

# Manager's Corner

## Meal Quality and Acceptability

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# Institute of Child Nutrition

## The University of Mississippi

The Institute of Child Nutrition was authorized by Congress in 1989 and established in 1990 at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and is operated in collaboration with The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. The Institute operates under a grant agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

### **PURPOSE**

Improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

### **VISION**

Lead the nation in providing research, education, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

### **MISSION**

Provide relevant research-based information and services that advance the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

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## Table of Contents

Professional Standards .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Lesson Overview.....	2
Questions for Staff.....	2
Activity: Meal Quality .....	3
References.....	6



## Professional Standards

### SERVING FOOD – 2200

**Employee will be able to correctly and efficiently serve food portions to meet all USDA school meal patterns requirements and encourage healthy food selections including those for special diets.**

2230 – Maintaining Food Quality and Appearance

Serve food to maintain quality and appearance standards.

## Introduction

*Manager's Corner: Meal Quality and Acceptability* is designed to empower managers to use in training their staff. Each lesson is roughly 15 minutes. This lesson plan contains:

- Learning objective
- Statement explaining the importance of the topic
- List of materials
- Instructions on how to present the information
- Questions to ask staff
- An activity to strengthen or refresh the knowledge of the staff

## Lesson Overview

### Instructions for lesson:

- Review the lesson objective and background information.
- Review why it is important.
- Ask staff the questions.
- Facilitate the activity outlined.
- Provide time for staff to ask questions.

**Objective:** Identify the visual characteristics of quality foods and prepare foods that meet the program's meal quality standards.

**Background information:** Providing a high-quality meal is an important job of child nutrition programs. Meal quality is one of the characteristics that affect how satisfied a customer is with a food item. As child nutrition professionals, it is necessary to judge the quality of each food item before it is placed on the serving line.

Some examples of factors related to meal quality include: variety, flavor, attractiveness of food on the serving line, choices that allow students to meet cultural and ethnic preferences, access to fresh foods, and etc.

**Why it is important:** The saying, "We eat with our eyes first" is true for all people but especially for children and teens. Making sure the food that is served looks pleasing can help increase the level of satisfaction from customers.

## Questions for Staff

- **How can we increase the quality of our meals?**

**Possible answers:**

- Utilize batch-cooking to ensure freshness.
  - Hold foods at the correct temperature for service.
  - Hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
  - Follow recipes, including preparing foods to proper cooking temperatures and doneness.
- **Broccoli on the serving line is bright green and tender. Would this be considered an acceptable quality item?**  
Yes, bright green and tender broccoli looks beautiful on a serving line and is inviting.

- **How can meal quality and acceptability positively affect the school nutrition program?**

**Possible answers:**

- Increase in participation
- Increase program integrity

**Please note:** The answers provided are only examples and are not an inclusive list of possible responses.

## Activity: Meal Quality

**Activity materials included in this document:**

- **Meal Quality**
- **Meal Quality Answer Key**

**Materials provided by the school nutrition operation:**

- Copies of handouts
- Writing utensils

**Activity Instructions:**

- Print the handouts.
- Verbally deliver food quality characteristics included in this training to staff.
- Ask the staff to answer the questions included in this training.
- Facilitate the activity.
- Have staff discuss and reflect on ways they can improve meal quality as a team.

# Meal Quality

**Instructions:**

Look through the list of items in the food items box. Complete the activity by placing the food items in the appropriate column: Acceptable Quality or Unacceptable Quality. For each unacceptable quality item identified, write down a way to prevent that issue from happening again.

Food Items		
Over steamed broccoli	Golden brown chicken breast	Mashed blueberries
Crisp garden salad	Overcooked green beans	Fluffy brown rice
Burnt cheese pizza	Warm yogurt	Bright green asparagus
Golden corn kernels	Vegetable soup with no liquid	Bright red strawberries

Acceptable Quality

Unacceptable Quality

How to Improve the Unacceptable Quality



## Meal Quality Answer Key

**Instructions:**

Look through the list of items in the food items box. Complete the activity by placing the food items in the appropriate column: Acceptable Quality or Unacceptable Quality. For each unacceptable quality item identified, write down a way to prevent that issue from happening again.

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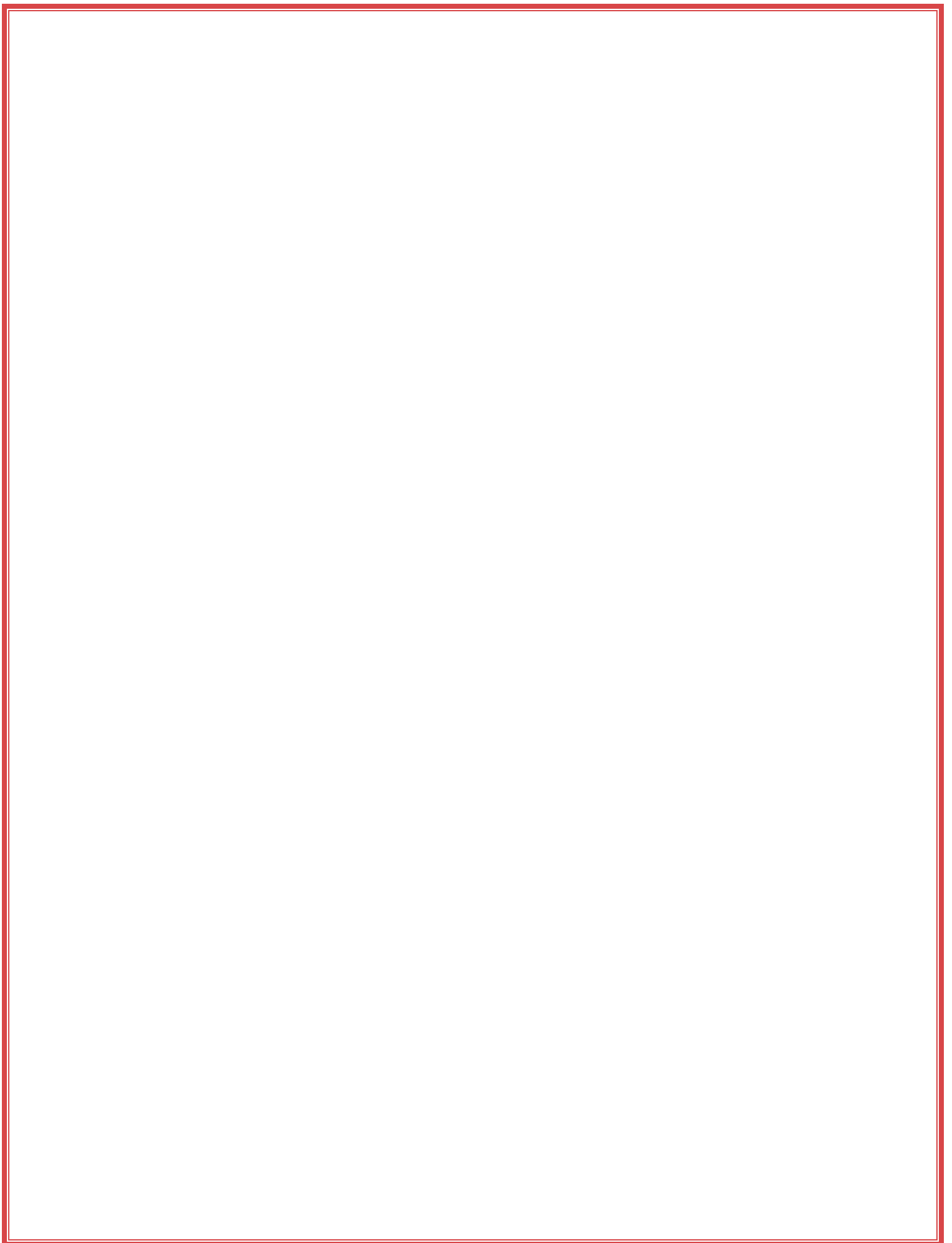
Acceptable Quality
<b>Crisp garden salad</b>
<b>Golden corn kernels</b>
<b>Golden brown chicken breast</b>
<b>Fluffy brown rice</b>
<b>Bright green asparagus</b>
<b>Bright red strawberries</b>

Unacceptable Quality
<b>Over steamed broccoli</b>
<b>Burnt cheese pizza</b>
<b>Overcooked green beans</b>
<b>Warm yogurt</b>
<b>Vegetable soup with no liquid</b>
<b>Mashed blueberries</b>

How to Improve the Unacceptable Quality
<b>Follow the recipe, ensure all ingredients are used and all steps are followed</b>
<b>Check recipe for accuracy and adjust if needed (adjust with recipe writer)</b>
<b>Use the correct serving utensil, so items are not crushed</b>
<b>Maintain time-temperature controls of food (hot foods served hot, cold foods served cold)</b>
<b>Set a timer for cooking times</b>
<b>Check equipment for malfunctions (oven too hot/cold)</b>

## Reference

United States Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Professional standards for school nutrition professionals*. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/professional-standards>





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