

Knife cuts: size, shape and even cooking

These are common culinary-school targets, not a demand for perfect ruler work. Match the recipe and keep pieces consistent. Metric sizes are rounded.

Cut	Typical size	Useful for
Julienne	1/8 x 1/8 x 2 inches (3 x 3 x 50 mm)	Thin vegetable strips
Batonnet	1/4 x 1/4 x 2 inches (6 x 6 x 50 mm)	Sticks; starting point for small dice
Brunoise	1/8-inch cubes (3 mm)	Fine garnish and quick-cooking aromatics
Small dice	1/4-inch cubes (6 mm)	Soup vegetables and even sautéing
Medium dice	1/2-inch cubes (13 mm)	Stews and larger vegetable pieces
Large dice	3/4-inch cubes (19 mm)	Longer-cooking vegetables

- Stabilize the board on a nonslip mat or clean damp towel. Make a flat side on round produce before cutting.
- Curl the guiding fingertips into a claw and cut slowly. Keep the blade pointed away from your body; never try to catch a falling knife.
- Practice with one carrot or potato. Cook the offcuts in soup instead of discarding them.
- Chiffonade is a thin ribbon cut for leafy herbs or greens, rather than a cube or stick.

Practice and read more: <https://thestudentchef.com/julienne/>

Sauce fixes: diagnose before adding

Make one small correction, stir, then taste or check texture again. This chart covers common savory sauces; delicate emulsions and dairy sauces need gentler treatment.

Problem	First correction	Watch for
Too thin	For a stock-based sauce, simmer gently to reduce. For a starch-thickened sauce, use the thickener appropriate to the recipe.	Reduction also concentrates salt. Add a cornstarch slurry gradually and bring it to the temperature specified by the recipe.
Too thick	Whisk in a little warm unsalted stock, water or the liquid used in the recipe.	Add a spoonful at a time so you do not overshoot.
Lumpy	Whisk thoroughly; if lumps remain, pass through a fine sieve.	Disperse starch in cold liquid before adding it to hot sauce.
Too salty	Dilute with an unsalted version of the sauce or unsalted liquid, then restore texture.	Sugar and lemon do not remove salt. A potato is not a reliable fix.
Butter sauce separates	Remove from direct heat and gently whisk in a small splash of cool water.	A severely broken sauce may need to be rebuilt. Do not boil a finished butter emulsion.
Scorched	Stop stirring. Transfer the unburnt portion to a clean pan without scraping the bottom.	Taste it. A pervasive burnt flavor usually means starting again.

- For a sauce that tastes flat, check salt first, then try a small amount of lemon or vinegar if it suits the dish.
- Taste only food that is safe to eat. Do not taste raw meat mixtures or sauces contaminated with raw meat.

Practice and read more: <https://thestudentchef.com/thickeners/>

Ingredient swaps: change flavor with control

These swaps suit everyday savory cooking. They are not universal baking substitutions or allergy guarantees. Read labels and check the role of the ingredient.

Missing ingredient	Try instead	Adjustment
Stock	Unsalted broth, or water plus suitable aromatics	Water gives a lighter result. Adjust seasoning after cooking.
Fresh tender herbs	A compatible dried herb	Start with about 1/3 as much dried herb by volume; taste and adjust. Add dried herbs earlier and fresh herbs near the end.
Lemon juice	A mild vinegar that suits the dish	Start with less, then taste. Flavor and acidity differ; not for preserving or canning.
Fresh vegetables for soup	Frozen vegetables	Add according to size and package instructions; tender frozen vegetables often need less time.
Canned beans	Fully cooked dried beans	Use a similar drained amount. Start with cooked beans, not raw dried beans.
Wine in a savory pan sauce	Unsalted stock plus a little lemon or vinegar	Use stock for the liquid, then add acid gradually. The flavor will change.
Butter for vegetable sautéing	An oil suited to the cooking temperature	Use enough to coat the pan. This does not replace butter in pastry, baking or butter emulsions.

- Choose swaps by function: liquid, fat, acid, sweetness, structure or seasoning.
- When baking, use a tested alternative recipe for egg, flour or leavener changes. One-for-one swaps can change structure.
- For food allergies, use verified suitable ingredients and prevent cross-contact; a swap list cannot establish safety.

Practice and read more: <https://thestudentchef.com/ingredient-swaps-salt/>

Measurements: volume, weight and temperature

Use the measurement system stated in the recipe. These are US customary kitchen volumes unless labeled otherwise; metric values are rounded for cooking.

Measure	Equivalent	Approximate metric volume
1 teaspoon	1/3 tablespoon	4.9 mL (often rounded to 5 mL)
1 tablespoon	3 teaspoons	14.8 mL (often rounded to 15 mL)
1/4 cup	4 tablespoons	59 mL
1/3 cup	5 tablespoons + 1 teaspoon	79 mL
1/2 cup	8 tablespoons	118 mL
1 cup	16 tablespoons; 8 US fluid ounces	237 mL
1 US pint	2 cups	473 mL
1 US quart	4 cups	946 mL

- A metric cup is commonly 250 mL. An Australian tablespoon is 20 mL. US and Imperial pints and fluid ounces differ. Do not mix systems within a recipe.

- Fluid ounces measure volume; ounces on a scale measure weight. 1 ounce by weight is about 28.35 g; 1 pound is about 454 g.

- Cups do not convert to grams without knowing the ingredient and how it was measured. Use the recipe's gram weights when provided.

- Oven conversion: $^{\circ}\text{C} = (^{\circ}\text{F} - 32) \times 5/9$. Common equivalents: 350°F about 175°C; 375°F about 190°C; 400°F about 205°C. Follow separate fan-oven instructions when given.

Practice and read more: <https://thestudentchef.com/learn-to-cook/>

Seven days. Seven useful habits.

Work at your own pace. Each day is a practice step, not a deadline. Days 6 and 7 are full cooking sessions. Check a box after practice and write one observation.

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Day 1: Set up before you cook

I can explain the steps and have a safe, organized work area.

[Mise en place and kitchen setup](#)

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Day 2: Make even cuts

My pieces are similar in size and my guiding fingertips stay clear of the blade.

[Julienne and even cutting](#)

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Day 3: Learn gentle heat with eggs

I adjusted the burner instead of waiting for a timer to fix the texture.

[Principles of egg cookery](#)

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Day 4: Finish pasta with sauce

The pasta has the texture I want and the sauce coats it without becoming watery.

[How to cook pasta](#)

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Day 5: Sauté without crowding

I noticed the difference between browning and steaming and adjusted space or heat.

[Set up a sauté station](#)

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Day 6: Build a pot of soup

I followed the ingredient order and checked vegetable tenderness before serving.

[Free Vegetable Minestrone recipe](#)

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Day 7: Put your skills together

I prepared first, controlled heat, checked doneness and wrote down one improvement for next time.

[Free Chicken Piccata recipe](#)

One habit to repeat: _____

Keep it safe

Use a thermometer for poultry: 165°F (74°C). Refrigerate perishable leftovers within 2 hours, or 1 hour above 90°F (32°C), in shallow containers. Keep the refrigerator at 40°F (4°C) or below. Reheat leftovers to 165°F (74°C).

Safety reference: [USDA FSIS leftovers guidance](#). Full challenge: thestudentchef.com/7-day-beginner-cooking-challenge/