

Menus, Recipes, and Equipment

ASSIGNMENT 4

Read the following assignment. Then read pages 13–22 in *The Professional Chef*. Pay special attention to these key terms as you read:

- Count
- Volume
- Weight
- Recipe conversion factor
- Fluid ounces

Modifying and Converting

A quick glance at Chapter 2 in *The Professional Chef* will show you one mathematical formula after another. New terminology is always a little daunting. Combining that with fractions, decimals, percentages, and unfamiliar abbreviations is enough to make anyone hesitate.

It doesn't seem nearly as inspiring as skipping ahead to the cooking sections to make a beautiful braised lamb or a perfectly roasted garlic. Most people who want to become serious cooks are attracted to the idea of creating amazing dishes like these—not to doing the math.

But if you approach this chapter with patience and read each section carefully, something unexpected can happen. You'll begin to see how much these simple formulas can do for you. As intimidating as they may seem at first—to anyone who finds math distasteful—these are the calculations that will give you the freedom to do whatever you want.

After you understand the basic principles of modifying and converting recipes, you'll be able to cook the Veal Shoulder Poêlé (on page 464) for two people or 50. You'll be able to



serve unforgettably delicate Petit Pots de Crème with chocolate garnish to 14 people without guessing at the proportions. When you find a recipe for an amazing, stacked Saffron Lobster appetizer in the newspaper, but the measurements are in pounds and ounces, you'll be able to convert it to metric without a hitch. You'll be able to do any number of things that you couldn't before because you'll know how to adjust a recipe to serve any number of people you like (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9—Sophisticated recipes require precise measures.



Chapter 2 (and pages 1163–1166 of the appendix) will even provide you with the tools you need to find out how many tablespoons are in a half-cup or how a fluid ounce differs from an ounce on a scale (Figure 10).

This isn't the math you didn't want to know in high school because you were never going to use it. This is the math you need to know to make gourmet cooking work for you. It will give you control of your recipes, your menus, your budget, and, if you're in business, your profits as well.



FIGURE 10—Sometimes guesswork just isn't sufficient—you need to know exactly how much things weigh.

Activity 4

Reading about measurement conversions will only serve to introduce you to the concepts you need to know. You need to do the measurements repeatedly to develop a real grasp of ratios, proportions, and conversions. You may always need to look up specific portions. But as soon as you begin to experience these conversions for yourself, they become clearer and no longer seem like tricky mathematical calculations. Let's start with something easy that you'll never forget. Here's what you'll need:

- A food scale
- A measuring cup
- Cornflakes
- Peanut butter

Page 17 of *The Professional Chef* makes certain claims about what you can expect when you measure cornflakes and peanut butter. Measure them yourself and see if you get the same results. Keep in mind that there's no standard for volume. Your measuring cup and the cup used by the authors of your text may be different sizes. But the experiment will be revealing anyway.

1. Is it true, on your scale, that 8 fluid ounces of cornflakes weighs only 1 ounce?
2. If you measure 4 fluid ounces of peanut butter into your measuring cup, does it weigh 4.5 ounces on the scale?
3. Does water rank the same, ounce-for-ounce, on the scale as in the cup?

Once you've learned the process, there are calculators, handheld devices and software programs to help you make the conversions more quickly. But you have to understand the concepts first. Take your time with this short chapter. It will serve you well.

Conversion Software

Knowing how to convert recipes is invaluable to the serious cook, just as it's invaluable to know how to add and subtract, even though we have hand-held calculators to do the job for us.

No software can promise to make the subtle adjustments of taste and texture that are evidence of a successful conversion. But an increasing number of companies are promising to make the food calculation process much easier.

By going online, you can check out the details of the software programs listed below. Some companies offer demos or trial packages of new software. Others offer the programs as shareware, so you can download them immediately. Websites such as <http://www.ZDNet.com> provide customer reviews of most of these products. However, your own experience will be the best guide as to which programs, if any, will be helpful for you. Here are a few to consider.

StarChef is designed specifically for culinary needs. It can create recipe information sheets for unit conversion and scaled recipes. It allows you to build a database of ingredients, costs, menus, suppliers, and so on. You can download it at <http://www.starchef.com>.

The Book of Yields, available at <http://www.chefdesk.com/boy.htm> (Figure 11), is award-winning software that promises one-click measurement conversions to help you cost and purchase food more quickly. Its database contains over 900 food choices. Many make distinctions between trimmed and cooked food.

Convert is a generic conversion program that's not specifically designed for serious cooks. Customers on ZDNet give it five stars and say that it's easy to use. It will convert temperature, volume, time, pressure, energy, and many other things. You can download it for free at <http://www.joshmadison.com/convert-for-windows>.

Convert It is a similar five-star program by XYZ Software. It's available in many languages and is already set to default to English, Turkish, or German. A demo is available for immediate download at <http://www.xyz-software.com>.

ChefTec Plus, available at <http://www.culinarysoftware.com/css-home.htm>, is a more elaborate and costly software program that can be run on a hand-held device. The convenience of a hand-held device in the life of a busy cook can't be underestimated—if the software program it operates is compatible with your needs (Figure 12). ChefTec Plus provides a host of recipe and menu costing and adjusting features, along with inventories, photographs, nutritional analysis, and bid updates.



FIGURE 11—When you know how to calculate yields, you know exactly how much food to buy.



FIGURE 12—Software calculations make high-volume productions easier.

Whenever you convert ounces to fluid ounces, you'll subject the ingredient you're measuring to the same test. Be familiar with this procedure because you'll be using it a lot!



Self-Check 4

Questions 1–5: Indicate whether the following statements are True or False.

- _____ 1. Kilogram is a measurement of volume.
- _____ 2. To serve twice as many people, you simply multiply the recipe by two.
- _____ 3. Volume measurements can be applied only to liquids.
- _____ 4. Liquid weighing three ounces is equal to three fluid ounces.
- _____ 5. To convert grams to ounces, you must divide the grams by 28.35.
6. You're catering a banquet and want to use a delicious chicken recipe that was a success with a previous client. However, the recipe makes 10, 4-oz portions, and you need to serve 60 people with 3-oz portions. Calculate the recipe conversion factor.
- _____
7. List three of the four basic units of weight measure.
- _____
- _____
8. You've purchased 15 lb of potatoes for a dish you're planning to serve at a banquet. Your chefs peel and cut the potatoes to prepare for the dish and end up with 10 oz of trim loss. You plan to serve 3-oz portions of the potato dish to your guests. How many people will you be able to serve?
- _____

Check your answers with those on page 38.

ASSIGNMENT 5

Read the following assignment. Then read pages 43–68 in *The Professional Chef*. Pay special attention to these key terms as you read:

- Tang
- Conical sieve
- Bolster
- Rondeau
- Convection oven

Knowing Your Equipment

Having the right equipment plays a large role in the overall success of a dish. This is just as important for gourmet cooks as it is for professional caterers. The wrong equipment can make a dish difficult—and sometimes impossible—to complete (Figure 13).



FIGURE 13—As your needs change, your appliances may need to change too.

If you linger in the poultry section of an American grocery store on the week before Thanksgiving, you can always find a few ambitious home cooks buying turkeys that are almost certainly too big for the standard American oven. Whether they realize it when they get it home, or don't notice until they've stuffed it, seasoned it, and tried to cram it into the oven, the problem is the same: their equipment is unsuited for the quantity they want to cook.

The size of the equipment is only one consideration. For a gourmet cook, quality matters. Why spend your time learning the most sophisticated techniques and striving for the most exquisite flavors, only to sabotage your efforts with inadequate knives, pots, or pans?

There's no need to purchase every sauteuse and mandoline in this chapter. It's designed to give you an overview of the possibilities. Owning the latest gadget isn't important. But making sure your gear is suited to the task is.

By keeping informed about the new devices, gadgets, equipment, and techniques that come out every year, you'll be better able to find the best tool for the job. If you've only seen an upright glass blender with blades inside, for instance, you won't know to look for an immersion blender when you need one.

The first and most essential piece of equipment that every serious cook must have is a high-quality set of knives. *The Professional Chef* discusses the value and importance of knives on pages 44–51. Chef Paolo Sacca shows you a full set of knives on the “Chef Skills” DVD and shows you how to care for them as well. The knives are costly, but they're the foundation of your equipment as a serious gourmet cook (Figures 14–16).



FIGURE 14—Every serious cook must have a professional set of knives.



FIGURE 15—A chef's knife is one of the knives you'll use most frequently.



FIGURE 16—Flexible slicing knives are invaluable.

Purchasing Equipment Online

A good idea is to go to your local culinary supplier to examine the equipment you're thinking about buying. In person, you can test the feel of a pot in your hand—consider its weight, experience its size in relation to you, compare it to similar pots—and make a well-informed decision.

After that, the most cost-effective choice may be to buy your equipment online. The Internet is full of suppliers for serious cooks. Sales and discounts are abundant as well. Here are a few resources to get you started, but don't stop with these! New culinary sites spring up by the hour. Keep looking.

Bowery Kitchen Supply (<http://store.bowerykitchens.com>). This supplier is a well-stocked resource for culinary equipment—from chafing dishes to hot-food steam tables to huge beverage, soup, and sauce servers. Their market extends to both serious cooks and catering professionals.

BigTray (<http://www.bigtray.com>). BigTray carries everything from high-end Wolf ranges to janitorial supplies. They cater to the culinary professional in need of large containers, heavy-duty appliances, and durable storage equipment.

ChefStore (<http://www.chefstore.com>). Regular discounts and sales on cooking equipment are listed here. They carry high-quality international brands, such as Wusthof-Trident, Kuhn-Rikon, All-Clad, KitchenAid, Le Creuset, Matfer, De Buyer, and Kyocera.

Activity 5

If you've honed (sharpened against steel) your knives so often that it's like second nature to you, skip this activity. If you've never tried it before or still feel a little uncomfortable with the process, turn to page 51 in *The Professional Chef* and follow the instructions for honing your knives. You'll need a knife and a steel.

You can also watch Chef Paolo Sacca demonstrate honing in the knife skills portion of the *Chef Skills* DVD (Figures 17–20). You may want to watch him once again before trying it yourself. Do *not* watch him while you’re honing your knives. Professional-grade knives are much too sharp to handle while you’re distracted. They’re extremely sharp and must always be handled with respect. If need be, watch the video, pause it, try Paolo’s movements yourself, and then continue the video. Don’t do both at the same time.



FIGURE 17—One method of honing a knife involves holding the steel at this angle.



FIGURE 18—Run your blade down either side of the steel.

FIGURE 19—For a more stable method of honing, place the tip of the steel against the counter.



FIGURE 20—Run the blade toward the counter on either side of the steel.



Try honing your knives with method one and method two—holding the steel almost vertically or resting the tip on the table. Professional chefs hone their knives frequently, often many times during the course of a single recipe. Getting into this practice will preserve your knives and keep them in peak condition.



Self-Check 5

Questions 1–5: Indicate whether the following statements are True or False.

- _____ 1. The heat on the stovetop is less intense than the heat in the oven.
- _____ 2. A rondeau is a wide, shallow pot.
- _____ 3. Copper serving dishes and utensils should be cleaned with a commercial cream or polish without abrasives.
- _____ 4. A chinois is a cone-shaped sieve.
- _____ 5. Bolsters are a separate piece attached to the handle of a knife.

6. List four rules of professional knife care.

Check your answers with those on page 39.
