



# How to Write a Recipe

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Whether sharing a recipe with family and friends or using it in a classroom setting or professional publication, knowing how to write a clear, concise, easy-to-follow recipe is an important skill. It takes creativity and practice to develop a delicious and wholesome dish. Writing a recipe so others can duplicate your results successfully, time after time, requires adhering to specific guidelines and a set of rules.

If you are going to submit a recipe for use with the family and consumer sciences program, the recipe should support the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Use the recipe template provided with this document and consult with your FCS agent.

## Parts of a Recipe

### 1. Title

Recipes should be named by the main ingredients they contain, the cooking process they use, or by their commonly known name. When possible, name recipes by the largest quantity ingredient first. For example, Broccoli Beef Stir Fry, Baked Chicken Salsa, Spinach Quesadillas, or Hamburger Tater Tot Casserole.

### 2. Servings

Insert the number of servings the recipe produces directly under the title.

### 3. Prep Time and Total Time

Include both preparation time and total time. Prep time is the amount of time to prepare the ingredients. The total time is the amount of time to prepare the ingredients plus the amount of time to cook the dish.

For example, if lasagna takes 20 minutes to prepare and 1 hour 15 minutes to bake, prep time would equal 20 minutes, and total time would equal 1 hour 35 minutes.

### 4. Equipment List

List the general kitchen equipment and tools to make the recipe. Some examples include baking sheet, square baking dish, cutting board, knife, skillet, measuring spoons, or liquid measuring cup. Use general sizes of pans and baking sheets, such as large, small, or square, rather than specific sizes.

### 5. Ingredients List

- List ingredients in the order they are used.
- If there are several parts to a recipe, list them in the order they are used in the directions. For example, if a recipe for apple pie includes the crust, the pie filling, and a pie topping (like streusel), list the ingredients in the order they are used, and specify which part to make first.
- If several ingredients are to be added at the same time, list them in order of quantity, from most to least, for example: 1/2 cup sugar, 1 tablespoon baking powder, 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, 1/4 teaspoon allspice. If using the same amounts of several ingredients that are to be added at the same time, list them alphabetically: 1/4 teaspoon dried basil, 1/4 teaspoon dried dill, 1/4 teaspoon dried rosemary, 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme.
- Use figures rather than spelling out numbers, and use fractions rather than decimals: 1 cup, 1/4 cup, 1/2 teaspoon.
- If an ingredient begins with a word rather than a number, capitalize the first letter, for example, "Salt to taste" or "Nonstick cooking spray."
- Use standard American measurements for quantities of ingredients: cup, teaspoon, tablespoon, etc. Spell out the measurements; do not use abbreviations. Canned and dry goods are sold by ounces instead of pounds, so when possible, specify ounces. Fresh

produce and meats are more often sold by the pound, so use pounds for those ingredients. A weight or volume measure is always better.

- For recipes where the amount of an ingredient does not matter, like meat or vegetable or fruit dishes, use fractions of an item instead of a measurement. For example, “1/2 onion, chopped,” instead of “1/2 cup onion, chopped”; or “1 banana, sliced,” instead of “2 cups banana, sliced.” Avoid the use of imprecise measures like a “bunch,” “handful,” “pinch,” or “sprig” (of herbs).
- If a recipe calls for a canned item, list it by the number of ounces needed, not by the number of cans needed because the size of cans is constantly changing. For example, instead of “2 cans of corn, 14 ounces each,” write “28 ounces canned corn.”
- When an ingredient is used more than once in a recipe, list it once in the ingredients list with the total amount of the ingredient needed for the recipe, followed by the word, “divided.” Indicate the amounts of the ingredient to use in the directions. For example, if 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon is to be used in pie filling and 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon in the pie topping, list the ingredient as “3/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon, divided.” In the directions for the pie filling, specify that only 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon is to be used; in the directions for the topping, specify that the remaining 1/4 teaspoon is to be used.
- Substitutions for ingredients can be included at the end of the recipe.
- Occasionally there is an ingredient that is not essential but adds a special touch. Place the ingredient last in the ingredient list with the word “optional” in parentheses, for example, “1/2 teaspoon dried oregano (optional).”



## Be Specific With Ingredients

- Advance preparation of ingredients should be specified in all recipes. For example:
  - 3 large eggs, beaten
  - 6 tablespoons cold, unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
  - 1/2 cup pecans, toasted
  - 2 cups cooked basmati rice, cooled
- The terms to the left of the ingredient describe the item as it is to be measured. Terms to the right of the ingredient provide preparation instructions after measurement. For example, “2 cups cooked basmati rice, cooled” means that cooked rice is to be measured, and it should be cooled before use. Terms to the left of the ingredient usually also describe how the ingredient is to be purchased from the store. For example, if the ingredient is “8 ounces nonfat vanilla yogurt,” “nonfat” and “vanilla” describe the yogurt to be purchased. It wouldn’t make sense to list “8 ounces nonfat yogurt, vanilla,” because “vanilla” is not a part of the preparation.
- Make sure the ingredients and the process for preparing the ingredients are written carefully and in the correct order. For example, “1 cup sifted flour” means it is first sifted, then measured, whereas “1 cup flour, sifted,” means it is first measured, then sifted. The second wording will result in a greater quantity of flour, altering the consistency of the recipe. Also, “1 cup walnuts, chopped,” is a smaller quantity than “1 cup chopped walnuts.”
- Baked goods such as cakes, cookies, breads, and pies must have specific ingredients in precise portions in order for the finished product to turn out properly. These ingredients must be exact.
- Be very specific about the preparation of raw ingredients, such as fruits, vegetables, and meats. Fresh fruits or vegetables can be described as washed, peeled, cored, pitted, seeded, etc. Use standard kitchen terms that are generally understood and easy to find in beginner’s cookbooks if further explanation is needed.
- If the ingredients need to be cut, describe their finished size or appearance. Use standard terms,

such as halved, quartered, chopped, sliced, diced, minced, pureed, cut in rings, etc.

- Indicate if meat, poultry, or fish is deboned, skinless, filleted, pounded, deveined (shrimp), excess fat removed, cut in chunks, marinated, etc. Following are some examples of descriptions and terminology you might use in an ingredients list of fruits, vegetables, or meats:
  - 1 pound green beans, washed, ends removed, broken into 1-inch pieces
  - 3 Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored, and cut into 1/4-inch slices
  - 2 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves, grilled, cooled, and cut into 3/4-inch strips
- Specify the form of ingredient if there are several, such as fresh, raw, frozen, defrosted, canned, dried, toasted, preserved, powdered, shredded, whole, low-fat or nonfat, etc. Indicate whether herbs are dried or fresh.
- Be specific about how the ingredient has been processed where needed. For example, a can of tomatoes can be whole, diced, crushed, pureed, or fire-roasted, and it can have added ingredients, such as herbs or onions. Chocolate can be unsweetened, semisweet, or bittersweet; milk, dark, or with its cocoa content listed.
- Never use brand names for ingredients. For example, use “2 tablespoons vegetable shortening,” rather than “2 tablespoons Crisco.”

## 6. Directions

The directions should include step-by-step directions detailing how to put the recipe together and in what order, how to cook the ingredients to create the dish, and, often, how to serve it.

- Use a bullet to indicate each step, and describe one procedure per step.
- Describe each step in the recipe from the first to the last. If something needs to be started before the actual cooking takes place, such as heating the oven or putting a large pot of water on the stove to boil (for pasta, for example), make sure that instruction is listed first.

- Use the term “Heat oven to xxx°F” when the oven is used. It should be the first direction unless the oven is not used until more than 30 minutes after the start of the recipe preparation. (Note: Do not use “preheat.”)
- Be precise about oven degrees and use “°F” to indicate temperature, for example, 350°F. (On a PC, the degree symbol is created by holding the “ALT” button on the computer keyboard and typing the numbers “167.” On a Mac, hold down the “shift” and “option” buttons together and click “8.”)
- Use standard kitchen terminology to describe procedures. Basic terms such as heat (the oven), simmer, boil, hard boil, braise, sear, saute, whisk, stir, beat, and fold are generally understood and are explained in most basic cookbooks.
- Begin directions with equipment and technique rather than ingredients. For example, “In a medium saucepan over low heat, whisk together the butter and sugar.”
- Use figures for all numbers unless there are two numbers in a row; in that case, spell out the first number. For example, “Bake for 1 hour,” “Cook for 5 minutes,” “Cook 5-8 minutes,” “Add one 12-ounce package.”
- If an ingredient is to be added in more than one step, be sure to indicate how much to use in each step.

Following are the first two steps for a chili recipe:

- In a large pot over medium-high heat, add the oil.
- When hot, add onion and cook for 3-5 minutes until transparent, stirring occasionally.
- Lower heat to medium, add garlic, and cook 1 minute.
- Add ground meat to mixture, breaking up any clumps as meat browns. Cook until no longer pink.

## 7. Recipe Source

If the recipe (or a version of the recipe) was previously credited to someone other than the person submitting the recipe for use in the FCS program, the source must be provided. It should be listed at the bottom of the recipe in parentheses and ending in a period.

Following are examples:

- Recipe from a book: (Recipe from John Smith’s “Book of Recipes,” Recipe Publisher, 2007.)
- Recipe from a magazine: (Recipe from the January 2007 issue of Gourmet.)
- Recipe from a website: (Recipe from epicurious.com.)
- Recipe from a secondary source: (Recipe from the January 2007 issue of Gourmet, as listed at epicurious.com.)
- Recipe adapted from a book: (Recipe adapted from John Smith’s “Book of Recipes,” Recipe Publisher, 2007.)

## Additional Points to Consider

1. Make the recipes as healthy as possible.

- Except for baked goods, which need salt to rise, salt can be reduced from most recipes. Rinsing canned vegetables will remove about 40 percent of the sodium, so include the reminder to rinse in recipes containing canned beans, corn, or other canned foods in the directions.
- Substitute lower-fat options for ingredients or reduce the total amount of the higher fat ingredients in the recipe.
- Think about substituting ingredients that are healthier alternatives, such as substituting rolled oats for breadcrumbs, or plain, low-fat yogurt for mayonnaise.

2. Emphasize food safety by including instructions such as the following:

- Wash hands and surfaces frequently.
- Rinse raw produce.
- Keep raw meats separate from other foods.
- Cook meats to the correct internal temperatures.
- Refrigerate foods quickly.

3. Look for ways to simplify steps and keep descriptions as brief and to the point as possible without compromising accuracy.

4. If the recipe has several parts, describe each part sequentially. A recipe for lasagna should list the separate steps of each part of the recipe followed by a colon, indicating that the preparation is for that step. For example, use “For the sauce:” for preparing the sauce; use “For the filling:” for preparing the filling; use “For the noodles:” for preparing the noodles; use “To assemble:” for assembling and baking the entire lasagna. Describe each step in the order in which it needs to be prepared.

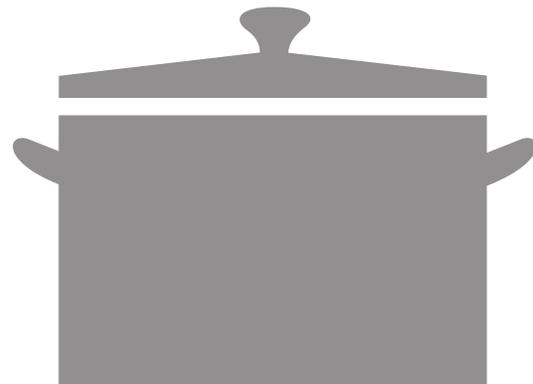
5. Give helpful tips about the recipe and warnings for any problems that may occur. For example, note if something should not be overcooked or if a dish will continue to cook after it is removed from the oven.

6. Describe what the final product should look like, for example, “the top will be golden brown” or “the casserole will be bubbling.”

7. Include instructions for serving the dish, such as whether to serve it hot immediately, to allow it to cool, or to refrigerate overnight to allow flavors to meld.

8. It is sometimes useful to tell what parts of a recipe can be done in advance or how well something keeps if a busy cook wants to make a dish to serve later.

9. Be sure to prepare the recipe several times to make sure the taste and texture are pleasing and the ingredients are accurate. Adjust ingredients if necessary and note adjustments on your draft copy of your recipe. When you are pleased with the results, the recipe can be submitted for publication.



# Putting It All Together: A Template and Recipe Example

The following is a guide for writing recipes. Use this template when submitting a recipe to your FCS agent for consideration for publication.

## Recipe Template

**Name of Dish in Boldface** (centered above recipe)

**Servings:**

**Prep time:**

**Total time:**

**Equipment**

List general kitchen equipment and tools needed to make the recipe.

**Ingredients**

First ingredient

Second ingredient

Third ingredient, etc.

Last ingredient

Optional ingredients (optional)

**Directions**

- Skip a line and begin the step-by-step procedure portion of the recipe, starting with the first step or any pre-preparation needed to get the ball rolling, like heating the oven. Use bullets to separate steps.
- Describe serving, storing, or any additional information for the recipe.



## Sample Recipe

### Easy Stovetop Lasagna



**Servings:** 6

**Prep time:** 30 minutes

**Total time:** 30 minutes

#### Equipment

Large skillet with lid

Knife

Measuring spoons

Liquid measuring cup

Spatula

Can opener

#### Ingredients

1/2 pound ground turkey

15 ounces canned, low-sodium, diced tomatoes

1 cup water

1 tablespoon Italian seasoning

1/2 teaspoon dried parsley

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

8 ounces whole-wheat noodles

15 ounces nonfat cottage cheese

8 ounces reduced-fat mozzarella cheese, shredded

#### Directions

- Heat skillet to medium. Brown ground turkey in skillet, cooking until it is no longer pink.
- Return turkey to skillet and stir in tomatoes, water, Italian seasoning, parsley, and oregano. Bring to a boil.
- Add uncooked pasta noodles. Cover and cook on medium heat for 15 minutes.
- Stir in cottage cheese. Cover and cook for 5 minutes.
- Remove lid and sprinkle mozzarella cheese over the top.
- Cover and remove from heat. Let stand 5 minutes to melt cheese.

## Acknowledgements

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