

5 Menu Planning

CATERING IN THEORY

What's in a menu?

Designing menus

A menu is an important marketing tool for a restaurant since it expresses its style and personality. Before designing your menu, it is important to do some market research into your competitors by checking their websites and flyers to see what they offer, what people think of them and decide what you could do differently.

Menus should be easy to handle and understand and good layout is essential. It is also important to give clear information about service or cover charges. The organisation of items on the menu guides customers when they order. So, you can sequence courses and desserts or provide a specials' menu with captivating names and descriptions. It is not easy to establish the right pricing for your menu. **Food cost** and **portion control** are two ways to help price your menu correctly. You establish the price of a dish according to the cost of its preparation. Then, each portion should be the same size in order to properly track food costs.

Menu formats

- **Classic hand-held menus:** made of paper or card, can be laminated, easy to read, used in formal restaurants.
- **Placement menu:** usually only one page long, cheap, common in cafés and fast-food chains.
- **Board menu:** can be placed outside to attract passing trade, efficient and economical way to display the menu, available in fine dining restaurants, bistros or gastropubs.
- **Digital menu:** used in chain restaurants in order to transmit and change the menu in all their restaurants at the same time. This is an impersonal service.
- **Flyer menu:** popular with take-away restaurants, can be delivered to people's home and businesses or left at the serving counter.
- **Online menu:** customers can browse and place orders by phone, on the Internet or using mobile devices.

Understanding menus

There are different ways to set out a menu, but it is important to ensure that the information is clear and comprehensive.

Special menus

Breakfast, lunch and dinner menus

- **Breakfast** in the UK is more substantial than in many other European countries: cereal with milk or yoghurt, toast and jam or marmalade and sometimes eggs served with tea, coffee or fruit juice. The traditional full English fried breakfast is usually eaten at weekends and can be known as **brunch**, a combination of breakfast and lunch. In Italy "prima colazione" is a quick and easy meal. It consists of coffee with milk or espresso, bread rolls, biscuits, croissants or brioche and maybe some fruit, yoghurt and cereal.
- **Lunch** in the UK is generally a light, informal and often packaged meal (sandwiches, salads or soups) as people do not go home from school or work. The only exception is Sunday lunch, consisting of roast meat and potatoes, fresh vegetables, gravy and dessert. In Italy "pranzo" is still the most important meal of the day, consisting of a first course of pasta or rice, followed by a second course of meat or fish with vegetables and followed by fruit or dessert. Some people in the UK still have the very English **teatime** between four and five in the afternoon while in Italy many children enjoy "merenda" between lunch and dinner.
- **Dinner** is the most important meal in the UK, which people eat after work from about 6 p.m. onwards. It consists of meat or fish and vegetables, followed by fruit or dessert. In Italy people eat a lighter meal in the evening than at lunch time, maybe soup, salads or cold cuts.

English breakfast menus

The **British breakfast**, known as the "Full English" has many regional variations. In **Wales**, you might eat cockles and laver bread (seaweed and oats) or sea trout served with eggs.

In **Northern Ireland**, the breakfast is known as the **Ulster Fry** and includes soda bread and potato bread. In **Scotland**, you might get tattie scones (potato scones), kippers (smoked herring) or porridge made with salt and water.

Afternoon tea menus

The tradition of afternoon tea dates back to the early 19th century when Anna Russell, the 7th Duchess of Bedford, complained about a "sinking feeling" during the late afternoon. At the time people only ate two meals a day, breakfast and dinner. The solution was a pot of tea and a light snack brought to the Duchess during the afternoon.

Kids' menus

Kids' meals are becoming more creative, fresher, healthier and more seasonal. With an increase in child-friendly restaurants, there is also an increase in noise and chaos. Solutions include providing a children's play area, having designated family nights or times or a menu which provides children with activities such as colouring games, puzzles and cartoons to keep them occupied.

Dessert menus

The most popular desserts are: chocolate tarts, mousses and brownies, ice cream, sorbets and parfaits, cream or custard desserts such as crème brûlée and panna cotta, meringue-based desserts such as Pavlova, cheesecakes, fruit tarts and puddings.

It is important to use seasonal ingredients and to make a classic dessert more interesting, by adding unusual tasting granite, herbs and spices, caramelised fruit or nutty crusts. Modern kitchen aids, such as **pacojet**, can increase the range of desserts available on a menu even if you shouldn't have too many desserts on your menu which should offer the following options: hot and cold, fruit and chocolate, pastry, custard and iced dessert.

Sweet recipes and wines

There are some famous non-European sweet wines which make a perfect match with many desserts. **South African** wines and sweet wines are valued all over the world. Unfortified sweet wines include varieties of **Chenin Blanc** and **Riesling**, as well as a late-harvest **Muscat**. Fortified wines include sherry-style wines like **Jerepigo** and **Muscadel** and a range of port-style wines known as **Cape Port** such as Cape Ruby, Cape Tawny and Cape White. There are also several **Cap Classique**.

Sweet wines in **California** are of high quality and come in a wide variety. Late-harvest unfortified wines include aromatic wines such as **Riesling**, **Gewürztraminer**, **Sauvignon Blanc** and **Semillon**.

Fortified wines include **Quady's Essencia** (Muscat grape) and port-style wines known as **Port from California**, like Zinfadel Port and Petite Syrah Port. Popular amongst its many sweet sparkling wines are **Crémant Demi-Sec North Coast** and **Ballatore Moscato Rosé**.

Cheese menus

Americans tend to serve cheese as a starter, the French serve it before dessert while in the UK it is the last thing you eat in a meal. Cheese should be served at room temperature. How you present cheese is also important. You can serve it on a small wooden cutting board, piece of marble or a plate. Good accompaniments to cheese include natural ingredients such as fruit, nuts, dried berries, herbs, olives and pickled vegetables. Cheese goes well with almost any drink from beer to cocktails to full-bodied ports to heady champagnes.

Banqueting and special events menus

	Banquet	Wedding reception
Reason held	for an important occasion	for a wedding
Venue	palaces, castles, stately homes, open air venues	hotels, restaurants, private villas, gardens, community halls
Menu	starters, main courses, side dishes, desserts, wines, champagne, liqueurs	appetizers, aperitifs, finger food, champagne, non-alcoholic cocktails, starters, main course with side dishes,

		dessert, wine
Service	formal waiter service	self-service buffet or waiter service for aperitifs, sit-down meal for a more formal ceremony
Entertainment	speeches and toasts	formal toasts, wedding cake, wedding photos, sometimes evening reception with a deejay or live music

Religious menus

Many people require special menus because of their religion.

Type of menu	Ingredients to avoid	Ingredients to include
Hindu	meat, above all beef, fish and products derived from animals	fruit, vegetables, grains, pulses, spices
Buddhist	some Buddhists are vegetarian and do not even eat root vegetables or strong flavoured foods. Some of them also avoid alcohol	fish and meat, most vegetables, fruit, grains and pulses, seitan, tofu and tempeh
Halal (prepared according to Muslim law)	any foods derived from pork, alcohol	dairy products, fish, fruit, vegetables, nuts, pulses, cereals, any meats (apart from pork) as long as it is killed according to the halal slaughtering process
Kosher (prepared according to Jewish law)	dairy and meat products should not be mixed; pork, shellfish or animals slaughtered in a non-kosher way, pork	fish, fruit, vegetables, grains, pulses, eggs, kosher meats
Sikh (Sikh religion was founded in the Punjab area between India and Pakistan)	Kosher or halal meat	spicy dishes made of vegetables, pulses or meat cooked in ghee (clarified butter) and served with yoghurt, flatbreads and rice
Christian	meat or sweet foods during Lent, meat on Fridays for Orthodox Christians and strict Roman Catholics; alcohol or caffeine altogether for some protestant and evangelical Christians	almost any ingredients

CASE STUDY

Odette's tasting menu

Odette's is an award-winning British restaurant near Regent's Park in London. It specialises in fresh seasonal local produce and tasting menus. Degustation or tasting menus consist in more than ten dishes and offer the opportunity, in a single meal, to taste a broad range of dishes offered by the restaurant.