



PC-101 Personal Chef Basic Operations Study Guide

This exam covers 5 areas of knowledge: Sales & Marketing, Food Safety, Menu Planning, Business Practices and Operations.

Sales & Marketing

There are a lot of different groups that you will market your services to: busy professionals; those with no cooking skills; new parents; those with dietary challenges; and many more. One thing that most of your potential clients have in common is that they can afford your service because both adults in the household work. You will best attract your clients by being able to describe the various features of your service (such as: I create a menu from the information I get in our client interview) and then point out the benefits to those features (such as: that way you can sit down every night to the foods you truly enjoy). There are a lot of examples of this but just remember that the feature refers to your service and the benefit tells the client what's in it for him/her. During your client interview you may be faced with objections such as "that figure comes to a lot of money per meal. I can eat at Applebee's for that" When that happens you should reassure your client that you understand (perhaps repeat the comment back in your own words), and offer to make a slightly greater quantity of food, thereby reducing the per-meal cost. Sometimes by better explaining the benefits to your service you can easily overcome objections such as that. These objections help you to determine what your client needs, and satisfying these needs is what you want to do.

One of the things that all budding personal chefs struggle with is what to call the business. While there are many successful services with cute names there are dangers to names such as 'Savory Thymes'. For one thing clients will not be able to tell you apart from 'Thyme Savors' and 'Savor the Thyme' on the other side of town. For another it doesn't really say who you are and what you do, which is really what you want to convey.

Food Safety

Two major concerns with food safety are cross-contamination and proper cooling. An obvious example of cross-contamination is that little bit of chicken juice left on the cutting board when you go to chop broccoli. One way to prevent this is to use multiple cutting boards, perhaps some of the color-coded ones on the market. They come in yellow for poultry, red for meat and green for vegetables. In any case make sure that you are using a good cleaning agent, such as a mixture of bleach & water.

There are several good ways to cool your cooked food, such as ice baths and cold running water. One method to avoid is just placing your dish directly in the refrigerator. The danger here is that you increase the temperature in the refrigerator while cooling only the outside surface of the food. Don't forget your own safety. In addition to packing a first-aid kit make sure that you dress appropriately to protect against spills and burns.

Menu Planning

Not all of your clients will get the 'typical' service of 5X4, but many will. This means 5 entrées plus appropriate sides, 4 servings of each. This standard package can easily be adjusted by increasing the number of servings. This will help to take into account the number of people in the family and how often they want you to come. If there are children involved it is easiest to count them as adult eaters. By appropriate sides we mean that not all entrées call for a second dish for that particular meal. Making more one-dish meals can help to reduce costs for you and for the client.

There are several things to take into account when writing your clients' menus: a good balance of more freezer and few refrigerator dishes will ensure that meals are fresh and safe; try to keep repeats to a minimum. Unless your clients beg for something in particular (and they will) you should try to cook a particular dish no more than twice a year.

Business Practices

While most of us are excellent cooks even a 'good' cook can thrive in this industry by being professional and organized. Having the proper paperwork helps you to look and even be more professional. Your paperwork will include the client presentation package, which you give to the prospect during the initial interview, to the food label which tells everything necessary about the dish without the client having to root through it all. You will also need nicely prepared forms to leave at the end of the cook date which reference what you just did plus what you plan for next time as well as some way to get feedback about your service.

Pricing and managing expenses may be difficult at first, but you will catch on after a while. If you are using the all-inclusive fee structure you will need to watch that your grocery costs do not exceed about 1/3 of your total fee. The exception would be if you offer a slight discount for the first service only, in which case the percentage would be a bit higher (but just that once).

Everyone has heard the stories of chefs who are still cleaning up while the family is ready to sit down to that first night's dinner, but with a little practice you should be able to be in by 9 and out by 2 or 3.

Operations

Other examples of the proper paperwork you will need are the lists you will create for each cook date. You will need a grocery list for each store as well as a pantry list and an equipment list for the tools and such for that client. Even after examining the client's kitchen for space and equipment you will want to take whatever is necessary for all of your recipes.

There are many different containers available for you to use. Some are oven specific and some are microwave specific, but it may be to your advantage to use something like the Gage disposable paper ones, which can go both ways.