Risk assessment basics using a hospitality task

A useful risk-assessment discussion starts with the actual task and the people it could affect. Identify what might cause harm, consider existing controls and decide what further action is needed. Staff often contribute important detail about awkward routes, busy periods and workarounds. The responsible assessor should use that information to select controls and follow up on whether they work.

GB introductory concepts for staff and new supervisors; employer retains responsibility for suitable assessments and competent assistance.

The practical principles

Identify who could be harmed

A hazard is something with potential to cause harm. Risk considers the likelihood and seriousness of harm in the circumstances. Observe the work, speak to people doing it and consider visitors, contractors and anyone with particular needs. Look beyond the normal shift to deliveries, cleaning and breakdowns. Record the actual activity instead of copying a list that does not fit.

Choose controls that work

First consider removing the hazard or avoiding the activity. Then consider safer substitutes and ways to separate people from danger or control exposure. Procedures, instruction and suitable PPE may support the arrangement. Identify who will make each change and by when. A control written on paper is useful only when it is implemented and people can use it.

Review against reality

Check whether controls remain effective and whether circumstances have changed. Incidents, near misses, new equipment or different staffing can prompt a review. Involve relevant workers and escalate areas beyond your competence. Record significant findings and outstanding actions in the organisation’s system. A risk-assessment introduction helps staff contribute; specialist hazards need assessment by someone with the relevant competence.

Work through a shift scenario

Fictional exercise: a café changes its delivery time to the busiest part of service. The route now crosses a customer queue. The manager reviews the task, considers a different delivery arrangement or route, and agrees how to protect the area if movement is necessary. The record identifies who will act and how the arrangement will be checked.

Avoid the common failure

A risk score by itself does not change a hazardous task. Describe the control and action owner clearly. Consider removing or reducing the hazard before relying only on warnings or PPE. This introductory guide supports staff participation; responsibility for a suitable assessment and competent assistance remains with the employer.

A second situation to discuss

Fictional scenario: A stockroom assessment says “keep aisle clear”, but deliveries block it every Friday.

Review why the arrangement fails. Consider changing delivery timing, storage capacity or the unloading process, assign an owner and check the revised control during the next delivery. Repeating the instruction alone leaves the practical cause unresolved.

Use a working record

Record the specific arrangements below before the briefing. Keep the wording short enough for a colleague to use during the shift. Where a field does not apply, explain why; where information is missing, assign a person to resolve it. Store personal or sensitive details in the business's approved system.

- Task and people affected
- hazard
- existing control
- further action
- owner
- deadline
- review trigger

At the next handover, ask what changed, which action remains open and who now owns it. Close the record only when the agreed follow-up is complete. A recurring problem should inform the next briefing and the relevant operational procedure.

Check understanding

A hazard is:

Something with potential to cause harm Hazards exist before harm occurs.

A strong first option is:

Remove or avoid the hazard Removing exposure can be more effective.

Risk assessment exercise: when the planned route disappears

An event layout was checked yesterday. Today a sponsor has placed a display across the route used for stock trolleys. The alternative runs through a queue. Does the earlier assessment cover the change?

Compare your decision

Pause the affected movement and ask the responsible person to review the actual layout. Consider relocating the display or separating deliveries from guests. Check the revised route with someone who will use it before giving the go-ahead.

Capture the change, exposed people, agreed control and owner. Pick a moment to revisit it, such as doors opening when the quiet rehearsal space becomes a busy public area.

Sources and scope

- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm
- Source: https://www.hse.gov.uk/competence/what-is-competence.htm

Original workplace examples and suggested record. Prepared 19 October 2026. Use the current linked guidance and the venue's procedures for operational decisions.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details