

Things to Think About in the Construction of Your Cookbook

WHO IS THE TARGET AUDIENCE?

Who is going to use the cookbook? Experienced cooks will understand what to do if the method says “Deglaze pan,” but will everyone? It may be preferable to spell out the steps.

USE THE RIGHT MEASUREMENTS

Decide in advance if you’re using imperial measurements (1 cup, 1 tbsp, etc.) will metric equivalents will be included as well. If so, you need a list of standard equivalents.

FOLLOW INGREDIENT CONVENTIONS

Did you know there are rules about the order in which to list ingredients? Will the user know:

- exactly what to buy and in what quantity/volume/weight?
- how to prepare the ingredient (let thaw? trim? chop? slice?)
- in what size and type of vessel the mixture is to be cooked and how (over medium heat? covered? stirring occasionally?)
- and for how long it is to be cooked/baked?

VET NUTRIENT CLAIMS

Beware of casually tossing off terms like low-fat and high in fibre. Unless nutrient analysis has been done by a dietician, you won’t know how many grams of fat or fiber are in a serving of the recipe in question.

USE STYLE GUIDES AND REFERENCES

Today’s cuisine embraces so many global influences and ethnic ingredients you’ll need a good food dictionary to supplement your regular dictionary. Here are two that many food writers and editors have on their reference shelves: [The Cook’s Essential Kitchen Dictionary: A Complete Culinary Resource](#) and [The New Food Lover’s Companion](#).

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If you’d like to see fewer copyeditor corrections and queries in your manuscript, consider these ten points:

1. No voice. Recipes don’t just tell what to combine and how long to cook it—they convey your personality. Part of the creation is your own description of how it should look, sound, feel, taste, and smell.

2. Passive voice. Ingredients aren't magically transformed by an unknown force. We work with them and they work for us. Use an active voice: "Beat the eggs until ...," not "The eggs should be beaten until ...". Note, too, the active voice is usually more concise—and in cookbooks, real estate is precious.

3. Improper use of culinary terms. A Food TV host might say "sauté the mushrooms in broth," but that doesn't make it correct, or even possible. Develop your own voice and vocabulary, but be accurate and clear.

4. Inconsistent terms for measures or techniques. Don't use multiple terms for the same thing. The version you use the most is the one you like best, so plug it into every occurrence. For example, if you call for both "potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes" five times and "1/2-inch-diced peeled potatoes" twice, the cubes win. In the event of a tie, use the wording that's most consistent with your voice.

5. Illogical or ambiguous prep terms. The recipe says "1 cup squash, sliced." The reader wonders, "Should I stuff a few zucchini into a measuring cup, then pull them out and slice them? And is it okay if they stick out the top of the cup when I first jam them in?" It's clearer to say "1 cup sliced squash."

And remember: "1/2 cup parsley, chopped" is not the same as "1/2 cup chopped parsley;" the way you measure the parsley is different, and that difference can change the dish. Be clear which you mean.

6. Unrealistic prep times. The time it takes your readers to prep something could be very different from the time it takes you. This is especially true if the reader is multitasking, not focusing the way you did when you developed the recipe. If you include times, a realistic range is helpful.

7. Unrealistic cook times. All stoves and ovens are not the same. Ingredients, too. A range of times is the best way to account for those differences. Giving visual or other sensory cues for doneness, as well as times, lets the reader know what matters most.

8. Misplaced oven preheating or water boiling. Did someone really say to preheat the oven before mixing a dough that needs 3 hours to rise? To boil the pasta water before starting an all-day ragù? Oops. Put actions like these closer to when they're actually needed.

9. Esoteric ingredients with no substitutes. What's everyday to you might be esoteric to a reader in another region. Who has heard of Johnnie Fair syrup, for example? Or mâche. Sure, there are times when only one item will do. But if another syrup or green is acceptable and more universally available, or if frozen will work as well as fresh, or if the dish will be taste fine

with a different protein or flavoring, let the reader know—including how much, if the measures differ. The same goes for equipment: call for a fine-mesh strainer, not a tamis.

10. Unavailable package sizes, or no size given. Don't send readers on a wild-goose chase looking for a specific package size no one can find. A size range (two 15- to 16-ounce cans black beans) is better. A stew made with a 29-ounce can of tomato sauce instead of the 8-ounce can you tested with—but didn't specify —might turn out okay, but it won't be the well-balanced entrée you intended.