

# The Ultimate Course Planner



and Practice Guide

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## The Beginning

We're going to make this as easy as possible BUT you will have to put in a little bit of time and effort. No one magically acquires knife skills...you have to practice.

So this planner will help keep you organized and when you're finished will serve as your reference guide and you'll never have to depend on a recipe again!

Now, you may choose to use a recipe as a guide or use one that you just absolutely L-O-V-E but you will from this day forward never be tied to a recipe.....how does that feel?

Pretty darn awesome, right!?

Plus, given the right attitude, ingredients, and tools, you will have a virtually effortless, carefree and dare I say, fun time in the kitchen so...

**LET'S GET THIS PARTY STARTED!**

## Knife Skills

This is really where it all begins because without decent knife skills, cooking is not fun at all!

Your first task – find a good knife. Not an expensive one, necessarily, especially not to begin with. Go to your local kitchen supply and not Williams-Sonoma. I love them but they are there to sell you stuff you don't need and you just need a workhorse knife. Or, go to a big warehouse-type store that stocks restaurant supplies. I give my students inexpensive Santoku knives (those are the ones with the ridges on the side). You can find them in a set of two for \$12 - \$13. Then, get a sharpener. You don't need to be messing with a knife steel at this point.

So get your knife, make sure it is sharp and practice a little every day. Like maybe 20 minutes.

### Basics to remember

Hold your knife like you're shaking hands with it, kinda like holding a golf club or tennis racquet.

Do not rest your index finger on the top of the blade.

On your other hand, curl your fingers under and away from the knife (this is known as "the claw").

Use a gentle, "rocking" motion from knife tip to the back.

Here are some pictures to use as guides as you practice.



**Large Dice**  
Dimensions:  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes



**Medium Dice**  
Dimensions:  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch cubes



**Small Dice Or Brunoise**  
Square off foods and julienne so they're easier to small dice. Dimensions:  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch cubes



**Slice, Rondelle, Or Coin**  
Slice with the blade straight at even intervals.

**Slice On The Bias**  
Slice with the blade at an angle to achieve slanted pieces.



**Batonnet**  
Square edges to produce rectangular prisms. Dimensions:  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch square, 2 inches in length



**Julienne Or Matchstick**  
Square edges. Dimensions:  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch square, 1 to 2 inches in length



**Fine Julienne**  
Halve julienne cuts. Dimensions:  $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch square, 1 to 2 inches in length



**Mince**  
Finely chop an ingredient until a paste-like consistency is achieved.



**Chiffonade**  
Stack fresh herb leaves or leafy green vegetables. Roll tightly and slice finely.

## Mise en Place

### Let's Get Organized!

If you go into a restaurant kitchen, you will find lots of different sizes of bins, bowls and containers lined up in the cooking and preparation area. Chefs and their cooks use these to organize their cooking space and it is known as “mise en place” or “put in place”. It makes cooking (and life) easier when you have things organized, ready to go and you know where things are. So here's what you need to do to practice this and make it second nature.

Make a list of 3 to 5 things you already have in your kitchen that you can use to hold ingredients after you have them ready for your cooking. You don't have to use bowls. Small pieces of foil or plastic wrap can work also.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Put one or all of them in a place that is handy to your cutting and cooking area.

Now...here is a simple recipe to use as an example (It also is easy to make and tastes great!).

## Pico de Gallo

Makes about 2 cups

½ cup chopped red onion

1 medium tomato, chopped

1 small jalapeño, seeded and chopped

1 small bunch cilantro, chopped

Juice from 1 lime

Kosher salt and black pepper

In a medium bowl, combine onion, tomato, jalapeño, cilantro and toss. Stir in lime juice, salt and pepper, to taste.

Refrigerate for at least an hour to allow flavors to meld. Serve.

1. Read through the recipe.
2. What ingredients do you need to make it? List them.
3. Do you have everything you need to make the recipe?
4. Prepare each item as the recipe suggests.
5. Put each item in its own container.

Now your mise en place is complete and you're ready to finish your recipe.

Choose one of your own recipes and do the same thing.

Do this with every recipe that you make until it's automatic (you don't have to think about it at all!).

## Measuring

I don't like to measure. I don't like to measure so much that I rarely make anything that demands precision...like baking.

In this exercise, you're going to learn how to measure without using measuring spoons or cups.

You have to practice this also!

Let's start with salt and pepper. First, throw out your shakers. Next, buy kosher salt (we'll talk about "why" in Ingredients) and restaurant-style ground black pepper. Find some small bowls (like custard cups or ramekins). Pour salt in one and pepper in the other. Now, you're ready to begin.

If you have small hands, get a  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon measuring spoon.

If you have larger hands, get a 1 teaspoon measuring spoon.

Now...look at the pictures below.



Here is the salt and the measuring spoon





Pick up as much salt as you can




And, measure it into the spoon



Now, when you pick up salt, you are grabbing a  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon or whole teaspoon of salt. If you have to use different measuring spoons, that's okay. It's just a way to standardize your salt "grab". You know how much you're grabbing so you don't need to use a measuring spoon anymore!

Measuring in cups involve "eyeballing". So, get a one cup measuring cup. Fill it with water or beans or something that is handy and easy to measure.

Now pour the cup of whatever it is into a coffee mug or a bowl or a saucepan and take a look at how much volume is taken up.



Repeat this process with different measuring cups and different bowls or pans or mugs until you can tell...just by looking...how much you have poured in.

This takes practice but it's not hard to do. You just have to get used to it and recognize the amount you are seeing without strict measuring.

This will really give you freedom once you have it figured out. You won't believe it!!

Here's a little homework...

What surprised you most about learning your own method of measuring? Write down your answer below.

## Ingredients

In this section, we're going to develop your own personal, "go-to" ingredient list.

Here are a couple of mine and why they are my "go-to's"

Kosher salt – This is the most common or series of questions from my classes: What kind of salt do you use? Why? And, isn't salt really bad for you?

Kosher salt is a flaked salt so it dissolves faster in your dishes when you add it. As a consequence, you use less salt. Over-salting is bad for you, yes. But, food needs to be seasoned so salt is a requirement. Chefs are taught how to season food and you can learn that, too. It's practice! Cook the salt into the food and then you don't have to add raw salt to the dish. In my personal opinion, salt that is cooked into food is less "hazardous" to your health than adding an over abundance of salt after the food it cooked.

**ALWAYS TASTE BEFORE YOU SALT!!**

Unsalted butter – Another common question, why do you use unsalted butter? So that you can control the seasoning in your food. This also applies to buying canned food (I know, it's heresy but I also know that a lot of people buy canned food). Try to buy "unsalted" or "low sodium" products because then you can control the amount of seasoning that goes in. Makes sense, doesn't it?

So take some time and go for variety. Make a list of 20 foods, including, herbs, spices, fruits, veggies, meats, poultry, fish and whatever else you can think of that you really like to eat and/or cook. Then next to it, give at least one reason why you like it. It's okay if you've only eaten it but never cooked it...we're plowing new ground here.

Here's an example to get you started.

*Ice Cream*

*Temperature, Texture, Flavor*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.



14.

15.

16.

17.

18.

19.

20.

Now...make a list of 10 foods that you *think* you don't like.  
Next to each food, put why you think you don't like it.  
Here is an example to help you get started.

*Oysters*

*Texture, Flavor*

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.



9.

10.

Now think about all 30 foods.

Do they all have distinct and strong flavor memories for you? I bet the foods you like do and the foods you don't like, well, don't.

See if you can come up with an occasion that really solidified that flavor memory for you...even for the foods you don't like.

In the next section, we'll use these favorites and not so favorites to create your own personal flavor profiles.

## Flavor Profiles

Now you've got something to work with since you have a list of flavor memories and ingredients.

Flavor profiles and understanding them is what separates the chefs from the non-chefs. You get this handled and you are well on your way to recipe freedom!

To begin, a flavor profile is a way of skillfully combining ingredients so they create harmony...the "party in your mouth" phenomenon. I talk a lot about food "singing" well, this is the singing part of our program.

Some people might disagree with me but there are really no "rules". You create your own in your own kitchen.

But think about it as every ingredient having a purpose or "job" to do. Some ingredients add richness, others acid, others sweetness but they do need to balance out one another. And, that! My friends, is how you know you're on to something...it's all about the balance. Ingredients work together by contrast (typically). Out of balance basically equals bad taste or texture. A good example is something like a rich egg based sauce (Hollandaise is one) that has lemon added. Too much lemon, the sauce breaks into globby components of butter and egg but too little lemon, no flavor.

**IT TAKES PRACTICE BUT IT'S NOT HARD!**

So here are some “classic” flavor profiles. You’re going to read these and say to yourself, “Wow, I just thought it tasted good!” Well, duh! That’s a big 10 – 4, good buddy! That is a balanced flavor profile.

Italian profiles –

Tomato, basil, olive oil

Garlic, anchovy, olive oil

Japanese –

Ginger, soy sauce

Korean –

Soy sauce, brown sugar, hot chiles

Greek –

Lemon, oregano, garlic, olive oil

French –

Shallot, garlic, parsley

Chinese –

Ginger, garlic, green onion

Think about each of those profiles and imagine the flavors in your head and on your tongue.

Now it’s time to create your own.

Based on the ingredient list of things you like and may not like, create 3 – 5 personal flavor profiles that you either





already use or think sound good and you want to experiment with.

My flavor profiles

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Now hold onto these profiles, you'll be using them later.  
Or, be bold and start practicing with them now!

## Tools and Equipment

The good news is that you don't have to have a bunch of fancy, expensive equipment (think back to Chapter 2 – Knife Skills) but you do need something that works.

Although the newest model of range, fridge, oven, freezer, etc., etc., is very exciting, I can find something wrong with everything out there, for me. And, that's the thing...you've got to find (eventually) what works for you, personally. If you have to "make do" (that's what's known in the food biz as "basic McGyver-ing", you know that TV cop who could turn nothing into something, that's what happens everyday in the restaurant/professional kitchen). So you have an electric cooktop, it's okay just learn to work with it. A teeny, old, has to be defrosted refrigerator/freezer, no problem, learn to adapt. You won't be putting the Thanksgiving turkey in there...get a turkey breast or leg.

So basics...something to cook on and something to put cold stuff in. Develop your preferences, make mental notes or write your wishlist here for the future.

To make my kitchen personal, I would love to be able to cook on \_\_\_\_\_  
with a \_\_\_\_\_  
refrigerator/freezer.

But let's talk about some things that may be more in your reach like small appliances and essential tools.

Small appliances and essential tools should be like your oldest and bestest friends...always there when you need them and they never let you down.

I recommend what Alton Brown calls “multi-taskers”. It just makes more sense if things can do more than one thing no matter how cool it looks and Lord knows, there is a lot of groovy stuff at those kitchen stores! Try to control yourself, though, and consider this list. Brands don’t really matter most of the time (if they do, I specify) and remember these are MY top 6...make your own list!

Medium-sized food processor (or blender)

Hand mixer (you don’t really need a big stand mixer unless you bake a lot, which I don’t)

Immersion blender (also known as a stick blender)

Toaster oven (if you have room, it’s nice to have an extra)

Small microwave (NOT for frozen dinners but for melting butter, boiling water, even popping popcorn)

Pressure cooker (preferable electric and one that does multiple tasks like rice, slow cooking, browning)

My favorite small appliance list (go-to’s)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

5.

Essential kitchen tools make life and cooking so much easier. These are MY top 12 that I use almost everyday. You can make just about anything, if you have these.

Saute pans (10" and 12" are good sizes)

Saucepans (4qt and 6 qt)

Dutch oven (8qt)

Mixing bowl (set of 3, small, medium and large)

Wooden spoons

Silicone spatula

Wire whisk

Fine mesh strainer

Microplane

Japanese mandoline (lighter, cheaper and more portable than the heavy stainless steel ones)

Pyrex baking dishes (8 x8 and 9 x 13)

Baking sheets (these are known as half-size hotel pans)

Now make your list of your 10 essential tools. If they're the same as mine, it's okay (it is a pretty good list)

1.

- 
- 2.
  - 3.
  - 4.
  - 5.
  - 6.
  - 7.
  - 8.
  - 9.
  - 10.

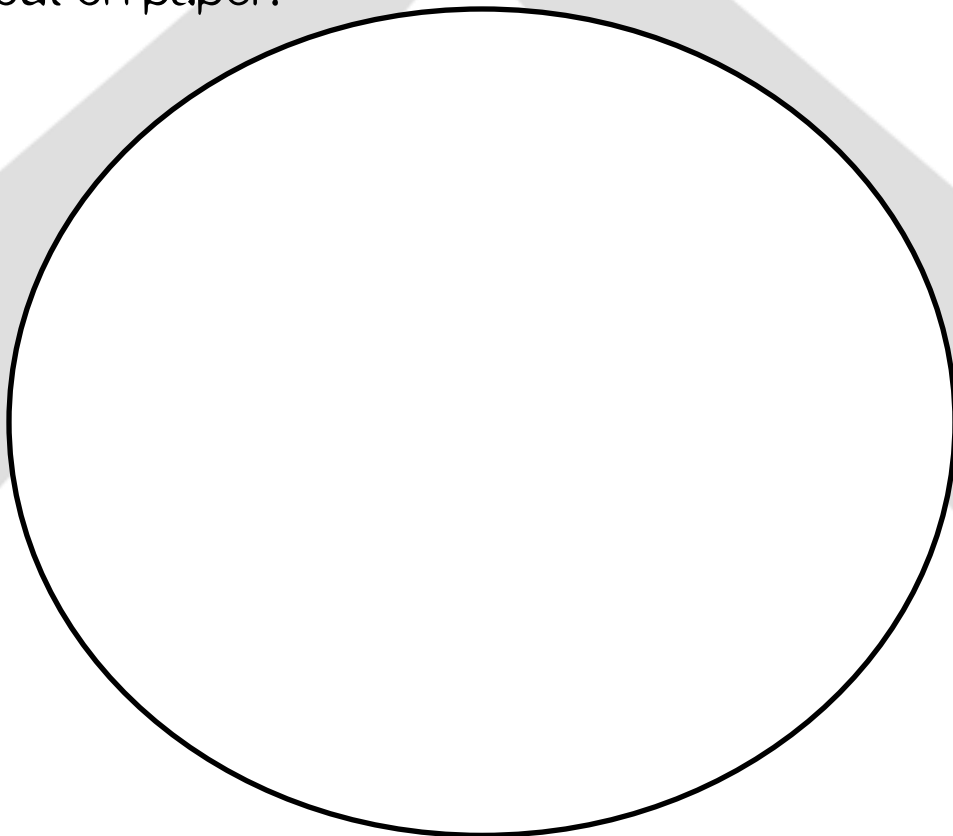
Next...we'll start working on the cooking but first, plating!

## Plate Presentation Basics

Learning the “theory” behind plating design and then practicing will lead you to beautiful food BUT AGAIN you have to practice. This is an easy practice because you can do it every time you put a meal together.

So here’s a “rule of thumb”...put your carb down first and more or less in the middle of your plate. Carbs hold heat better than veggies and proteins so they will stay warmer longer and will help keep the other food warm. Next, place your protein *over* the carb using a layering kind of effect. Finally, add your vegetables around the protein and carbs. This is an exercise in less is more. Heaping food on the plate does not make it more appetizing, just messier!

Here’s a practice plate. Chefs often draw their plating design out on paper.



## Stocks, soups and sauces

I practiced making \_\_\_\_\_ stock.

I practiced making \_\_\_\_\_ soup.

I practiced making \_\_\_\_\_ sauce.

I would make \_\_\_\_\_ again.

I would NEVER make \_\_\_\_\_ again.

The best part of making my own stock/soup/sauce was:

The worst part of making my own stock/soup/sauce was:

When I make \_\_\_\_\_ again,  
here's what I would change.

When I changed it, this is what happened:

Meat and Poultry

My favorite cut of meat/poultry is

and I like to cook it by \_\_\_\_\_.

I didn't think I liked \_\_\_\_\_

And now - I still don't like it/like it/love it/hate it.

The thing I was most afraid about was

because

The thing that surprised me the most was

The thing that I will do again

The thing that I will NEVER do again



Fish...

Don't be afraid! You have to practice, that's all it takes!

Find a fish monger (like a butcher except for fish). You will have faster, more positive results with a trusted advisor!

Choose a variety of fish that you have never eaten.

Tell your fish monger what kinds of fish that you have liked in the past and what you are willing to try to broaden your horizons.

Choose a cooking method that is suited for the fish. For instance, don't try to grill Dover sole.

I tried \_\_\_\_\_.

Here's how I cooked it

I was surprised how much I liked it/hated it.

Here's what I would do different next time.

Here's what I would do the same.

All Kinds of Sides – Veggies, Pasta, Rice, Beans, Salads

One vegetable I think I hate but I'm going to try is

This is how I'm going to cook it/sauce it

It was great/okay/so-so/horrible

Here's what I would do different

Here's what I would do the same

Try a different pasta shape that you've never had before...there are 100's of shapes and it's fun! Be sure to not over(or under) cook it. Al dente is the goal with dried pasta. The timing will be on the package.

Do the same with rice and beans. Try varieties you've never had. Also, try different grains, like quinoa and farro. The cooking principal is basically the same. Beans come in every color and texture...so experiment.

Then...what would you do the same and what would you do differently every time you try something.

**AND THAT'S IT!**

## Experiment

What would you do the same/different

Practice, practice, practice

HAVE FUN! DRINK WINE! LISTEN TO MUSIC!

Watch me cook in Module 14

You have all the tools you need for

Cooking without a Parachute.

Now get creative and JUMP!