



Recipe Testing

Since recipes are the heart and soul of your business, you need to be sure that recipes used for your clients meet the following requirements: a dinner entrée has to maintain taste, color, texture, spicing and appearance (as best as possible) after it has been heated. If it doesn't meet these standards or requirements, then you will have trouble retaining customers. Remember, if someone is going to pay you anywhere from \$10 to \$16 for a dinner entrée, they expect that when they heat this selection up, the entrée will taste as if it has just been prepared.

How do you find those recipes that meet industry standards? Since you want to meet the high standards already in place, you need to follow similar testing procedures.

Testing Procedures

When you have a recipe that is a potential candidate, you need to do an extensive test to determine if it will be deemed excellent when served. The items to check:

Storability:

- ❖ Which containers (disposable, reusable, etc.) work best
- ❖ Does the entree store best in the refrigerator, freezer or both?
- ❖ How long can it be stored?

Appearance:

- ❖ Did the color change?
- ❖ Does it look dry, sticky, etc.?
- ❖ Does the entree look the same as when it was just prepared?

Taste:

- ❖ Is the texture the same?
- ❖ Is the spicing the same?
- ❖ Is the original flavor maintained?

The First Test

Prepare the recipe, then store the recipe in both the refrigerator and the freezer using different storage methods and containers (perhaps reusable containers and disposable containers). Two to three days later, take the refrigerator servings, one for you and one for another person, heat the entrées and conduct a taste-test. You are looking for changes in taste, texture, color, spicing and appearance. Does it look and taste the same as when you just prepared it? If any of these have changed, and are unsatisfactory, you need to determine what has caused the changes and if you can modify the recipe to eliminate the cause.

You will find that some recipes store better in disposable containers than in reusable containers. If you find none of the characteristics have changed and the recipe tastes the same, you have completed your first step to having a successful recipe.



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The Second Test

After about a week, if you were successful in testing using the refrigerator phase, take that same entrée out of the freezer, let it defrost naturally, heat it up and do your evaluation. Again, does it meet your tests for taste, texture, color, spicing and appearance? Does it look and taste the same as when you just prepared it? If it meets the standards, you have a winner on your hands, and that recipe can then be added to your repertoire of acceptable recipes.

Let a trusted friend or relative be a judge. They really have nothing to compare this meal against, except their own experiences, just like a real client. Give them a frozen meal and instructions, and get their honest input afterward. Thawing and heating instructions that you create will be perfectly clear to you, but will someone else think those same directions are crystal clear? Ask if your test people if that meal was worth \$10-\$16 - honestly. If not, why? Would a small side dish be a factor?

If you find the recipe worked well in the refrigerator, but not in the freezer, you have found yourself a successful refrigerator recipe. If you find the recipe didn't work well, you need to determine if you can modify the recipe and what it will take to do so. If you feel you can make changes that will improve the recipe, then do so and repeat the testing process. If you can't make the changes, don't use the recipe. You jeopardize your business by using a substandard recipe.

To recap, recipe testing is a time- and cost-intensive exercise. You can test recipes yourself, but you must be very, very careful and very thorough to assure that the quality of your recipe(s) and subsequent entrées is excellent in order to make your business really successful.

Note: The Culinary Business Institute is not a replacement for an accountant or CPA, but when conducting recipe tests as mentioned above, the ingredients will most likely be tax deductible. Your labor is probably not a valid deduction.

Note: Because you are donating food (providing a free sample meal to a neighbor, for example), you are allowed to cook this meal in your own home and deliver it.