

PRACTICAL LIFE SKILLS

Basic Cookery

Kitchen essentials, food safety, knife skills, understanding heat, seasoning and flavour building, eggs and batters, proteins, vegetables and sauces, reading recipes, a capstone weekly meal repertoire, and a curated resource directory to keep learning from.

11 Chapters

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CHAPTER 1: KITCHEN ESSENTIALS

Basic Cookery

Chapter 1 · Kitchen Essentials — Tools & Setup

You don't need a fully stocked kitchen to cook well — you need a short list of the right things, kept sharp, clean, and within reach. This chapter covers what's actually worth owning before you start, what's genuinely optional, and how to set up your workspace so cooking feels easier rather than like a scramble.

The Essential Toolkit

Everything on this list earns its place — you'll reach for each of these constantly, starting from the very first recipe in this course.

ITEM	WHY IT MATTERS
A good chef's knife	One sharp 20cm (8") chef's knife handles the vast majority of all cutting tasks. A single good knife beats an entire block of mediocre ones — see Chapter 3 for real technique.
A cutting board	Wood or plastic, large enough that food doesn't fall off the edge. Protects both your knife's edge and your countertop.
A large frying pan / skillet	Stainless steel or nonstick, roughly 26–30cm. Handles sautéing, searing, eggs, and most stovetop cooking — the single most-used pan in any kitchen.
A medium saucepan with lid	Boiling, simmering, sauces, reheating. The lid matters — it traps heat and speeds up boiling significantly.
A large pot	Pasta, stock, soups, anything cooked in a lot of liquid or in a big batch.
Measuring cups & spoons	Precision matters far more in baking than in savoury cooking, but you'll still reach for these constantly.

ITEM	WHY IT MATTERS
A set of mixing bowls	Prep, marinating, mixing, holding ingredients before they go in the pan — genuinely used every session.
Tongs	The single most useful tool for flipping, turning, and serving that isn't a spatula. Better control than a fork, safer than your fingers.
A thin metal (fish) spatula	For flipping delicate items — eggs, fish, pancakes — without tearing them. A rigid spatula is one of the most underrated tools in a kitchen.
A wooden spoon or silicone spatula	Stirring and scraping pans without scratching nonstick coatings or gouging your cookware.
A colander	Draining pasta, rinsing vegetables — there's no good substitute once you actually need one.
An instant-read thermometer	Genuinely important, not a luxury — it's how you confirm food has actually reached a safe temperature (Chapter 2) and how you nail doneness on meat, poultry, and fish (Chapter 7) without guessing.

Essential vs. Nice-to-Have vs. Skip For Now

Kitchenware marketing leans hard on "essential." Most of it isn't. Here's an honest three-way split.

GENUINELY ESSENTIAL • Chef's knife • Cutting board(s) • A skillet and a saucepan • Tongs • Instant-read thermometer • Mixing bowls	NICE TO HAVE, NOT URGENT • Cast-iron skillet • Stand mixer • Food processor • Dutch oven • Kitchen scale • Immersion blender	SKIP FOR NOW • Full knife block sets • Avocado slicers, banana slicers • Egg separator gadgets • Most "as seen on TV" single-task tools
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BUY TOOLS AS YOU ACTUALLY NEED THEM

You don't need everything in the essential column before your first meal in this course — Chapter 6 is the first time you'll genuinely need a saucepan and a skillet together, for example. Build the toolkit up as the course gives you a real reason to, rather than buying it all up front.

Choosing a Knife, Pan & Board

Knife

One good chef's knife beats a full block of mediocre ones. Look for a comfortable grip and a blade that feels balanced in your hand rather than blade-heavy or handle-heavy — this matters more than brand or price. Hand wash it, dry it immediately, and never put it in a dishwasher (the heat and the impact with other cutlery both dull and damage the edge fast).

A DULL KNIFE IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN A SHARP ONE

It's counterintuitive, but true: a dull blade needs more force to cut through anything, and that extra force is exactly what makes it slip off whatever you're cutting — onto your hand. Keeping your knife properly honed (see this chapter's own Kitchen Practice below) is a genuine safety habit, not just a sharpness preference.

Pans

TYPE	GOOD FOR	WATCH OUT FOR
Stainless steel	Browning, searing, oven-safe, lasts essentially forever	Food sticks if the pan isn't hot enough before you add anything
Nonstick	Eggs, delicate fish, anything that shouldn't tear	Never use metal utensils on it; avoid very high heat; doesn't last as long as stainless
Cast iron	Exceptional heat retention, great sears, gets better with age	Needs seasoning and dedicated care; heavy; optional for this course

For this course, one good stainless skillet plus one nonstick pan for eggs and delicate items covers essentially everything you'll need through Chapter 10.

Cutting board

Wood or bamboo is gentler on your knife's edge and, properly cared for (dried standing up, oiled occasionally), is perfectly hygienic. Plastic boards are dishwasher-safe, cheap, and easy to own several of — which matters directly for Chapter 2's own food safety rules around keeping raw meat separate from everything else. A sensible starting setup: one good wood or bamboo board for general prep, plus one dedicated plastic board reserved only for raw meat and poultry.

Organizing Your Kitchen for Efficiency

Professional kitchens run on a principle called **mise en place** — French for "everything in its place." In practice it means: prep and organize everything *before* you turn on any heat, not while a pan is already going. You'll get the full hands-on treatment of this from Chapter 3 onward; for now, the setup habit itself is worth building from day one.

- **Prep zone** — your cutting board, knife, and mixing bowls, ideally near the sink for easy rinsing and cleanup.
- **Cook zone** — the stove, with your pans, tongs, and spatula within arm's reach. You don't want to be hunting for tongs while something's actively browning.
- **Plate zone** — a clear, clean bit of counter near the stove to actually finish and serve onto, so the cook zone doesn't get cluttered mid-meal.
- **A trash or compost bowl** right at your cutting board, so peelings and scraps don't pile up mid-prep and force you to stop and clean as you go.

READ THE WHOLE RECIPE BEFORE YOU START

The single most common beginner mistake isn't a technique failure — it's starting to cook before realising, halfway through, that a step needed something prepped ten minutes ago. Reading a recipe fully first is the cheapest possible investment in a smooth cooking session. Chapter 9 covers reading recipes properly in depth.

Kitchen Practice

No cooking yet — this chapter's practice is about your setup, not a dish. Each of these is a real, worth- doing task before Chapter 2.

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Audit your own kitchen. Go through the Essential Toolkit table above and check off what you already own. For anything missing, decide honestly whether it's genuinely essential for you or something you can put off — and pick the top two or three gaps actually worth filling first.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Set up a mise en place station. Pick any simple task — chopping vegetables for a salad or a stir-fry works well — and organize a proper prep station before you touch a knife: board positioned, knife ready, small bowls for each prepped ingredient, a trash bowl within reach. Then actually do the prep and notice whether it felt calmer than your usual approach.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Learn to hone your knife. Using a honing steel (or, in a pinch, the unglazed rim on the bottom of a ceramic mug or plate), practice realigning your knife's edge. This is basic maintenance every home cook should know before using a knife seriously — and it directly addresses this chapter's own warning about dull blades being the more dangerous ones.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — THE ESSENTIAL TOOLKIT

- Chef's knife (one good one, kept sharp)
- Cutting board — wood/bamboo for general use, plastic dedicated to raw meat

- Large skillet (stainless or nonstick) + medium saucepan with lid + large pot
- Measuring cups & spoons, mixing bowls, colander
- Tongs, thin metal spatula, wooden spoon or silicone spatula
- Instant-read thermometer

Next — Chapter 2: Food Safety & Hygiene

Safe internal temperatures, the "danger zone," cross-contamination (exactly why that dedicated raw-meat board matters), safe storage and thawing — the ground rules every other chapter in this course builds on.

CHAPTER 2: FOOD SAFETY & HYGIENE

Basic Cookery

Chapter 2 · Food Safety & Hygiene

None of this chapter is optional — it's the set of rules every later chapter in this course quietly assumes you already know. The good news: it's a short, learnable set of habits, not a long list to memorise. This chapter's own numbers are drawn from real, current UK (Food Standards Agency / Food Standards Scotland) and US (USDA) food safety guidance rather than folklore.

The Temperature Danger Zone

Food-poisoning bacteria multiply fastest in a specific temperature band. The UK Food Standards Agency defines this **Danger Zone** as roughly **8°C to 63°C** — below 8°C, bacterial growth slows right down; above 63°C, most bacteria start dying off.

Below 8°C — safe (chilled)

8–63°C — Danger Zone

Above 63°C — safe (hot)

colder

hotter

The practical rule that follows from this: don't let food sit in the Danger Zone for long. A widely used guideline is **no more than 2 hours total** at room temperature — and just **1 hour** if the room is genuinely hot (above roughly 32°C, e.g. a warm day or near an oven). This is why food left out after a meal should go in the fridge promptly, not "once it's cooled down naturally" on the counter for hours.

"IT SMELLS FINE" ISN'T A SAFETY TEST

Many of the bacteria that cause food poisoning don't noticeably change how food smells, looks, or tastes. Time and temperature are the actual safety measures — not your senses.

Safe Cooking Temperatures

The general UK legal target for cooked food is **75°C for at least 30 seconds** at the thickest part (an accepted equivalent is 70°C for 2 minutes). For specific categories of raw food, the temperatures below (drawn from USDA guidance, the most detailed publicly available reference) are the ones worth actually knowing — check with your instant-read thermometer from Chapter 1 rather than guessing from cooking time alone, since oven/pan behaviour varies too much to rely on time alone for safety.

FOOD	SAFE INTERNAL TEMPERATURE
Chicken & turkey (whole, parts, or minced)	74°C (165°F)
Minced beef, pork, lamb	71°C (160°F)
Whole cuts — steaks, chops, roasts (beef, pork, lamb)	63°C (145°F), then rest 3 minutes
Fish	63°C (145°F), or opaque and flakes easily
Egg dishes (quiche, frittata, etc.)	71°C (160°F)
Leftovers, when reheating	Steaming hot throughout (74°C)

A LOCAL NOTE, SINCE THIS COURSE IS WRITTEN FOR AN EDINBURGH-BASED READER

Scotland has its own, stricter legal requirement specifically for **reheating** previously-cooked food: **82°C**, under the Food Hygiene (Scotland) Regulations 2006 — noticeably higher than the "steaming hot" guidance used in the rest of the UK. This applies to reheating, not to cooking raw food for the first time, but it's genuinely worth knowing if you're reheating leftovers at home in Scotland.

The whole-cut "63°C then rest" line often surprises people — a rested steak or roast continues cooking slightly from residual heat, and resting also lets juices redistribute rather than run out the moment you cut in. Chapter 7 covers resting properly.

Cross-Contamination

Cross-contamination is bacteria moving from one food (almost always raw meat, poultry, or fish) onto something that won't be cooked afterwards — a salad, a chopping board, your own hands. It's one of the most common real causes of food poisoning at home, and entirely preventable with a few consistent habits.

- **Use a separate board for raw meat** — exactly the dedicated plastic board Chapter 1 recommended. Never let raw meat juices touch a board you're about to chop salad or bread on.
- **Wash your hands** after handling raw meat, poultry, or fish, and before touching anything else — another ingredient, a tap handle, your phone, a clean plate.
- **Wash the board and knife** in hot, soapy water immediately after raw meat prep, before they touch anything else — don't just rinse and move on.
- **Store raw meat on the bottom shelf** of the fridge, below everything else, so it can't drip onto ready-to-eat food.
- **Never put cooked food on a plate that held raw meat** without washing the plate first — a genuinely common mistake at barbecues specifically.

DON'T WASH RAW CHICKEN

It's tempting to think rinsing raw poultry under the tap makes it cleaner. It doesn't remove meaningful bacteria, and it actively splashes contaminated water droplets across your sink, taps, and nearby surfaces — genuinely increasing risk rather than reducing it. Cooking to temperature is what makes it safe, not rinsing.

Fridge & Freezer Storage

Your fridge should read **0–5°C** (the UK legal maximum for chilled food is 8°C, but keeping it closer to 5°C or below gives real margin). Your freezer should read **-18°C or colder**. A cheap fridge thermometer, checked occasionally, is the only real way to know your fridge is actually holding the temperature its dial claims.

FOOD	FRIDGE (ROUGH GUIDE)	FREEZER
Raw chicken / poultry	1–2 days	Up to 9 months

FOOD	FRIDGE (ROUGH GUIDE)	FREEZER
Raw minced meat	1–2 days	3–4 months
Raw whole cuts (steak, chops, roasts)	3–5 days	4–12 months
Raw fish	1–2 days	3–6 months
Cooked leftovers	3–4 days	2–3 months
Eggs (in shell)	Roughly 3 weeks past packing, check the box	Not recommended in shell

These are rough, conservative guides, not a substitute for the use-by date on the actual packaging — always defer to what's printed on the label over a general rule of thumb.

Thawing Safely

Freezing food doesn't kill the bacteria already present — it just pauses them. That means thawing has to be done carefully, at a safe temperature, not left to chance.

METHOD	HOW
In the fridge (best)	Slowest but safest — plan ahead. A whole chicken can take a full day or more.
In cold water	Submerge in a sealed bag, changing the water every 30 minutes to keep it cold. Much faster than the fridge.
In the microwave	Fastest, but food thawed this way must be cooked immediately afterwards — parts of it will have started to warm into the Danger Zone.

NEVER THAW FOOD AT ROOM TEMPERATURE ON THE COUNTER

The outside of the food reaches the Danger Zone long before the inside has even started to thaw, giving bacteria hours to multiply on the surface while the centre is still frozen solid.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Check your own fridge and freezer temperature. Using a fridge thermometer (or your Chapter 1 instant-read thermometer left in a glass of water in the fridge overnight as a rough substitute), confirm what your fridge and freezer are actually holding versus what the dial claims, and adjust if needed.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Practice a cross-contamination-safe prep session. Cook any simple meal that involves both raw meat (chicken works well) and a fresh, uncooked component like salad — deliberately practicing the separate-board, wash-hands-between, clean-as-you-go habits from this chapter, start to finish.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Do a fridge audit using first-in-first-out. Go through your fridge, check dates on everything, move older items to the front so they get used first, and identify (and discard) anything past its use-by date or any undated leftover you can no longer confidently place a date on.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — FOOD SAFETY

- Danger Zone: 8–63°C — no more than 2 hours there (1 hour if very warm)
- Chicken/turkey 74°C · minced meat 71°C · whole cuts 63°C + rest · fish 63°C or flakes easily
- Scotland: reheated food must reach 82°C by law
- Fridge 0–5°C · freezer -18°C or colder

- Separate board for raw meat, wash hands and surfaces between raw and ready-to-eat food
- Thaw in the fridge, cold water, or microwave — never on the counter

Next — Chapter 3: Knife Skills & Basic Prep

Grip and control, the claw, and the core cuts — dice, julienne, chiffonade, mince — plus the safe handling habits that make a sharp knife (Chapter 1's own warning) genuinely safer than a dull one in practice.

CHAPTER 3: KNIFE SKILLS & BASIC PREP

Basic Cookery

Chapter 3 · Knife Skills & Basic Prep

Good knife technique isn't about speed — speed is just what naturally falls out once grip, guiding hand, and a sharp blade (Chapter 1) are all working together. This chapter builds that foundation slowly and deliberately: get it right at a slow pace first, and speed comes on its own with repetition.

Grip & Control

The single most useful grip change for a beginner is the **pinch grip**: instead of wrapping all four fingers and your thumb around the handle, pinch the *blade itself* between your thumb and the side of your index finger, just in front of the handle, with your remaining three fingers wrapped around the handle underneath.

WHY THE PINCH GRIP, SPECIFICALLY

Gripping the handle alone puts your hand's own pivot point behind the blade, which makes the knife wobble side to side as you cut. Pinching the blade itself moves your control right up to where the cutting actually happens — the knife tracks straighter, and it takes real, noticeable effort to make it wander off a clean line.

For most cutting, use a gentle rocking motion: keep the tip of the blade in light contact with the board and rock the handle up and down through the food, rather than lifting the whole knife clear off the board between every single cut. It's faster, quieter, and easier to keep a consistent rhythm and cut size.

The Claw — Your Guiding Hand

Your knife hand isn't the one that needs the most attention here — your *other* hand, the one holding the food steady, is where most beginner knife injuries actually happen. The fix is a hand position called the **claw**.

1 Curl your fingertips under

Curl the fingertips of your guiding hand inward, so your fingers form a rounded shape resting on top of the food — knuckles forward, fingertips tucked well back and out of the blade's path.

2 Tuck your thumb behind your fingers

Keep your thumb tucked behind the curled fingers too, never out in front where it could end up in the blade's path.

3 Rest the flat of the blade against your knuckles

As you cut, let the flat side of the knife blade ride lightly against your curled knuckles. Your knuckles become a physical guide the blade slides along — the blade genuinely can't reach your fingertips as long as this contact stays consistent.

4 Move your guiding hand back as you go

After each cut (or small group of cuts), shift your claw hand back slightly to expose the next bit of food, keeping the same curled shape the whole time rather than relaxing it between cuts.

THIS FEELS AWKWARD AT FIRST — THAT'S NORMAL

The claw feels slow and unnatural for the first several times you use it deliberately. That's expected — it becomes automatic with real repetition, and it's worth pushing through the awkward stage rather than reverting to flat, exposed fingertips because it's faster in the short term.

The Core Cuts

Almost every recipe's prep instructions boil down to one of these four cuts. Learn them once, properly, and you can follow the vast majority of recipes without having to look anything up.

CUT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TYPICALLY USED FOR
Dice	Even cubes — small (~0.5cm), medium (~1cm), or large (~2cm), depending on the recipe	Stews, sautés, sauces — general all-purpose cooking
Julienne	Thin matchsticks, roughly 3mm × 3mm × 5cm	Stir-fries, salads, garnishes — anything wanting a delicate, quick-cooking shape

CUT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	TYPICALLY USED FOR
Chiffonade	Thin ribbons, cut from stacked, rolled leaves	Leafy herbs and greens — basil, mint, spinach — as a garnish or mixed through a dish
Mince	As fine as you can practically get it, almost paste-like	Garlic, ginger, chillies — anything where you want flavour distributed through a dish, not distinct pieces

Dicing an onion, properly

This is the single most common piece of knife prep in home cooking, and it's worth learning the real technique rather than hacking at it.

1 Halve it root to tip

Cut the onion in half through the root, not across it. Peel off the skin. Leave the root end intact on each half — it's what holds the layers together while you cut.

2 Make horizontal cuts

Lay a half flat-side down. Make several cuts parallel to the board, from the outside edge toward (but not through) the root, so the onion is sliced into layers that are still held together at the root.

3 Make vertical cuts

Now cut straight down through the onion from tip to root, again stopping just short of the root — this creates a grid pattern while everything's still held together.

4 Cut across, and it falls into a neat dice

Turn the onion 90° and slice across your grid. The pieces fall away already diced, evenly, in one pass — no need to go back over anything.

FLATTEN ROUND VEGETABLES BEFORE YOU CUT THEM

Anything roughly round or cylindrical — a carrot, a potato — will roll under your knife and turn a stable cut into a dangerous one. Slice a thin piece off one side first to create a flat, stable base to rest it on, before you start your actual cuts.

Safe Handling Habits

- **Never cut toward yourself** — always cut away from your body, or across, never pulling the blade back toward your own hand or torso.
- **Carry a knife point-down, blade against your leg**, and announce yourself ("behind you", "knife") if you're moving through a kitchen with anyone else nearby.
- **Never try to catch a falling knife**. Step back and let it fall — a bruised toe heals; a grabbed blade doesn't.
- **Never leave a knife submerged in a sink of soapy water** where the next person reaching in can't see it's there. Wash it immediately, by hand, and set it aside visibly.
- **Store knives properly** — a block, a magnetic strip, or individual blade guards — never loose in a drawer where you're reaching in blind past an exposed edge.

All of this connects directly back to Chapter 1's own warning: a properly sharp, properly honed knife, handled with real technique, is genuinely the safer choice — it's the combination of a dull blade and poor habits that causes most home kitchen cuts.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Dice an onion using the root-on method. Work through the four-step technique above, slowly and deliberately — the goal this time is even, consistent pieces and good claw-hand form, not speed.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Julienne a carrot and chiffonade some leafy greens. Practice both cuts on real ingredients — a carrot for the julienne, basil or a leafy lettuce for the chiffonade — and compare how each technique actually feels.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Mince garlic properly. Crush a clove with the flat of your blade to loosen the skin, remove it, then mince as finely as you can. You'll reuse this exact skill directly in Chapter 5's own flavour-building work.

[→ Solution](#)**QUICK REFERENCE — KNIFE SKILLS**

- Pinch grip: thumb and finger on the blade, not just the handle
- Claw hand: fingertips curled under, knuckles guide the blade
- Dice, julienne, chiffonade, mince — the four cuts behind most recipes
- Flatten round vegetables first so they can't roll
- Cut away from yourself, never catch a falling knife, store blades properly

Next — Chapter 4: Understanding Heat — Core Cooking Methods

Sautéing, roasting, boiling, simmering, steaming, baking, and grilling — what each one actually does to food, and how to know which to reach for.

CHAPTER 4: UNDERSTANDING HEAT

Basic Cookery

Chapter 4 · Understanding Heat — Core Cooking Methods

Almost every recipe instruction — sauté, roast, simmer, steam — is really just a different way of applying heat. Once you understand what heat actually does to food, and why these methods behave so differently from each other, you stop needing a recipe to tell you exactly what to do and start being able to work it out yourself.

The Three Ways Heat Moves

CONDUCTION

Direct contact — a hot pan touching food, or food touching hot water. Fast and even where there's full contact, which is why a properly hot pan matters so much for searing.

CONVECTION

Heat carried by a moving fluid — hot air circulating in an oven, or boiling water moving around food. Gentler and more even over a larger surface than direct contact alone.

RADIATION

Heat as infrared energy, travelling without needing to touch anything — a grill element or a hot broiler. Intense and directional, which is why grilling browns one side fast while barely warming the other.

Every cooking method in this chapter is really just some combination of these three — knowing which is dominant in a given method explains a lot about how that method actually behaves.

What Heat Actually Does to Food

- **Proteins firm up (coagulate).** Raw egg white is translucent and liquid; heat turns it opaque and solid. The same thing happens to meat and fish proteins, which is part of why overcooking makes them tough — the proteins keep tightening the longer heat is applied.
- **Starches absorb water and soften (gelatinize).** This is why raw rice is hard and cooked rice is tender — heat and moisture together let the starch granules swell and soften.
- **Sugars brown and turn sweeter and more complex (caramelization).** Pure sugar, or the natural sugars in vegetables like onions, brown and deepen in flavour under sustained heat

— this is what's happening when a slowly-cooked onion turns sweet and golden.

- **Proteins and sugars together brown and develop deep, savoury flavour (the Maillard reaction).** This is the specific browning you see on a seared steak or a roasted potato — a genuinely different chemical process from caramelization, but one that needs the same thing: real heat, and a dry surface.
- **Tough connective tissue breaks down into gelatin — but only with time and moderate, moist heat.** This is exactly why a tough cut of meat needs long, slow, moist cooking (Chapter 7) rather than a quick sear.

BROWNING NEEDS A DRY SURFACE

Maillard browning and caramelization both need real heat *and* a surface that isn't wet — water on food's surface has to fully evaporate before the surface can actually get hot enough to brown. This is why a wet piece of meat placed straight in a hot pan steams first and only starts browning once the surface has dried out, and why patting food dry before searing genuinely matters.

Dry Heat vs. Moist Heat

Nearly every cooking method falls into one of two families, and the split explains most of the practical differences between them.

DRY HEAT

- Sautéing, roasting, baking, grilling
- Real browning — Maillard reaction, caramelization
- Best for tender cuts and quick cooking
- Can dry food out if overdone

MOIST HEAT

- Boiling, simmering, steaming, braising
- No browning — the surface never gets hot enough or dry enough
- Gentler; good for delicate food and breaking down tough cuts over time
- Harder to overcook quite as harshly as dry heat

Method by Method

METHOD	WHAT'S HAPPENING	GOOD FOR
Sautéing / pan-frying	High heat, a small amount of fat, mostly conduction, food kept moving	Thin or tender pieces that cook fast — vegetables, thin cuts, aromatics
Roasting / baking	Dry oven heat, mostly convection, surrounds food evenly	Larger cuts and whole items — a joint of meat, a whole vegetable, bread
Boiling	Rapid, rolling bubbles, roughly 100°C at sea level	Pasta, quick blanching, rapidly reducing a liquid
Simmering	Gentle, occasional bubbles, noticeably below a full boil	Sauces, stocks, delicate items that would break apart at a hard boil
Steaming	Cooked by water vapour, food never actually touches the water	Vegetables and fish where you want gentle cooking with minimal nutrient loss
Grilling / broiling	Direct radiant heat, very high, usually from one side only	Quick cooking with a real char and Maillard flavour on the surface

BOILING VS. SIMMERING ISN'T JUST "HOW VIGOROUSLY IT LOOKS"

A full boil is genuinely more violent than most recipes actually want — the constant turbulence can break apart delicate items (a poached egg, a flaky fish fillet) that a gentle simmer would cook perfectly intact. When a recipe says "simmer," it means turn the heat down until the bubbling is gentle and occasional, not "boil, but a bit less."

Choosing the Right Method

- **Tender cut, want browning and speed?** Reach for dry heat — sauté or grill.
- **Tough cut, need it to become tender?** Reach for moist heat, low and slow — Chapter 7 covers this properly.
- **Delicate item that could fall apart?** Gentle moist heat — simmering or steaming.

- **Want a real caramelized, browned crust?** You need dry heat, real temperature, and a dry surface — moist heat structurally can't produce this, no matter how long you cook it.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

The overcrowded pan experiment. Sauté the same amount of sliced mushrooms or diced onion two ways: once spread in a single layer with space between pieces, once piled into the pan all at once. Compare colour, texture, and taste side by side.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Boil vs. simmer the same vegetable. Cook two batches of the same sliced vegetable (carrots work well) — one at a hard, rolling boil, one at a gentle simmer — for the same amount of time, and compare how intact and evenly cooked each batch is.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Dry-roast a vegetable for real caramelization. Roast a sliced onion or some carrots at high heat until genuinely browned at the edges, and notice how different the flavour is from the same vegetable boiled or steamed.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — UNDERSTANDING HEAT

- Conduction (direct contact), convection (moving air/liquid), radiation (infrared)
- Dry heat browns (sauté, roast, bake, grill); moist heat doesn't (boil, simmer, steam)
- Maillard reaction + caramelization both need real heat and a dry surface

- Tender + fast = dry heat · tough + slow = moist heat · delicate = gentle moist heat
- Simmer means gentle, occasional bubbles — not a slightly quieter boil

Next — Chapter 5: Seasoning & Flavour Building

Salt, acid, fat, and heat balance; when to season; herbs vs. spices; and tasting and adjusting as you go — the difference between a technically-cooked dish and one that actually tastes good.

CHAPTER 5: SEASONING & FLAVOUR BUILDING

Basic Cookery

Chapter 5 · Seasoning & Flavour Building

A dish can be technically cooked correctly — right temperature, right doneness — and still taste flat, dull, or "off." That gap is almost always about seasoning and balance, not technique. This chapter is about closing that gap deliberately, rather than hoping it works out.

The Four Elements: Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat

Nearly every well-balanced dish is built on these four working together. Get a feel for what each one actually does, and you can diagnose almost any "something's missing" dish yourself.

SALT

Doesn't just make food "salty" — used well, it amplifies the flavours already there, making everything taste more vividly like itself. Season in layers throughout cooking, not just once at the end.

FAT

Carries flavour — many aroma and flavour compounds only fully express themselves when dissolved in fat — and adds richness and mouthfeel. It's also what lets spices "bloom" (see below).

ACID

Brightens a dish and cuts through richness — genuinely the most under-used tool in a home cook's kitchen. A squeeze of lemon or a splash of vinegar at the end can fix a dish that tastes flat far more effectively than more salt.

HEAT

Chapter 4's own subject, but it belongs here too — how much heat and how it's applied changes how the other three elements behave and express themselves, not just the food's texture.

The Balancing Act — Diagnosing a Dish That's "Off"

Most seasoning problems fit one of these patterns. Taste, identify which one you're facing, then adjust — a little at a time.

IT TASTES...	TRY ADDING
Flat, dull, "something's missing"	Salt first. If it's still flat after that, acid — a squeeze of lemon or a splash of vinegar.
Heavy, rich, one-note	Acid, to cut through and brighten it — this is often what a rich dish is genuinely missing.
Too sharp, sour, or acidic	A little fat to round it out, or a small pinch of something sweet to balance rather than cancel it.
Bland even though you've salted it	Don't just add more salt — try acid instead. The problem is often balance, not quantity of salt.

ADJUST IN SMALL STEPS

Add a little, taste, add a little more if needed. A seasoning mistake going the wrong direction is much harder to undo than one you catch early — small, incremental adjustments with tasting in between are always safer than one big correction.

When to Season

Seasoning isn't a single step at the end — it's a series of decisions made throughout cooking.

- **Season meat well before cooking** where possible — salt has time to work into the surface, which helps both flavour and, for some cuts, moisture retention.
- **Salt pasta and vegetable cooking water generously** — this is one of the only chances to season the food itself from the inside, not just the surface afterward.
- **Salt vegetables like eggplant or cucumber early** when a recipe calls for it — this draws out excess water before cooking, which is about texture as much as flavour.
- **Taste and adjust in layers as you cook** — after the aromatics, after the main ingredients go in, again once everything's combined. Waiting until the very end to season for the first time means you're guessing at everything all at once.

Herbs vs. Spices

Herbs are the leafy parts of a plant; spices come from seeds, bark, roots, and other non-leafy parts. That difference in origin is exactly why they behave so differently in cooking.

DELICATE FRESH HERBS

Lose flavour fast under sustained heat — add late, often right at the end or as a finishing touch.

Basil, coriander/cilantro, parsley, dill, mint

HARDY HERBS

Sturdier structure holds up to longer cooking — safe to add earlier, in the pot from the start.

Rosemary, thyme, bay leaf, sage

SPICES

Generally robust to long cooking. Many benefit from "blooming" — cooking briefly in hot fat early on to release their flavour compounds before anything else goes in.

Cumin, paprika, cinnamon, chilli flakes, coriander seed

FRESH HERBS ADDED TOO EARLY JUST DISAPPEAR

Throw fresh basil into a sauce at the start of a long simmer and by the time it's done, most of its flavour and colour will be gone — it'll have turned dark and flat rather than staying bright and fragrant. Stir it in right at the end instead.

Tasting and Adjusting As You Go

This is the single most-skipped habit in home cooking, and arguably the most important one in this whole chapter. Taste at multiple points — not just once, right before serving, when it's genuinely too late to fix much.

- Use a clean spoon each time, not the one that's been stirring the pot.
- Taste before you season, so you actually know what you're starting from.
- Taste again after each real addition — don't add three things at once and taste only at the end; you won't know which change actually fixed (or broke) it.
- If a dish is genuinely hard to taste and adjust mid-cooking (like a roast), taste and adjust anything that's still adjustable — a pan sauce, a side, a garnish — instead.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Taste and fix a deliberately flat dish. Make a simple soup or sauce, but hold back seasoning entirely at first. Taste it plain, then use this chapter's own balancing-act table to diagnose and fix it step by step — salt, taste, then acid, taste — rather than guessing.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Build a vinaigrette from scratch. Starting from a rough 3-parts-oil-to-1-part-acid ratio, whisk together a basic vinaigrette, then taste and adjust the balance until it's genuinely right to your own palate — you'll reuse this exact skill directly in Chapter 8.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Bloom a spice and compare. Cook the same spice — ground cumin works well — two ways: stirred raw into a finished dish versus briefly fried in hot oil before anything else goes in. Taste both and compare the intensity of flavour.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — SEASONING & FLAVOUR

- Salt, fat, acid, heat — the four elements behind almost every well-balanced dish
- Flat? Try salt, then acid. Too rich? Try acid. Too sharp? Try fat or a touch of sweetness.
- Season in layers throughout cooking, not just once at the end
- Delicate fresh herbs go in late; hardy herbs and spices can go in early — spices often benefit from blooming in fat

- Taste constantly, adjust a little at a time, use a clean spoon

Next — Chapter 6: Eggs, Grains & Starches

Eggs cooked several honest ways, rice, pasta, potatoes — plus this course's first real Kitchen Practice dishes: scrambled eggs, American-style pancakes, and French crêpes.

CHAPTER 6: EGGS, GRAINS & STARCHES

Basic Cookery

Chapter 6 · Eggs, Grains & Starches

Eggs, rice, pasta, and batter show up constantly, across an enormous range of dishes, which makes them some of the highest-value techniques in this whole course. This is also the first chapter with real, complete dishes to cook — scrambled eggs, American-style pancakes, and French crêpes — rather than isolated technique practice.

Eggs, Several Honest Ways

Eggs are simple ingredients that reward real technique more than almost anything else in a beginner's kitchen — the difference between a mediocre egg and a genuinely good one is almost entirely about heat control and timing, not ingredients.

METHOD	WHAT MATTERS MOST
Scrambled	Low, gentle heat and constant movement — the full technique is this chapter's own first Kitchen Practice below.
Fried	Medium heat, a little fat; "sunny side up" is never flipped, "over easy" is flipped briefly for a still-runny yolk, "over hard" is cooked through.
Boiled	Start from already-boiling water, not cold — roughly 6-7 minutes for soft, 9 for medium, 11-12 for hard. An ice bath immediately after stops the cooking and makes peeling easier.
Poached	A gentle simmer (Chapter 4), a small splash of vinegar in the water to help the white set faster and hold together.

EGGS KEEP COOKING AFTER YOU TAKE THEM OFF THE HEAT

Residual heat (Chapter 4's own point about carryover cooking) applies strongly to eggs, which cook fast and can go from perfect to overdone in seconds. Pull scrambled eggs off the heat while they still look slightly underdone and glossy — they finish in the pan's own retained heat on the way to the plate.

Rice, Pasta & Potatoes

Rice

For most long-grain white rice, rinse it first under cold water until the water runs mostly clear — this removes surface starch that would otherwise make the rice gummy. A common starting ratio is roughly 1 part rice to 2 parts water. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a gentle simmer (Chapter 4), cover, and resist lifting the lid — you're trapping steam deliberately. Once the water's absorbed, rest it off the heat, covered, for a few minutes before fluffing with a fork.

Pasta

Cook pasta at a real, rolling boil (Chapter 4) in generously salted water — this is one of your only chances to season the pasta itself, not just the sauce around it. Aim for *al dente* — cooked through but with a slight, deliberate firmness to the bite, not fully soft. Before draining, reserve a small cup of the starchy cooking water — it's genuinely useful for loosening and binding a sauce afterward.

Potatoes

For mashing, start potatoes in cold water and bring them up to a boil together — starting from already-hot water cooks the outside faster than the inside, leaving an uneven result. For roasting, Chapter 4's own dry-heat principles apply directly: a hot oven, a single layer, and real time for genuine browning.

The Batter Technique — Pancakes & Crêpes

American-style pancakes and French crêpes come from the same basic idea — a flour, egg, and milk batter, cooked on a hot surface — but the details diverge sharply, and understanding why makes both easier to get right.

AMERICAN-STYLE PANCAKES

- Thick batter, similar to a loose paste
- Leavened with baking powder — genuinely fluffy and risen
- Cooked in distinct rounds, one ladle at a time

FRENCH CRÊPES

- Thin, pourable batter, closer to heavy cream
- No leavening at all — thin and pliable is the whole point

- Slightly undermixed batter, a few lumps left in it, is correct

- Spread thin across the whole pan by swirling, not scooped into a round
- Batter rested 30+ minutes for a more tender, less tearable result

DON'T OVERMIX EITHER BATTER

Stirring flour into a wet batter develops gluten — a little of this gives structure, but overmixing makes pancakes noticeably tough and tight rather than tender. Mix only until the dry streaks disappear; a few small lumps left in a pancake batter are genuinely fine.

The full recipes and technique for both are in this chapter's own Kitchen Practice below — including the concrete visual cues for exactly when to flip each one.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Scrambled eggs, done properly. Cook a genuinely good batch of scrambled eggs using low, gentle heat and constant movement — pulled off the heat while still slightly underdone, using carryover heat to finish.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

American-style pancakes. Mix a leavened batter without overworking it, and learn the real visual cue for exactly when to flip — bubbles forming and popping across the surface, edges looking set rather than wet.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

French crêpes. Make a thin, rested batter and practice the swirl technique for an even, paper-thin crêpe — a genuinely different pan skill from anything else in this course so far.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — EGGS, GRAINS & STARCHES

- Scrambled eggs: low heat, constant movement, off the heat while still slightly wet
- Rice: rinse first, roughly 1:2 rice to water, simmer covered, don't lift the lid
- Pasta: boil in generously salted water, aim for al dente, save some pasta water
- Pancakes: thick, leavened batter, slightly undermixed, flip once bubbles cover the surface
- Crêpes: thin, unleavened batter, rested 30+ minutes, spread by swirling the pan

Next — Chapter 7: Cooking Proteins — Meat, Poultry & Fish

Doneness and how to check it, resting, basic marinades — plus Thai beef salad, putting this chapter's own flavour-balance work (Chapter 5) to real use.

CHAPTER 7: COOKING PROTEINS

Basic Cookery

Chapter 7 · Cooking Proteins — Meat, Poultry & Fish

More home cooking anxiety centres on meat, poultry, and fish than almost anything else — mostly from genuine uncertainty about doneness. This chapter replaces guessing with an actual, checkable method, plus the handful of habits that separate a good result from a dry, overcooked one.

Checking Doneness Properly

The instant-read thermometer from Chapter 1 is the only genuinely reliable doneness check. Poking, pressing, or judging by colour alone are all real techniques professional cooks do use, but they take years of repetition to calibrate — a thermometer gives you the same accuracy from your very first attempt.

WHY A RARE STEAK IS SAFE BUT A RARE BURGER ISN'T

This surprises a lot of beginners, and it's genuinely important, not just trivia. On a whole, intact cut of meat, bacteria live only on the outer surface — searing that surface (Chapter 4's own Maillard heat) makes it safe even if the centre stays rare. Grinding meat mixes that same surface bacteria all the way through the meat, so ground beef, poultry, and anything minced must be cooked fully through to a safe temperature throughout — there's no "rare" option for it, ever.

WHOLE / INTACT CUTS

Steaks, chops, roasts, whole poultry, fillets. A genuine range of doneness (rare through well-done) is available for beef and lamb specifically, since only the surface needs to reach a safe temperature.

GROUND / MINCED MEAT, AND ALL POULTRY

Burgers, mince, sausages, and chicken or turkey in any form. No "doneness range" — always cooked fully through to the safe minimum from Chapter 2, no exceptions.

Beef & lamb doneness ranges (whole cuts only)

DONENESS	INTERNAL TEMPERATURE
Rare	49–52°C (120–125°F)
Medium-rare	54–57°C (130–135°F)
Medium	60–63°C (140–145°F)
Medium-well	65–68°C (150–155°F)
Well-done	71°C+ (160°F+)

Remember Chapter 2's own point about resting: a rested steak continues cooking a few degrees from residual heat, so pull it off the heat slightly before your actual target.

Resting Meat

Resting isn't optional theatre — it does two real things: residual heat keeps gently finishing the cooking (Chapter 4 and Chapter 6's own carryover-heat point, applying here too), and the muscle fibres relax enough that juices redistribute through the meat rather than immediately running out onto the board the moment you cut in.

- **Steaks and chops:** rest about 5 minutes, loosely tented with foil.
- **Whole roasts:** rest 15-20 minutes or more for a larger joint — genuinely worth the wait.

Basic Marinades

A marinade is usually built from an acid or dairy component (Chapter 5's own acid element — lemon juice, vinegar, yoghurt, buttermilk), an oil, and aromatics or seasoning. Contrary to popular belief, marinades mostly flavour the surface rather than penetrating deep into the meat — that's still genuinely worthwhile, just worth knowing so you're not expecting more than a marinade can actually do.

NEVER REUSE A RAW-MEAT MARINADE AS A SAUCE

A marinade that's touched raw meat carries the same bacteria the meat itself did (Chapter 2's own cross-contamination principle). If you want to use it as a sauce or basting liquid afterward, it must be brought to a full boil first — never spooned over cooked food straight from the raw-meat bowl.

Common Beginner Mistakes

MISTAKE	WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS
Pan not hot enough first	No real sear develops — the meat just gently cooks through without Chapter 4's own Maillard browning
Not patting the surface dry	Surface moisture has to evaporate before browning can start (Chapter 4) — a wet piece of meat steams first, wasting time and heat
Moving it around too much	A proper crust needs sustained contact with the hot pan — constant flipping never lets it form
Overcrowding the pan	Same effect as Chapter 4's own overcrowded-pan experiment — the pan's temperature drops and everything steams instead of searing
Cutting in immediately	Skips resting entirely — juices run straight out onto the board instead of staying in the meat
Guessing doneness instead of checking	The single most avoidable cause of both dry, overcooked meat and unsafe undercooked meat — use the thermometer

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Thai beef salad (yam nua). Sear a steak to medium-rare, rest it properly, and slice against the grain — then build the classic salty-sour-sweet-spicy dressing using this chapter's own seasoning-balance framework from Chapter 5.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Pan-cooked chicken breast, checked properly. Cook a chicken breast to exactly 74°C using your thermometer — a real, deliberate demonstration of why poultry gets no doneness range at all.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Pan-seared fish. Cook a fish fillet using the "opaque and flakes easily" visual cue from Chapter 2, alongside a thermometer check, to build real confidence reading fish doneness by eye.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — COOKING PROTEINS

- Whole cuts of beef/lamb: a real doneness range. Ground meat and all poultry: always cooked fully through.
- Beef/lamb doneness: rare 49-52°C · medium-rare 54-57°C · medium 60-63°C · well-done 71°C+
- Rest steaks ~5 minutes, roasts 15-20+ minutes
- Never reuse a raw-meat marinade as a sauce without boiling it first
- Dry surface, hot pan, don't overcrowd, don't move it too much, use the thermometer

Next — Chapter 8: Vegetables & Basic Sauces

Cooking vegetables so they're genuinely good, a roux, a simple pan sauce, a vinaigrette — plus a fresh green salad putting Chapter 5's own dressing skill to work again.

CHAPTER 8: VEGETABLES & BASIC SAUCES

Basic Cookery

Chapter 8 · Vegetables & Basic Sauces

Vegetables cooked well and a handful of real sauce fundamentals do more to lift a home-cooked meal than almost anything else in this course. Neither needs to be complicated — both mostly need a little technique that's rarely explained clearly.

Cooking Vegetables So They're Actually Good

The single most common vegetable mistake is overcooking — most vegetables are genuinely better with some bite left in them than cooked to complete softness. A little resistance when you bite in is usually the goal, not a sign something's unfinished.

Blanching and shocking

For green vegetables especially, this technique keeps colour and texture at their best: boil briefly in well-salted water (Chapter 4's own rolling boil) until just bright and tender, then immediately transfer to a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking dead. Without the ice bath, residual heat (Chapter 4, 6, and 7's own recurring point) keeps cooking the vegetable well past where you actually wanted it.

Roasting

Chapter 4's own dry-heat principles apply directly — real heat, a single layer, genuine time, for real caramelization rather than just "cooked through." If you haven't already, Chapter 4's own Kitchen Practice 3 is worth revisiting here.

SALT VEGETABLES WHILE THEY COOK, NOT ONLY AFTER

Chapter 5's own point about seasoning in layers applies to vegetables just as much as anything else — salting the cooking water, not just the finished plate, seasons the vegetable itself rather than only its surface.

The Roux — A Foundational Thickener

A roux is simply equal parts fat and flour, cooked together — the base for a huge number of sauces, including the classic white sauce (béchamel) this chapter's Kitchen Practice covers.

1 Melt the fat

Butter, in a saucepan, over medium heat, melted but not browned.

2 Whisk in an equal amount of flour

By weight or volume, roughly equal parts — this forms a thick paste.

3 Cook it briefly, whisking constantly

A minute or two, still pale (a "white roux") — this cooks out the raw flour taste without adding any colour, which is what a white sauce needs.

4 Whisk in liquid gradually

Add the milk (or stock) a little at a time, whisking continuously — adding it all at once is the single most common cause of a lumpy sauce.

LUMPS COME FROM ADDING LIQUID TOO FAST

Whisking in liquid gradually, a splash at a time, lets each addition fully combine before the next goes in. Dumping it all in at once traps pockets of dry roux that never properly dissolve — that's where lumps come from.

A Simple Pan Sauce

The next time you sear meat in a pan (Chapter 7), don't wash it straight away — the browned bits stuck to the bottom, called **fond**, are concentrated flavour, not mess.

1 Remove the meat, keep the pan hot

Pour off any excess fat, but leave the fond stuck to the pan itself.

2 Deglaze

Pour in a splash of liquid — wine, stock, even water — and scrape the pan with a wooden spoon as it bubbles, lifting all that stuck-on fond into the liquid.

3 Reduce

Let it bubble and reduce for a minute or two, concentrating the flavour as some of the liquid evaporates.

4 Finish with butter (optional)

Off the heat, whisk in a small knob of cold butter for extra richness and a glossy sheen — a technique called *monter au beurre*. Taste and adjust with Chapter 5's own seasoning-balance framework before serving.

Vinaigrette — Putting Chapter 5 to Work

Chapter 5's own Kitchen Practice already covered the technique — roughly 3 parts oil to 1 part acid, whisked in gradually, tasted and adjusted using this course's own balancing-act framework. This chapter's own Kitchen Practice puts it to direct use in a real dish.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

A fresh green salad. Prep a proper salad using Chapter 3's own knife skills, and dress it with a vinaigrette built and tasted the Chapter 5 way — putting two earlier chapters' worth of technique together into one real dish.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Make a basic white sauce (béchamel). Build a roux from scratch and whisk in milk gradually to produce a smooth, lump-free white sauce.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

A simple pan sauce after searing. Sear a piece of chicken or another protein, then build a real pan sauce from the fond it leaves behind — deglaze, reduce, and finish with butter.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — VEGETABLES & BASIC SAUCES

- Most vegetables are better with some bite left, not cooked to full softness
- Blanch then shock in ice water to stop cooking and keep colour
- Roux: equal parts fat and flour, cooked briefly, liquid whisked in gradually
- Fond is flavour, not mess — deglaze, reduce, finish with butter for a real pan sauce
- Vinaigrette: roughly 3 parts oil to 1 part acid, tasted and adjusted

Next — Chapter 9: Reading, Adapting & Scaling Recipes

How a recipe is actually structured, substituting ingredients sensibly, scaling up or down, and adjusting for what's genuinely in the fridge.

CHAPTER 9: READING & ADAPTING RECIPES

Basic Cookery

Chapter 9 · Reading, Adapting & Scaling Recipes

Every recipe you use after this course assumes you can actually read it properly, adjust it sensibly, and scale it without breaking it. This chapter is about that meta-skill — the difference between following a recipe and genuinely understanding one.

How a Recipe Is Actually Structured

Most recipes share the same basic shape: a yield (how many servings), an ingredient list — usually in the order they're used, sometimes grouped by component ("For the sauce:", "For the salad:") — and a method.

- **Common shorthand:** tbsp/tsp (tablespoon/teaspoon), "to taste" (add gradually and check against Chapter 5's own tasting discipline), "as needed" (amount genuinely depends on the situation), "room temperature" (matters more than it sounds for some ingredients, especially in baking).
- **Prep verbs matter:** "fold in" means a gentle, minimal-mixing motion (Chapter 6's own warning about overmixing batter); "whisk" implies real incorporation and air; "sauté" and "sear" imply Chapter 4's own dry-heat, high-temperature methods specifically.

READ THE WHOLE RECIPE BEFORE YOU START

This is Chapter 1's own advice, worth repeating here directly: the most common real mistake isn't a technique failure, it's discovering halfway through that a later step needed something prepped ten minutes ago. A full read-through first is the cheapest investment you can make in a smooth cooking session.

Substituting Ingredients Sensibly

The useful question isn't "can I swap this ingredient?" — it's "**what job is this ingredient actually doing?**" Once you know that, Chapter 5's own salt/fat/acid/heat framework tells you

what else could do the same job.

ORIGINAL	REASONABLE SUBSTITUTE	WHY IT WORKS
Buttermilk	Milk + a splash of lemon juice or vinegar, rested 5 minutes	Recreates the acidity buttermilk brings to the dish
Shallot	A small amount of onion, or spring onion	Same allium family, doing the same aromatic job
One fresh herb	Another fresh herb with a similar character	Both are doing a fresh, aromatic finishing job (Chapter 5)
Wine, in a pan sauce	Stock, with a small splash of vinegar for acidity	Recreates both the liquid and the acid the wine was providing
Fresh chilli	Dried chilli flakes or hot sauce, to taste	Same "spicy heat" job from Chapter 7's own note on chilli

WHERE SUBSTITUTION IS RISKY

Baking specifically — precise ratios of flour, fat, sugar, and leavening drive real chemical reactions. This course doesn't cover baking in depth, but it's worth knowing substitutions there are far less forgiving than in savoury cooking.

WHERE SUBSTITUTION IS FORGIVING

Most savoury cooking — soups, stir-fries, salads, sauces. As long as the substitute is doing the same job (acid for acid, aromatic for aromatic), the dish usually still works, even if it tastes a little different.

Scaling a Recipe Up or Down

Multiplying ingredient quantities is the easy part. Two things genuinely don't scale linearly, and catch people out:

- **Seasoning.** Salt, chilli, and strong spices rarely need to double just because everything else did — taste and adjust incrementally (Chapter 5's own discipline), rather than blindly multiplying the seasoning line along with everything else.
- **Cooking time.** A doubled roast doesn't take double the time — the ratio of surface area to volume changes as size increases, so a bigger piece takes proportionally longer for heat to

reach the centre, but not by a simple multiplication. Always check doneness properly (Chapter 7's own thermometer discipline) rather than trusting a scaled-up time estimate.

WATCH YOUR PAN SIZE WHEN SCALING UP

Doubling a stir-fry recipe in the same size pan just recreates Chapter 4's own overcrowded-pan problem — the pan can't hold enough heat for that much food at once. Use a bigger pan, or genuinely cook it in two batches, rather than piling it all in together.

Adjusting for What's Actually in the Fridge

Once you understand the technique behind a dish — not just the specific ingredients listed — a recipe becomes a flexible pattern rather than a rigid instruction set. A stir-fry recipe calling for broccoli can usually take whatever vegetable is actually in the fridge; a soup's aromatics list can flex with what's on hand.

The exceptions are the same ones from earlier in this chapter: don't improvise on baking ratios, and never improvise on food safety — Chapter 2's temperatures and Chapter 7's doneness checks apply regardless of what a recipe happens to say.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Read an unfamiliar recipe before cooking anything. Find a recipe you haven't made before. Read it fully first, identify its structure (yield, ingredient groupings, shorthand terms), and note anything that needs prepping ahead — before you touch a single ingredient.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Scale a recipe, sensibly. Take a recipe from earlier in this course and scale it up or down — adjusting seasoning by taste rather than blind multiplication, and checking whether your pan or

pot size can actually handle the scaled quantity.

→ Solution

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Substitute an ingredient deliberately. Cook a dish from earlier in this course, but swap one ingredient for something else in your fridge — using the "what job is this ingredient doing" framework to pick a sensible replacement rather than guessing.

→ Solution

QUICK REFERENCE — READING & ADAPTING RECIPES

- Read the whole recipe before starting — always
- Ask what job an ingredient is doing before substituting it
- Baking is unforgiving of substitutions; savoury cooking usually isn't
- Seasoning and cooking time don't scale linearly — taste, and check doneness properly
- Watch pan size when scaling up, to avoid Chapter 4's overcrowding problem

Next — Chapter 10: Capstone — Building a Weekly Meal Repertoire

Putting everything in this course together into a small, genuinely repeatable set of go-to meals, a real week's plan, a shopping list, and timing more than one dish at once — including fish and chips.

CHAPTER 10: CAPSTONE — WEEKLY MEAL REPERTOIRE

Basic Cookery

Chapter 10 · Capstone — Building a Weekly Meal Repertoire

Nine chapters of technique are only genuinely useful once they turn into meals you actually cook, regularly, without relearning everything each time. This capstone is about building that small, repeatable rotation — and about the one real skill this course hasn't covered yet: timing more than one dish so everything lands on the plate hot together.

Building a Repertoire, Not a Recipe Book

You don't need dozens of recipes — you need a handful you can cook confidently, on rotation, without thinking hard about technique each time. This course has already given you the building blocks for a genuine starting repertoire.

DAY	MEAL	DRAWS ON
Monday	Pasta with a simple pan sauce, side salad	Chapter 6 (pasta), Chapter 8 (pan sauce & salad)
Tuesday	Pan-seared chicken breast, roasted vegetables	Chapter 7 (chicken doneness), Chapter 4 & 8 (roasting)
Wednesday	Thai beef salad	Chapter 7 (protein & slicing), Chapter 5 (dressing balance)
Thursday	Pan-seared fish, rice, steamed vegetables	Chapter 7 (fish doneness), Chapter 6 (rice), Chapter 4 (steaming)
Friday	Fish and chips	This chapter's own centrepiece dish, below
Weekend	Pancakes or crêpes for a relaxed breakfast	Chapter 6

This is a starting point, not a rule — swap days, repeat favourites, and let it grow as you pick up more dishes beyond this course (Chapter 11's own resource directory is exactly for that).

Building a Shopping List From a Meal Plan

- **Group by store section** — produce, meat/fish, dairy, pantry — rather than the order dishes appear in your plan. It's faster to shop and less likely to miss something.
- **Check what you already have first.** Chapter 2's own fridge audit habit applies directly here — a quick look before you shop avoids buying a third bottle of the same vinegar.
- **Buy versatile ingredients on purpose.** A vegetable or aromatic that shows up in two or three of your planned meals reduces both cost and the amount left to spoil unused.

Timing Multiple Dishes at Once

This is the one genuinely new skill in this chapter — everything before now has been one dish at a time. The real technique is simple: work backwards from your intended serving time, and start whichever component takes longest first.

Fish and chips is a deliberately good test case: both components need to be freshly cooked and hot at the same moment, but they're cooked completely separately, in the same pot of oil, at different stages.

DEEP-FRYING SAFETY, SERIOUSLY

A pot of hot oil is genuinely more dangerous than anything else in this course. Never leave it unattended. Use a thermometer to actually know the oil's temperature rather than guessing. Never fill the pot more than about a third full, since adding food makes the level rise. Pat ingredients completely dry first — wet food causes hot oil to spit violently. Keep a metal lid nearby in case of a fire — **never** pour water on a hot oil fire, it will make things dramatically worse.

Kitchen Practice

KITCHEN PRACTICE 1

Fish and chips. Cook proper double-fried chips and battered fish, timed so both are hot and ready at the same moment — this course's own final, most technically demanding dish.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 2

Build your own weekly meal plan. Using this chapter's own table as a starting point, write a real 5-7 day meal plan drawing on dishes and techniques from this course, adjusted to what you actually like to eat.

[→ Solution](#)

KITCHEN PRACTICE 3

Build a shopping list from that plan. Turn your own meal plan from Kitchen Practice 2 into a real, category-grouped shopping list, cross-checked against a quick fridge audit first.

[→ Solution](#)

QUICK REFERENCE — BUILDING A REPERTOIRE

- A handful of reliable, rotating meals beats a huge, rarely-used recipe collection
- Group a shopping list by store section, and check what you already have first
- Work backwards from serving time; start whichever component takes longest
- Never leave hot oil unattended; keep a lid nearby; never use water on an oil fire

Next — Chapter 11: Recipe & Resource Directory

A genuine departure from the rest of this course — no more technique, just a curated set of real recipes, recipe sites, YouTube channels, and cookbooks to keep learning from, including one for banana ice cream.

CHAPTER 11: RECIPE & RESOURCE DIRECTORY

Basic Cookery

Chapter 11 · Recipe & Resource Directory

This chapter is a genuine departure from the rest of the course — no technique, no Kitchen Practice, just a small, curated set of real, verified places to keep learning once this course is finished. Every link below was actually checked before being included here, the same discipline this site's own Links pages use.

Individual Recipes

Two specific recipes worth calling out directly — one revisiting a dish from this course with a slightly different approach, and one for one of your own original dish requests that didn't fit neatly into an earlier chapter.

Classic Thai Beef Salad (Yum Nua) — Beyond Kimchee

A traditional take on Chapter 7's own dish, using a similar grilled-and-sliced technique with a classic salty-sour-sweet-spicy dressing.

Banana Ice Cream (For the Ice Cream Maker) — Fresh April Flours

A genuine ice-cream-maker recipe that roasts the bananas first to deepen their sweetness before churning — well worth trying with your own machine.

General Recipe Sites

BBC Good Food

Every recipe tested by a professional kitchen team before publication — a genuinely reliable, UK-focused starting point.

Serious Eats

James Beard award-winning, science-backed recipes and technique explanations — the natural next step once you want to know *why* a technique works, not just the steps.

YouTube Cooking Channels

Joshua Weissman

Takes everyday food and shows how to make a genuinely better version at home — entertaining, and the techniques hold up.

Adam Ragusea

A relaxed mix of recipes and real food science — unfussy, and good at explaining the *why* behind a technique in plain terms.

J. Kenji López-Alt

The most technique- and science-focused of the three — real-time demonstrations rather than a polished montage, matching this course's own "understand why, not just how" approach.

Recommended Cookbooks

Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat by Samin Nosrat

The book Chapter 5's own seasoning framework is directly built on — genuinely the natural next read if that chapter clicked for you.

The Food Lab by J. Kenji López-Alt

Deep, tested, science-backed technique explanations — a natural next step up in depth from this course.

How to Cook Everything by Mark Bittman

A genuinely enormous, thorough reference covering technique after technique — less about a handful of chapters, more a book to keep on the shelf for years.

APPLY CHAPTER 9 TO EVERYTHING YOU READ FROM HERE

Every one of these sources will occasionally call for an ingredient you don't have, or a quantity that doesn't match how many people you're cooking for. Chapter 9's own substitution and scaling skills apply just as much to a cookbook or a YouTube recipe as they did to anything in this course.

COURSE COMPLETE

That closes all eleven chapters — kitchen setup, food safety, knife skills, understanding heat, seasoning, eggs and batters, proteins, vegetables and sauces, reading recipes, a capstone weekly repertoire, and this closing resource directory. You've cooked scrambled eggs, pancakes, crêpes, a Thai beef salad, and fish and chips along the way — a real, working foundation to keep building on.