



## How to Write a Recipe

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### Introduction

Knowing how to write a clear, concise, easy-to-follow recipe is an important skill, whether sharing the recipe with family and friends, using it in a classroom setting, or producing a professional publication. 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, can be accomplished by following specific recipe guidelines.

Recipes developed for use with Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) programs should support the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines for Americans (USDA-HHS 2020) and the safe food preparation guidelines set forth in the *Safe Recipe Style Guide* (PFSE 2020).

This publication with associated recipe template is intended for Extension faculty, staff, and volunteers who are writing or adapting a recipe for VCE. It should not be used as guidance for those manufacturing food products for sale.

Volunteers should also consult with their Extension Agent.

Based on federal funding, the Virginia Family Nutrition Program (FNP) has specific guidelines for recipes. Please submit recipes for FNP directly to FNP.

### Parts of a Recipe 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 Casserole, Spinach Quesadillas, or Hamburger Tater Tot Casserole.

### Servings

Insert the serving size and number of servings the recipe produces directly under the title.

### 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.

### 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, unless a specific size is important to the product outcome.



- (Photo courtesy of pixabay.com)

## Ingredients List

- List ingredients in the order they are used in cooking/baking.
- 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 numerals 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.
- Filling volume measurements is dependent on how the measuring utensils are manufactured and how they are filled with ingredients. Weight is generally more precise than volume. When possible, include both weight and volume.
- For recipes where the amount of an ingredient does have to be exact, 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. For example, instead of “2 14 ounce cans of corn,” 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 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 the ingredients list of the recipe. For example:
  - 3 large eggs, beaten
  - 1/2 cup whole 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 whole wheat flour” means it is first sifted, then measured, whereas “1 cup whole wheat 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.”
- 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.
- If the ingredients need to be cut, describe their finished size or appearance. Use standard terms or measurements, such as halved, quartered, chopped, sliced, diced, minced, pureed, cut in rings, etc.
- Indicate if ingredients require additional preparation before it is used in the recipe. 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.
- Do not use brand names for ingredients. For example, use “1 cup whole wheat flour” rather than “1 cup King Arthur’s whole wheat flour.”

## Directions

- The directions should include step-by-step directions detailing how to put the recipe together and in what order. Include any steps for keeping foods safe\*; how to cook the ingredients to create the dish; and how to serve it when appropriate.



- (Photo courtesy of pixabay.com)
- Describe each step in the recipe from the first to the last in a bulleted list. 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.
- 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 leftovers within two hours.
- 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.
- Use standard kitchen terminology to describe procedures. Basic terms such as heat (the oven), simmer, boil, hard boil, braise, sear, sauté, whisk, stir, beat, and fold are generally understood.
- Begin directions with equipment and technique rather than ingredients. For example, “In a medium saucepan over low heat, whisk together the butter and sugar until butter is melted and sugar is dissolved.”
- Use numerals 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,” or “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 partial directions 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 the mixture, breaking up any clumps as meat browns. Finish browning the meat. Cook until internal temperature of chili reaches 160°F as measured with a food thermometer

## 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 Extension programs, 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 Hokie Bird’s “Book of Recipes,” Recipe Publisher, 2007.)
  - Recipe from a magazine: (Recipe from the January 2020 issue of Heart Insights.)
  - Recipe from a website: (Recipe from choosemyplate.com.)
  - Recipe from a secondary source: (Recipe from the January 2020 issue of Heart Insights, as listed at heart.org.)
  - Recipe adapted from a book: (Recipe adapted from Hokie Bird’s “Book of Recipes,” Recipe Publisher, 2020.)

## Additional Points to Consider

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

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

If you are a volunteer, submit your recipe to your Extension Agent.

If you are an Extension Agent, submit recipes to Dr. Carlin Rafie.

If you are an FNP employee, you should submit your recipe to Ashley Songer.

## References

PFSE (Partnership for Food Safety Education). 2020. “Recipe Style Guide”

<https://www.saferecipeguide.org/>

USDA-HHS (U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025. 9th Edition. December 2020. Available at [DietaryGuidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov).

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# Putting It All Together: A Template and Recipe Example

## Recipe Template

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

**Number of Servings:**

**Serving Size:**

**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, food safety procedures\* or any additional information for the recipe.

\*as outlined in the Partnership for Food Safety Education's Safe Recipe Style Guide, (2020)

## Sample Recipe

### Easy Stovetop Lasagna

**Number of Servings:** 8

**Serving Size:** 1 cup

**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

- Wash hands with soap and water.
- Heat skillet to medium. Brown ground turkey, stirring frequently in skillet. Cook until internal temperature reaches 165°F as measured with a food thermometer.
- Wash dishes after each step involving raw meat.
- 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.

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