Restaurant Lingo Cheet Sheet

Alphabetical reference guide for restaurant operators

5 Out: When a chef yells out "5 out!" they are trying to tell the other cooks that the dish they are working on will be ready for plating in 5 minutes.

86: This is a common term you'll have heard multiple times if you've worked in the restaurant industry long enough. "86" is used when a restaurant is unable to prepare a certain dish, whether that be because they have some external constraint or simply run out of the ingredients required.

A La Carte: A la carte is the opposite of a set restaurant menu and refers to when a customer orders an individual dish from the menu.

A La Mode: A dish served with ice cream.

Adam and Eve on a Raft: Even if you've worked in the restaurant industry for years, this one might be a term you've never heard of, and that's because it's primarily used in the states. Adam and Eve on a raft refers to when a customer orders two eggs (poached or scrambled) on a piece of toast.

All Day: The term "All Day" refers to the total number of items that needs to be sent out from the kitchen. The term is usually slapped on the end of a long sentence. "I need eight scrambled eggs, five soup of the days, three cups of coffee, five pancakes with butter on the side all day"

Back of House (BOH): The back of the house refers to everything in the restaurant behind the dining room. This usually includes the kitchen, storage rooms, offices, and any prep rooms. The back end of the restaurant, typically the kitchen, prep, and storage areas.

Bartender: A bartender is someone employed at a restaurant, usually behind a bar, to prepare and serve alcoholic and non alcoholic beverages. Bartenders are referred to by many different names, which include barkeep, barman, bar chef, mixologist, and barmaid.

Bev Nap: Bev naps are the small square paper napkins that are used in lieu of a coaster. Customers can use this for wiping their hands or table, but conventionally these are meant to be placed under a beverage.

Blue-Plate Special: A blue plate special is a type of dish almost exclusive to the United States and Canada, other countries serve a variation of this concept, but don't refer to them as 'blue plate specials'. This dish refers to a low cost menu item that changes everyday and is typically served at diners and cafes.

Camper: A camper is a busy restaurant's least favorite kind of customer. The term refers to someone that has already paid for and finished their meal but will not leave their table. Campers lead to longer wait times when a restaurant is packed and on a waitlist.

Can't cook their way out of a paper bag: This is usually said about someone that is terrible at cooking but is in denial about it.

Charcuterie: This term refers to a specific kind of cooking that is focused primarily on the preparation of meats such as sausage, ham, and bacon.

Check Back: This refers to when a server checks on how the customer's meal went while also dropping the check at the same time, as opposed to having them be two separate events.

Chef: A chef is someone that is trained professionally in the art of food preparation and cooking. Most trained chefs will focus on one specific cuisine, but it is not unheard of for a chef to be proficient in multiple cuisines.

Chef de Partie: More commonly referred to as a line cook, a Chef de Partie refers to a chef that is usually at the beginning of their career and can fit into multiple chef roles. The next role for a Chef de Partie is usually as a Sous Chef once they get promoted.

Restaurant Lingo Cheet Sheet

Alphabetical reference guide for restaurant operators

Chef's Table: A Chef's Table experience is probably one of the most luxurious ways you can dine at a restaurant. With its location right in the kitchen, Chef's Tables are reserved for special guests only and provide them with a custom curated dinner that they would otherwise not get in the normal dining room.

Combination Meal: A combination meal, sometimes referred to as a "combo" is a meal type that includes everything one needs for a complete meal. You will mostly see these kinds of dishes at fast food chains, but they are not uncommon to fast casual and fine dining restaurants. A combo meal will usually include a main course, a side, and a beverage.

Commis: A commis usually refers to a beginner chef that works right below the Chef de Partie. Similar to an internship or apprenticeship, their main goal is to learn as much as they can about their kitchen responsibilities.

Comp: "Comping" something means giving something away for free to your customer. Usually this is to smooth things over with a disgruntled customer who has had some part of their meal go wrong.

Cooked to Order: This is a type of dish that is cooked to a customers specific instructions. Not something that is pre-prepared.

Counter Meal: A counter meal is very similar to a "Blue Plate Special" except for the fact that counter meals are more popular at bars and pubs in Australia. These are usually set meals that are changed daily and are eaten at the counter top.

Cover: A cover refers to a single paying customer. A reservation for 5 people translates to 5 covers.

Cut: A slice of meat.

Dead Plate: A dead plate is a dish that can in no way be served to customers. This can be for a number of reasons but includes poor appearance, incorrect temperature, taking too long to serve the dish, or wrong ingredients.

Deuce: A table that can only seat two customers.

Dine and Dash: This term is not too foreign, and people that don't even work in the restaurant industry will know what it means. To dine and dash means a customer finishes their meal and sneaks out before having to pay the bill.

Double: Having to work two shifts in a row.

Douse It: When a customer requests to have their dish covered in extra sauce.

Drop: To start cooking an accessory item.

Drop the Check: Bringing the guest their bill to their table.

Dupe: A dupe is the information that gets passed to the kitchen from the front of house staff so the chefs know what to prepare for the customers.

Early Bird Dinner: An early bird dinner usually takes place earlier than peak dinner times and is primarily aimed at elderly couples and tourists that are looking to eat as much as they can for as little as possible.

Expeditor: The employee responsible for arranging food from the kitchen and sending it out to the dining room for the servers.

Family Meal: A family meal, sometimes referred to as a staff meal, is a daily meal that the restaurant serves its employees, usually outside peak hours. Sometimes these meals will be prepared using leftover or unused ingredients, and often times a chef will use family meals as an opportunity to test new recipes.

Restaurant Lingo Cheet Sheet

Alphabetical reference guide for restaurant operators

Fire: Orders given by the head of the kitchen to start preparing a certain dish.

Flash: When a particular meat is undercooked, a chef might "flash it" in an oven to raise the temperature slightly and cook it the remainder of the way.

Foodie: A foodie is someone that believes they know everything they need to know about food and cooking.

Free Lunch: A free lunch is a strategy restaurants use with the aim of bringing in customers and increasing revenue generated. By promising a free lunch with the purchase of a drink, restaurant owners are hoping that customers will order more than one drink or become loyal long time customers.

Front of House (FOH): The front of house of a restaurant is everything that your customers can see. This includes the dining room and bar.

Garde Manger: The garde manger is the part of the kitchen where chef prepare cold menu items such as salads, desserts, and cold appetizers.

Ghost Restaurant: A ghost restaurant is a restaurant that is usually empty and generates almost all of its revenue through food delivery.

Gueridon Service: This term usually refers to tableside food preparation. This requires that a gueridon (trolley) is used to transport ingredients to a guest table where a dish is prepared live for the customer.

Happy Hour: Happy hours are ways for restaurants to drive more traffic into their restaurant during their off peak hours. Most of the time happy hour offers include free drinks, a free dish, discounts, or even a free meal.

Hockey Puck: A reference to a well cooked hamburger patty.

In the Weeds: In the weeds is a term that refers to both the front and back of house staff and it is used to describe a situation where the kitchen staff is pressed for time and required to do a huge task such as dropping the check to 12 tables at once.

Jumpin: A colloquial term to describe a very popular and busy restaurant.

Kid's Meal: A kid's meal is a meal that is catered to and targeted to children. They usually include a fun toy or something to entertain a child.

Kill It: To overcook something, usually by the customer's request.

Line Cook: Line cooks are tasked with preparing ingredients and assembling dishes according the the restaurant recipes. Line cooks are essential to the basic functioning of a busy restaurant kitchen.

Main Course: The main course section of a menu displays dishes that are the main focus of a meal. Usually follows an appetizer.

Maitre d'Hotel: A Maitre d'Hotel is usually something exclusive to high end restaurants, and is someone that welcomes guests, assigns their tables, takes reservations, and just makes sure that the guest has a generally good time.

Meat and Three: This type of restaurant offering is exclusive to the Southern United States and refers to a set menu where your customer can choose one meat and three side dishes for a special price.

Menu: A menu at a restaurant is a list of everything that your establishment can serve to your customers. This usually includes pictures and descriptions of each dish to entice your customers to make an order.

Restaurant Lingo Cheet Sheet

Alphabetical reference guide for restaurant operators

Mise en Place: This is a french term which refers to "putting everything in place" and is most commonly referenced when kitchen staff are required to follow a certain procedure before being able to start cooking.

Monkey Dish: A small dish that is used to serve condiments or nuts. It can also be used to dispose of bones when eating meat.

No-Show: A guest that makes a reservation at your restaurant and then doesn't show up.

Nuke it: When kitchen staff microwave a dish to heat it up or cook it.

Omakase: Coming from the Japanese term which means "Leave it up to you", Omakase refers to when customers let the chef choose the course of their meal as opposed to ordering each dish a la carte.

On the Fly: Something that needs to be done urgently.

One Bowl with Two Pieces: This term is primarily used in China and refers to ordering a pot of tea along with two dim sum.

Online Food Delivery: Ordering food from a restaurant online, whether that be from a restaurant website or restaurant aggregator app.

Overhead: Overhead refers to any additional factors that go into calculating food cost at your restaurant. This includes the electricity that is required to prepare a dish, the cost of labor, and even shipping costs.

Party: A reference to the size of a group dining at your restaurant.

Pick Up: This is when one server takes over another server's tables.

Pump it Out: Preparing food quickly.

Push It: Selling a particular item. Actively trying to get rid of stock of one particular dish.

Quote: When a restaurant is busy, a quote time is the time that a member of restaurant staff tells a customer they will need to wait before being able to get a table.

Rollup: Dining utensils that are rolled up in napkins.

Runner: A person whose job is not to be assigned to certain tables such as servers, but rather to just run back and forth between the kitchen and dining room delivering dishes.

Sacked: Fired.

Saucier: A chef de partie that is responsible for any item that is sautéed.

Serving Cart: A serving cart is a small cart that is used to help transport dishes to a table. Sometimes a serving cart is even used to display certain items.

Server: Refers to a waiter or waitress.

Shelf Life: How long a particular ingredient can sit on the shelf before losing quality or expiring.

Shorting: When a supplier charges a restaurant a larger amount than the cost of the products they've received.

Sidework: Busy work that is done by the front of house staff that is required to keep the restaurant operational. Includes drying and polishing silverware, refilling salt and pepper shakers, refilling toothpicks and napkins.

Signature Dish: A signature dish is a menu item that is a specialty of the restaurant or particular chef.

Restaurant Lingo Cheet Sheet

Alphabetical reference guide for restaurant operators

Sizzle Platter: A heavy duty metal plate that is used to serve sizzling dishes such as fajitas or nachos. Really good at maintaining heat.

Sommelier: An employee whose speciality is wine. Usually the one to make recommendations to customers about which wine pairs best with their dish of choice.

SOS: An abbreviation for "sauce on the side".

Sous-Chef: The second in command at your kitchen. The sous chef will be in charge when your main chef is off.

Starch: Starch refers to starchy sides such as rice, potatoes and pasta as alternatives to vegetables.

Station: A set number of tables that a server is assigned.

Stiffed: When a customer leaves without leaving a tip.

Still Mooing: Usually used to refer to a steak that is ordered rare.

Stretch It: Something that is done when a restaurant is running low on a certain ingredient, and they do whatever they can to "stretch" whatever is left to last them the entire night.

Table d'Hôte: A multi course set menu that is offered at a fix price.

Table reservation: A table reservation refers to when a customer calls or makes a booking online in advance to guarantee that a table will be available to them when they arrive.

Table Service: Table service is when a restaurant serves food right to the customer's table rather than having them pick up it up from the counter such as with fast food restaurants.

Table Sharing: Table sharing is when a restaurant will seat multiple parties at the same or adjoined tables.

Table Turns: Table turns refers to the number of times that a specific table has gone through the entire meal process (from being seated to paying) each shift.

Take-Out: When a customer orders food from your restaurant with the intention of eating it somewhere else.

Tare: The weight of the container that a product is delivered in, this number should be subtracted from the total weight of the product as to pay for an accurate weight.

The Boogie Man: A health inspector.

Three Martini Lunch: A special restaurant offering that usually takes place around noon in the United States and is primarily catered towards business people and lawyers.

Top: The number of customers in a party. A seven top refers to a dining party of seven people.

Toss: When a food vendor alters the appearance of a product to make it look like the box is full when it is in fact not.

Tourne: When a vegetable is cut in the shape of a small tapered cork.

Turn and Burn: To turn tables very quickly, usually a result of a busy restaurant with a long waiting list.

Two Second Rule: An unspoken rule in the restaurant industry where dropped ingredients are okay as long as they've only touched the floor for no more than two seconds.

Restaurant Lingo Cheet Sheet

Alphabetical reference guide for restaurant operators

Upsell: When an employee tries to sell a guest something that is more expensive than what they have requested.

Value meal: A value meal is a combination of restaurant items that are bundled and offered together for a very low price. This is usually done to increase revenue at a restaurant by increasing the number of items ordered.

Veg: Any veggies that accompany a main course.

VIP: A customer that is very important such as a food blogger, critic, relative of the restaurant owner, or a celebrity.

Walk-In: A walk- in can refer to two things at a restaurant.

- A walk in freezer where meats and perishable items are stored.

- A customer that walks into your restaurant looking for a table without making a reservation.

Walked: Very similar to "dine and dash", refers to a customer that leaves without paying. Can also refer to an employee that has left half way through their shift.Well Drinks: Alcoholic drinks that are made from cheap house liquors.

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Window: A heated shelf where a prepared dish is placed to keep it warm while it waits for a server to take it to the customer. A heated shelf where a prepared dish is placed to keep it warm while it waits for a server to take it to the customer.

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