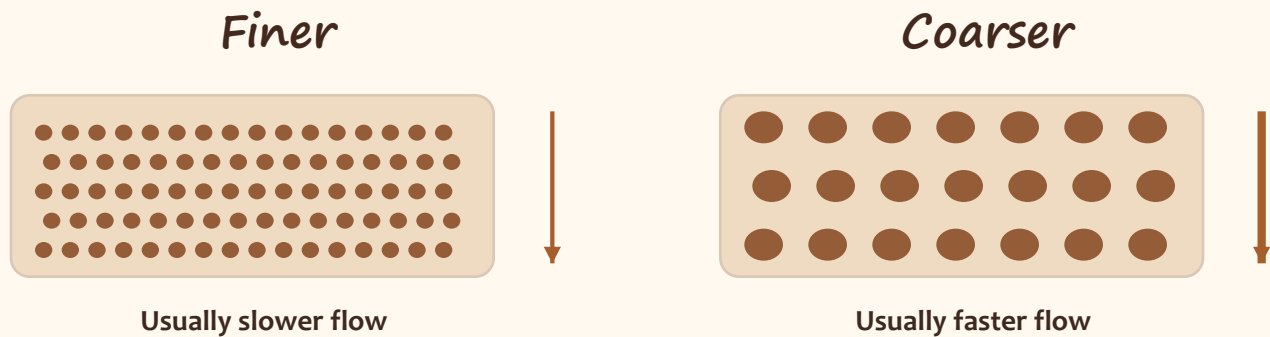
- ☐ Check the required drinks, quantities, cup sizes and any required pattern.
- ☐ Read the preparation time, performance time and judging criteria.
- ☐ Set out your coffee, milk, cups, jug, timer and cleaning cloths.
- ☐ Check how to operate the machine and adjust the grinder.
- ☐ Confirm the grinder preset and shot size with your trainer.

Use the official event requirements when they are available. Until then, use the sample exercises for skill practice.

CHAPTER 1 BREWING AND ESPRESSO

Grind size changes the shot

Grinding exposes the coffee to water. The size of the grounds affects both how flavour is released and how easily water flows through the coffee bed.



Particles enlarged. Compare with the same coffee, basket and shot size.

Finer grounds usually slow the pour; coarser grounds usually speed it up. Finer is not automatically better: an overly fine grind can restrict flow or encourage uneven paths through the coffee, called **channels**.

Three checks for a good shot

Time. Start timing when you press the brew button and stop when the shot finishes. Around **25 to 35 seconds** is a common practice starting point; use your trainer's target for this coffee and shot size. Time is a clue, not a pass or fail score.

Appearance. Watch for a steady, even flow. Sudden gushes, spluttering or prolonged drips need checking. The colour may lighten during the pour. Crema varies with the coffee; its colour or thickness alone cannot tell you whether a shot tastes good.

Taste. Stir, let the espresso cool enough to taste, then sip. Look for sweetness, pleasant acidity, body and a clean finish. Notice sharp sourness, a thin or hollow flavour, or a harsh, drying finish. Taste decides whether a change helped.

Grind reading: Scott Rao, *How to choose a grind setting* and *Fines: Fine for Espresso, Not So Fine For Filter*.

Further reading: *The Professional Barista's Handbook*. The explanations and drawings here are written for this guide.

CHAPTER 1 BREWING AND ESPRESSO

Adjust, taste and repeat

Use the automatic grinder's preset, then focus on small changes to grind size. Keep the rest of your routine steady so you can judge the difference.

01 Keep the setup consistent. Use the same coffee, basket and grinder preset. Keep the same programmed espresso shot or agreed cup level; do not change the shot size just to reach a time.

02 Prepare evenly. Start with a clean, dry basket. Spread the grounds evenly and tamp level. Keep this technique consistent before changing the grind.

03 Choose one small change. Time the shot, watch the flow and taste it. Use the clues below together; one symptom does not prove the cause.

What you notice	Try next
Fast flow; thin or sharply sour taste	Check preparation first. If consistent, try a small move finer , then taste again.
Very slow drips or a stalled shot	Check preparation. Try a small move coarser , then compare the flow and taste.
Uneven flow or a harsh, drying taste	Check for clumps and an uneven coffee bed. If the grind is very fine, try slightly coarser.

04 Clear and retest. After adjusting, clear retained grounds as your trainer demonstrates for that grinder. Make another shot and compare. Follow the grinder instructions for adjustment direction and operation.

On timed grinders, grind changes can alter the amount dispensed; ask your trainer to recheck the preset. If the taste stays unpleasant, review the coffee and setup with your trainer.

Practise three shots

Shot	Grind setting	Time s	Appearance and taste	Next change
1				
2				
3				

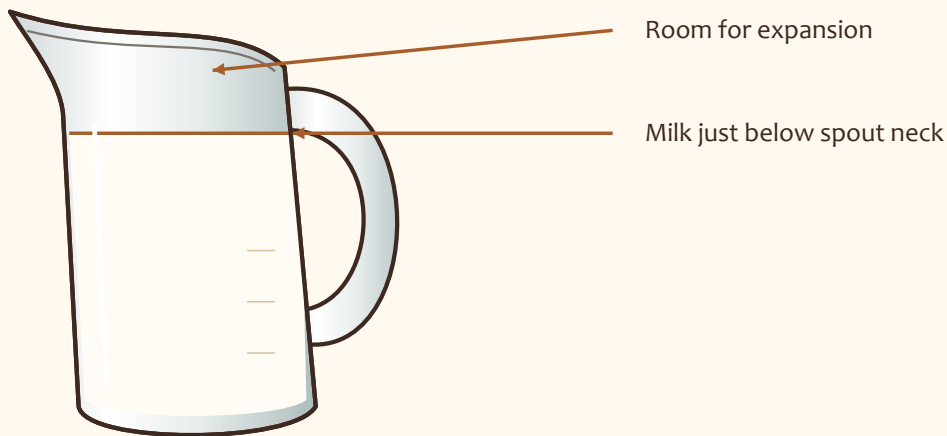
Compare with a partner. Which shot tastes most balanced, and what changed?

Practical reference: La Marzocco, [How to Dial In Your Grinder for Espresso](#).

CHAPTER 2 MILK

Start with the right setup

Aim for milk that pours smoothly and carries a fine, even foam. Practise with the exact milk, cup and jug that will be used at the event.



Choose a jug that suits one drink

What to have ready

A clean jug, chilled milk, a working steam wand, a milk thermometer and a clean damp cloth reserved for the wand. Choose a jug that suits the drink. Start with milk just below the neck at the base of the spout, leaving room for expansion.

Use the event milk

UHT milk can work for latte art; some UHT products are made specifically for baristas. Test the supplied brand rather than ruling it out. If plant milk is permitted, follow that product's steaming guidance.

Measure only what you need. Begin each attempt with fresh refrigerated milk and a clean jug. Do not re-steam leftover milk.

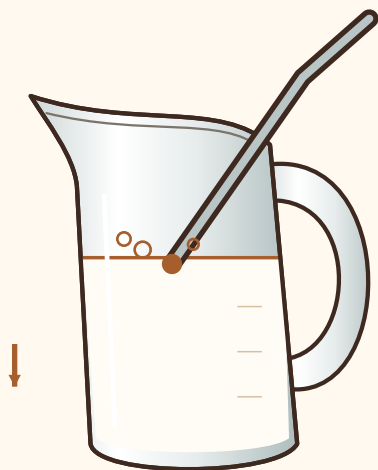
Use the same milk brand, starting volume and jug during each practice set. Match the foam to the drink you are making. The drawing does not prescribe one fill line for every jug.

CHAPTER 2 MILK

Learn two small movements

Adding air creates foam. Keeping the milk moving mixes that foam through the jug. The change in wand depth is small.

1 Add air



Lower jug slightly

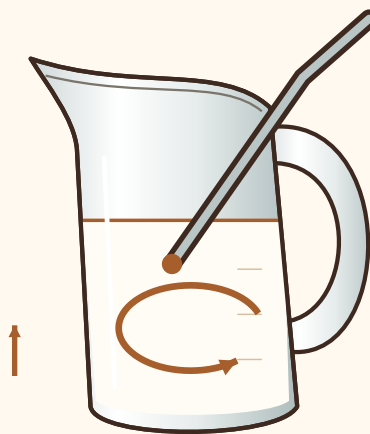
2 Mix and heat

Top view



Tip off centre

Cutaway views



Raise jug slightly

01 Purge. Clear condensation towards the drip tray, then turn steam off. Keep hands away from steam.

02 Position and start. Place the tip slightly off-centre and just below the milk surface. Turn steam on using the machine's instructed setting.

03 Add air gently. Lower the jug a little to admit air. Stop adding air once the required amount of foam is formed.

04 Keep it moving. Raise the jug a little so the tip sits deeper. Keep a rolling circulation while the milk heats.

05 Finish cleanly. At your target temperature (page 8), turn steam off. Wait until it stops before removing the jug. Wipe the wand, then purge towards the drip tray.

Listen as well as look: sound helps you judge how air enters the milk. See the sound guide on page 7. Keep the wand steady and make small jug movements.

CHAPTER 2 MILK

Listen while you steam

Sound is another useful clue to good steaming. Listen to how it changes as you add air, then mix and heat the milk. Use your ears together with your eyes and thermometer.

What to listen for

Sound	What it suggests and what to do
Soft hiss or gentle paper tearing	Small amounts of air are entering the milk. Aim for short, controlled sounds while adding air near the start. Keep the tip close to the surface and the milk turning.
Quieter, steady sound	Once enough foam has formed, raise the jug slightly to put the tip deeper. The air-intake sound should settle as the milk keeps rolling and heating. Avoid adding more air at this stage.
Loud screech or high-pitched squeal	The tip may be too deep, with too little air entering. Early in steaming, lower the jug a little to bring the tip nearer the surface. Make a small change and listen again.
Gulping, spluttering or loud bubbling	The tip may be too close to or above the surface, taking in large gulps of air. Raise the jug slightly to submerge the tip more and regain a controlled flow.

Check the whole picture

A useful sound should go with a rolling motion and fine, even foam. Sounds vary with the machine, steam tip and milk. If the noise stays harsh, ask your trainer to check the setup. Sound alone cannot confirm the milk temperature; keep using the thermometer.

A short listening exercise

Listen to your trainer demonstrate the air-adding and mixing stages. Then practise with a partner: one steams while the other listens and watches the milk. Describe the sound, make one small adjustment and compare the finished texture. Avoid adding extra air late just to change the sound.

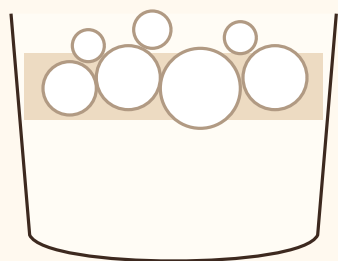
References: La Marzocco, [How to Steam Milk](#); Breville, [Barista Signature user guide](#), [Tips for milk texturing](#).

CHAPTER 2 MILK

Recognise a useful texture

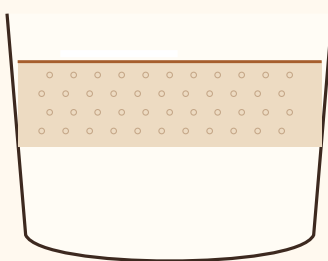
Look at the surface, swirl the jug and observe how the milk moves before pouring. These are training checks, not an official judging score.

Too bubbly



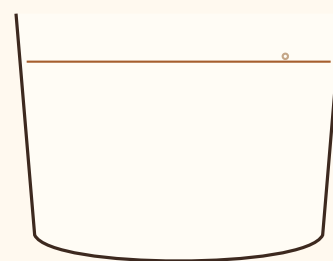
Large bubbles on top

Smooth and glossy



Fine foam mixed evenly

Too little foam



Almost no foam

Cutaways are schematic; fine bubbles are enlarged for clarity

Dairy milk practice target: approximately 60 to 65°C, checked with a thermometer. Follow the milk product guidance and any event requirement; this range is a practice reference.

What you see	Possible cause	Next attempt
Large bubbles	Air entered too aggressively	Use a smaller depth change and maintain circulation.
Stiff foam that sits on top	Too much air for this drink	Shorten the air-adding stage.
Thin milk with little foam	Too little air added	Add a little more air near the start.
Foam and liquid separate	Poor mixing or a long wait	Improve circulation, swirl and pour promptly.

Give the jug a gentle tap if there are a few surface bubbles, then swirl. A smooth, flowing texture is the aim. Tapping cannot rescue a whole jug of dry, over-aerated foam.



CHAPTER 2 MILK

Practise milk consistency

Use the same milk brand, starting volume and jug for every attempt. Check your own results before deciding what to change.

Three attempts with one focus

Review the two movements on page 6. Make three separate attempts, noticing when you add air and when you stop. Record the result before choosing one change. Use each successful jug in a drink where possible.

Attempt	Final °C	Sound and texture	Change for next attempt
1			
2			
3			

Check your own technique

- ☐ Milk is measured and there is room for expansion.
- ☐ Air enters with a gentle, controlled sound.
- ☐ Milk circulates during the mixing stage.
- ☐ Temperature matches your chosen practice target.
- ☐ Steam is off before the wand leaves the milk.
- ☐ The wand is wiped and purged immediately.
- ☐ Milk pours smoothly after swirling.

Use these self-checks to choose your next practice focus. They do not assign championship marks or penalties.

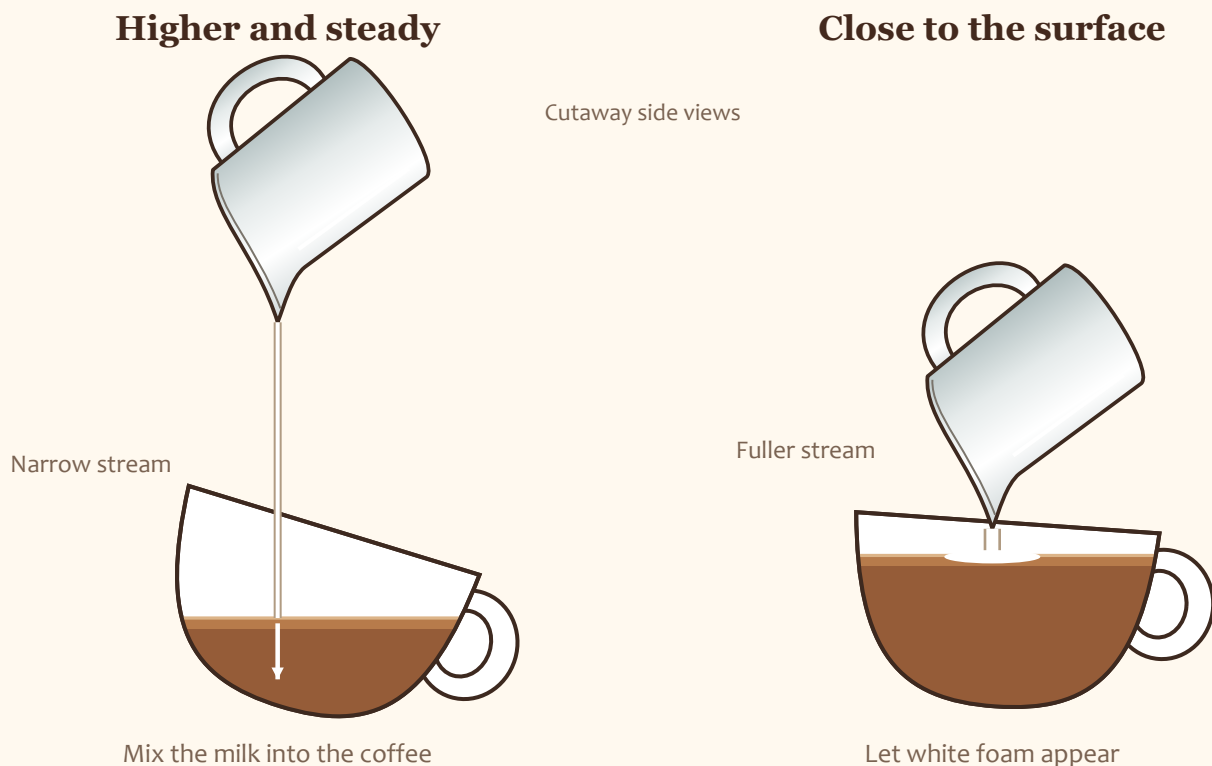
My most repeatable movement

One change I will practise next

CHAPTER 3 POURING

Control height and flow

Prepare the espresso and milk so you can pour promptly. A smooth texture makes control easier.



01 Build the base. Tilt the cup and begin with a controlled, narrow stream from above the surface. Keep the coffee colour even.

02 Bring the spout close. As the cup fills, lower the spout near the surface and increase the flow gently to place the white shape.

03 Keep the cup controlled. Gradually level the cup as it fills. Leave enough room to finish the pattern without spilling.

A short practice drill

Practise a smooth start and stop with cool water in a clean jug and cup. Then practise the same control using milk and espresso. Water trains the movement; milk is needed to judge the finished texture and pattern.

Tilt the cup at the start, then gradually return it upright as it fills. Watch the liquid level so you leave space for the finish.

CHAPTER 3 POURING

Practise a simple heart

Use a heart as a starter exercise. Check the event brief for any patterns required in the championship.

1 Build the base



2 Place the white



3 Let it grow



4 Lift and draw through

Lift first
↓
Draw through



1. Begin with the controlled mixing pour from page 10.
2. Bring the spout close and pour gently into one spot near the centre.
3. Let the white shape grow while gradually levelling the cup.
4. Raise the jug, reduce the stream and draw through the centre to form the point.

Review the result

Is the shape centred? Are both sides similar? Is the edge clear? Did you leave enough room for the finish? Photograph the result and choose one movement to improve on the next attempt.

The drawings show the main stages, not a guaranteed result. Milk texture, flow, cup shape and timing all affect the pattern.



PRACTICE SESSION

Put the skills together

Once you know the required drinks and performance time, practise a complete competition routine.

Prepare the station

- ☐ Read the event brief and set out the correct cups.
- ☐ Have your grinder preset, shot size and milk targets ready.
- ☐ Arrange tools and separate cleaning cloths within easy reach.

Complete one practice run

Make the required drinks, following any event sequence. Time your run and note where you hesitated or stopped. Review the finished drinks, then choose one skill to work on next.

Skill	What to check after your run
Espresso	Grind setting, preparation, time, appearance and taste
Milk	Steaming sound, temperature, texture, control and waste
Pouring	Flow, cup control and presentation
Routine	Order of work, cleaning and total time

Use the official judging sheet alongside this page when it is available. This is a training record, not a substitute score sheet.

Date and required drinks

Time taken and where the routine slowed

One priority for the next practice
