Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
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Now and Tomorrow
Excellence in Everything We Do

Essential Skills and Apprenticeship

Using Essential Skills: On the Job with a Cook

Are you starting an apprenticeship as a cook or are you thinking about a career in this trade? Pursuing a career as a cook requires strong essential skills such as reading, document use, numeracy and critical thinking.

Use this booklet to:

- learn how cooks use essential skills;
- follow the daily routine of a cook; and
- find out how your essential skills compare to those of a journeyperson cook.

How cooks use essential skills

Cooks use essential skills to perform a variety of job-related tasks, for example:

- **oral communication** to clarify orders or tell servers how to serve specialty dishes;
- **problem solving** to substitute ingredients when necessary; and
- **job task planning and organizing** to make sure food is ready to serve to customers at the right time and in the right sequence.

Cook

Essential Skills

Reading
Document Use
Numeracy
Writing
Oral Communication
Working with Others
Thinking
Computer Use
Continuous Learning

Cooks prepare and cook a wide variety of foods. They work in restaurants, hotels, hospitals and other establishments where food is served.

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Canada

A day in the life of a cook: Lara's story

Reading the schedule

Lara is an experienced cook in a busy restaurant. In addition to preparing meals, she supervises the other cooks in the "line." The line is the name given to the different stages of meal preparation, from cooking the meat to arranging the food on the plate. When Lara arrives for her shift, she checks the weekly schedule to see who she will be working with that evening *(document use)*. She decides which cooks to place where along the line according to their experience so that the line moves as quickly and efficiently as possible *(thinking skills – decision making)*.

Calling out orders

In the kitchen, Lara is usually the caller. As the caller, Lara reads the orders as they come in from the dining room and calls them out to the cooks *(document use, oral communication)*. The cooks repeat the order back to her before they start preparing it. The meals are prepared by priority and cooking time. If the orders get out of sequence, Lara reads the time at the bottom of each order to find out which one was placed first *(document use, numeracy)*.

Dine In
* KITCHEN ORDER
21 Patrizi

Tbl 3/1 Gst 3

Bar

S1
1 CHEESE STICK

Chk 7352 Dec16 03:11PM

Cooking ribs

Lara must also make sure that food that takes a long time to cook is ready when the customers order it *(thinking skills – job task planning and organizing)*. Ribs are a very popular order in the restaurant where she works. Since ribs take 2½ hours to cook, Lara uses a clock or timer on the stove to time the cooking *(numeracy)*. She also makes sure that the ribs are done by testing their firmness. A full rack is 12 ribs, so if a customer orders a half rack, Lara will cut off 6 ribs *(numeracy)*.

Dealing with problems

Lara also deals with any special requests or problems with orders. For example, if a customer has a food allergy, Lara is responsible for making sure everyone in the kitchen knows about it. She tells the other cooks about the allergy and covers the customer's meal with another plate so everyone in the kitchen knows to be careful around that order *(thinking skills – problem solving, oral communication)*.

Checking temperatures

An important part of Lara's job is to check the internal temperatures of the prepared food to make sure it is cooked thoroughly. The restaurant where Lara works asks her to fill in a temperature log at certain times of the day to make sure the kitchen meets health standards. Before checking the temperature of the chicken, Lara calibrates the meat thermometer to make sure it is working properly. She does this by placing it in a bowl of ice water and making sure the reading is 0°C. Then she checks the temperature of the chicken and records the results on the log *(numeracy, document use)*. If the chicken is not at the right temperature, she takes corrective action, usually by leaving the chicken to cook longer.

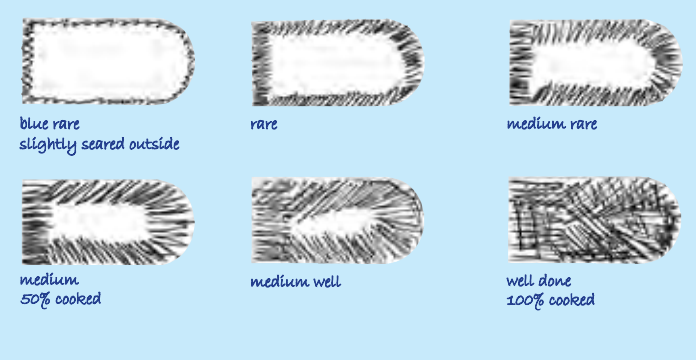
COOKED PRODUCT (Internal product readings)		Actual readings
Product	Standard	Lunch (11:30 AM)
Rotisserie chicken	190˚F/88˚C	
Ribs	175˚F/79˚C	Cooking:
		Final grill:
Grilled beef burger	175˚F/79˚C	79°C
Grilled kids' burger	175˚F/79˚C	76°C
Grilled chicken breast	175˚F/79˚C	Cooking: 75°C
		Final grill: 79°C
Chicken wings	165˚F/74˚C	Blanching:
		Final cook:
Chicken strips	175˚F/79˚C	70°C
Pot Pie	175˚F/79˚C	
Perogies	165˚F/74˚C	
Vegetables	175˚F/79˚C	
Rice	175˚F/79˚C	
Baked Potatos	190˚F/88˚C	
Mashed Potatos	165˚F/74˚C	
Corn	175˚F/79˚C	

Making gravy

One hour before the restaurant closes, Lara notices that the kitchen is running out of gravy. Instead of making up a whole new batch, which would go to waste if it doesn't get used, Lara decides to make half a batch. Normally, the recipe calls for 8 ounces of gravy powder and 16 ounces of water. Instead, Lara halves the recipe by using 4 ounces of gravy powder and 8 ounces of water *(numeracy)*.

Giving training

Cooks in restaurants like the one where Lara works are often trained on the job. As an experienced cook, Lara is responsible for passing on some of her knowledge to apprentice cooks. Sometimes she draws diagrams to show them how to cook or prepare something. For example, she draws a diagram to show the different ways people like their steak cooked *(document use)*.



Sometimes new recipes are sent in an e-mail from the head office of the company that owns the restaurant. Lara reads an email that includes a recipe for grilled chicken caesar salad and learns how to prepare it *(document use, computer use, continuous learning)*. She then shows the other cooks how to prepare it *(oral communication)*.

Do you have the essential skills to be a cook?

Complete the following questions to see how your skills compare to those of a journeyperson cook. (Answers on page 6.)

1. Weekly schedule

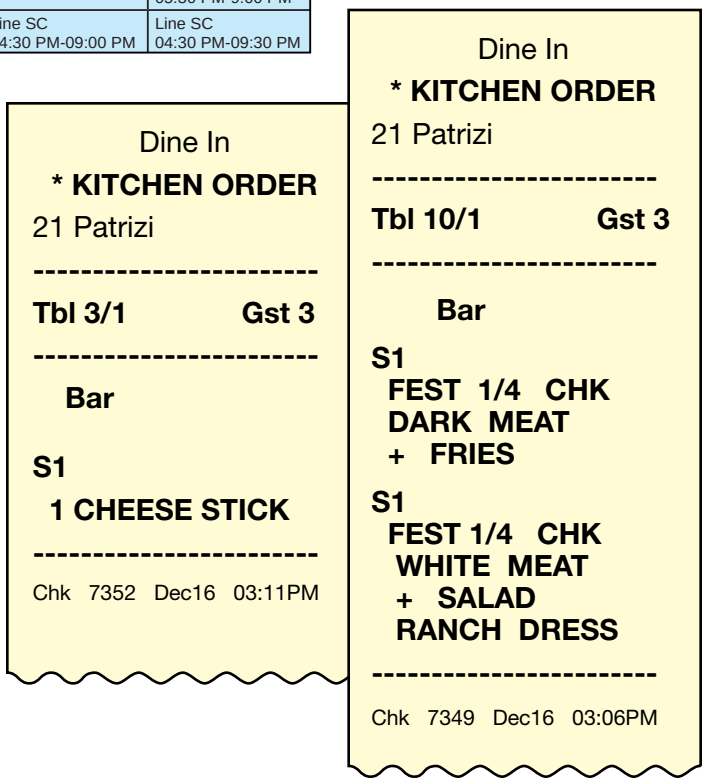
Look at the weekly schedule. On Tuesday, Lara starts her shift at 4:30 p.m. List the names of the other line cooks she will be working with.

Weekly Schedule Filters:Job					
Employee Name	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Line SC					
Aguilar, Carlos	Line SC 08:30 AM-05:00 PM	Line SC 08:30 AM-05:00 PM	Line SC 08:30 AM-04:30 PM	Line SC 08:30 AM-05:00 PM	Line SC 08:30 AM-05:00 PM
Cordeiro, Alex					
Dahl, Suzanne	Line SC 10:45 AM-03:00 PM	Line SC 10:45 AM-03:00 PM	Line SC 10:45 AM-03:00 PM	Line SC 10:45 AM-03:00 PM	Line SC 10:45 AM-03:00 PM
Esmail, Ahmid	Line SC 3:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 3:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 3:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 3:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 3:30 PM-10:30 PM
(m) Fitzpatrick, Christy			Line SC 5:00 PM-09:30 PM	Line SC 5:00 PM-09:30 PM	Line SC 5:00 PM-09:30 PM
Hayashi, Satoshi	Line SC 09:00 AM-02:00 PM	Line SC 09:00 AM-02:00 PM	Line SC 09:00 AM-02:00 PM	Line SC 09:00 AM-02:00 PM	
Ho, Thanh					
Laroche, Diana		Line SC 04:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 04:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 04:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 04:30 PM-10:30 PM
Ou, Lina	Line SC 04:30 PM-10:30 PM	Line SC 04:30 PM-10:30 PM			Line SC 10:30 AM-3:00 PM Line SC 05:30 PM-9:00 PM
Rossi, Teresa	Line SC 04:30 PM-10:30 PM			Line SC 04:30 PM-09:00 PM	Line SC 04:30 PM-09:30 PM

2. Kitchen orders

Orders are prepared in the sequence that they are received. When orders get out of sequence, the cook reads the time at the bottom of each order to find out which one was placed first.

The kitchen orders for table 3 (Tbl 3/1) and table 10 (Tbl 10/1) are out of sequence. Which order should be prepared first?



3. Grilled chicken caesar salad recipe

It is 45 minutes before closing and the kitchen has run out of grilled chicken caesar salad, which is one of the most popular side dishes in the restaurant. The cook doesn't want to make up a whole batch, since a lot of it will go to waste. She decides to use a quarter of the recipe.

Look at the grilled chicken caesar salad recipe. How much romaine lettuce should she use?

Grilled Chicken Caesar Salad

2 heads romaine lettuce
1 pound button mushrooms, sliced
1 cup garlic croutons
4 cloves garlic, chopped
2 red onions, sliced
½ - 1 cup ceasar dressing
½ cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon cracked peppercorns
8 chicken breasts, boned and skinned
1 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons crushed rosemary

1. Tear romaine into bite-size pieces, toss with mushrooms, croutons, garlic, onion and caesar dressing. Place on chilled salad plates. Spoon 1 teaspoon parmesan cheese over each serving and top with cracked black pepper.
2. Season chicken breasts with salt, pepper and rosemary. Grill about 5 minutes per side. Slice and serve over salad. Garnish with remaining cheese.

Makes 8 full servings and 4 side dishes.

4. Temperature log

A cook checks the temperature of the rotisserie chicken at 11:30 a.m. and sees that it is 80°C. The cook then continues cooking the chicken until it reaches 88°C, ten minutes later.

Enter this information on the temperature log below.

COOKED PRODUCT (Internal product readings)		Actual readings	Internal temperature must be checked twice on food items that are blanched/cooked, and then grilled/fried.		
Product	Standard	Lunch (11:30 AM)	Dinner (5:30 PM)	Corrective action taken	Resolved
Rotisserie chicken	190˚F/88˚C				
Ribs	175˚F/79˚C	Cooking:			
		Final grill:			
Grilled beef burger	175˚F/79˚C	79°C			
Grilled kids' burger	175˚F/79˚C	76°C		continue cooking	11:38
Grilled chicken breast	175˚F/79˚C	Cooking: 75°C			
		Final grill: 79°C			
Chicken wings	165˚F/74˚C	Blanching:			
		Final cook:			
Chicken strips	175˚F/79˚C	70°C		continue cooking	11:45

Answers

1. **Weekly schedule** *(document use)*

   Lara will be working with Carlos, Ahmid, Diana and Lina.

2. **Kitchen orders** *(document use)*

   The order for table 10 was placed at 3:06 p.m., so it should be prepared first.

3. **Grilled chicken caesar salad recipe** *(numeracy, reading)*

   2 : ¼
   2 × ¼ = ½
   The cook will use half a head of romaine lettuce.

4. **Temperature log** *(document use)*

COOKED PRODUCT (Internal product readings)		Actual readings: Internal temperature must be checked twice on food items that are blanched/cooked, and then grilled/fried.			
Product	Standard	Lunch (11:30 AM)	Dinner (5:30 PM)	Corrective action taken	Resolved
Rotisserie chicken	190°F/88°C	80°C		continue cooking	11:40
Ribs	175°F/79°C	Cooking:			
		Final grill:			
Grilled beef burger	175°F/79°C	79°C			
Grilled kids' burger	175°F/79°C	76°C		continue cooking	11:38
Grilled chicken breast	175°F/79°C	Cooking: 75°C			
		Final grill: 79°C			
Chicken wings	165°F/74°C	Blanching:			
		Final cook:			
Chicken strips	175°F/79°C	70°C		continue cooking	11:45

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