

The Coffee Troubleshooting Card

Six symptoms, one fix at a time. Print it, stick it near the kettle, and let the cup tell you what to change.

The golden rule: change one variable at a time, brew again, and stop as soon as the problem resolves.

Sour or Sharp

UNDER-EXTRACTED

1. **Grind finer** (one step). The first and most effective fix.
2. Still sour? **Extend contact time** — French press: +30 seconds. Pour-over & espresso: a finer grind is the time adjustment.
3. Still sour? **Hotter water**, staying inside 90–96°C (194–205°F).

Check first: actually sour, or just weak? Weak = faint and diluted → fix the ratio, not the extraction.

Bitter or Harsh

OVER-EXTRACTED

1. **Grind coarser** (one step).
2. Still bitter? **Shorten contact time** — French press: –30 seconds, and always decant immediately after pressing.
3. Still bitter? **Cooler water**, staying inside 90–96°C.

Dark roast? Smoky-bitter may be the roast, not your brew — test with a medium roast.

Weak

RATIO PROBLEM — NOT EXTRACTION

1. **Add 1–2 g of coffee**, same water. (French press: 2–4 g, e.g. 30 g → 32–34 g at 480 g water.)
2. **Keep the grind exactly where it is.**
3. Re-taste before changing anything else.

Never grind finer to fix weak — you'll get weak and bitter.

Dull or Lifeless

FRESHNESS PROBLEM

1. **Fresher beans** — look for a roast date, brew within ~4 weeks of it. No roast date on the bag = your answer.
2. **Grind just before brewing.** Airtight container, cupboard — never the fridge.
3. Then, if needed: a few degrees **hotter** inside 90–96°C.

No grind, ratio, or time change can restore freshness already lost.

Thin or Watery

BODY PROBLEM

1. **Add 1–2 g of coffee.**
2. Still thin? **Grind one step finer** — body compounds dissolve mid-extraction.
3. **Check the clock:** pour-over 2:30–3:30 • French press 4:00 steep • espresso 25–30 s. Finishing fast? A finer grind fixes time and thinness together.

Persists after all three? Reconsider the beans.

Inconsistent

PROCESS PROBLEM — GREAT YESTERDAY, FLAT TODAY

1. **Weigh** coffee *and* water. Every brew.
2. **Mark your grind setting** and check it before each brew.
3. **Same steps, timer on, temperature checked** — not estimated.

Control enough variables and the next off cup will tell you exactly what caused it.

The baselines behind every fix — 1:16 ratio • 90–96°C (194–205°F) water • one change at a time.

From *How to Make Better Coffee Every Day* by Felipe Abreu • more free tools at everydaycoffeeguide.com