



# PRINCIPLES OF SPEED-SCRATCH FOOD PREPARATION

Incorporating more scratch-made recipes and fresh produce into your menu is the most effective way to lower its sodium content. In this worksheet, you will learn the principles of **speed-scratch food preparation**, its benefits, and the culinary skills needed to incorporate speed-scratch recipes into your school foodservice operation.

## WHAT IS SPEED-SCRATCH FOOD PREPARATION?

**Speed-scratch food preparation** incorporates value-added food products with additional ingredients and utilizes minimal production steps to produce student-approved recipes.

The principles of speed-scratch can be broken down into two parts: *ingredients* and *assembly*.

**Ingredients** – Speed-scratch recipes incorporate **value-added food products** with *additional ingredients*.

- **Value-added food products** are pre-cooked, pre-cleaned, pre-cut, pre-mixed, pre-portioned, and/or no- or lower-sodium pre-seasoned food items. Additional ingredients may include fresh, frozen, canned, dry ingredients, or other value-added food products. They are often prepped ahead of time and stored for future use. For example, you could sauté pre-sliced, frozen bell peppers and add a customized spice blend to pre-cooked, sliced chicken to make fajitas.
- Value-added food products and additional ingredients are often cross-utilized, meaning that one product can be used in multiple recipes. For example, pre-cooked, sliced chicken is used in the fajitas today, available for the wraps on Friday, and used for the chicken salad next week.

**Assembly** – Minimal and basic equipment is used to incorporate value-added food products and additional ingredients into a recipe.

- Speed-scratch recipes may or may not involve cooking. Basic equipment may include commercial kitchen utensils, small wares, and an oven at a minimum.
- Menu items may be assembled and served on the line, or students may self-serve via “build-your-own” foodservice models.

Check out ICN's [Scratch Vs Speed-Scratch Recipe Comparison](#) worksheet to help you better understand the differences between scratch and speed-scratch recipes.

## VALUE-ADDED FOOD PRODUCT EXAMPLES

- Fruits/Vegetables
  - Canned produce
  - Fresh cut produce
  - Frozen cut produce
  - Low sodium tomato/marinara sauce
- Grains
  - Ready-made bread dough
  - Ready-made pizza crust
- Other
  - Pre-mixed, low-sodium spice blends
  - Low sodium salad dressings or finishing sauces
- Meats/Meat Alternates
  - Canned beef, chicken, tuna
  - Liquid egg/egg patties
  - Shredded/sliced reduced-fat cheeses
  - Pre-cut and/or pre-seasoned and/or pre-cooked meat/poultry
    - Ground beef patties
    - Ground beef crumble
    - Pulled pork
    - Diced chicken
  - Low sodium canned beans
  - Sliced deli meats

## BENEFITS OF SPEED-SCRATCH

Save money, time, and labor by preparing flavorful meals using speed-scratch food preparation. In addition to increasing overall meal quality, speed-scratch food preparation provides more control over the ingredients you choose to use in a recipe. This, in turn, allows you to better manage the nutritional content (including sodium) of your menu items.

### SAVE MONEY, TIME, AND LABOR

- Value-added food products are usually less expensive than heat-and-serve products.
- Speed-scratch recipes can have the quality and freshness of scratch recipes while not requiring the time and labor to produce them.
- Combining value-added food products with additional ingredients make for faster, easier meal preparation.

USDA Foods in Schools offers many value-added products. Check out the [USDA Foods in Schools Product Information Sheets](#) for lists of food items expected to be available to schools.

### INCREASE MEAL QUALITY

- Cross-utilizing value-added products provide endless mix-and-match opportunities for variety and appeal.
- Speed-scratch food preparation provides opportunities for more menu customization to students' preferences (such as the use of spices by age group or region).
- Streamlining food prep with value-added products allows more focus to be placed on the overall presentation of the meal.
- Speed-scratch food preparation allows for more opportunities for students to personally customize their meals in a self-serve environment. Students tend to consume more "made-to-order" foods.

Specifications for most value-added food products should include nutrition standards. Use ICN's [Scoping Out Sodium in School Menus](#) worksheet to help identify value-added food products that may be high in sodium.

Check out ICN's [Writing Specifications That Limit Sodium](#) worksheet to review how to write sodium nutrition standards within your product specifications.

### MORE CONTROL OVER INGREDIENTS AND NUTRIENTS

- Prepping some ingredients—especially fresh—in-house and incorporating them into meals provides a fresh taste.
- Assembling carefully selected value-added food products and additional ingredients (especially fresh produce) provides more control over the final product's nutritional value (including sodium).

## SPEED-SCRATCH FOOD PREPARATION CULINARY SKILLS

Properly training your staff will help you reap the benefits of speed-scratch food preparation. It is important to equip your staff with the knowledge and skills they need to create menu items your students will want to eat over and over again. Training should take place at least annually, as well as when staff are first hired and when new recipes, skills, or equipment are introduced.

Check out the [Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition](#) for resources and trainings related to cooking methods and techniques.

### Two fundamental skills your staff should know:

- **Reading and utilizing a standardized recipe** – This skill is the foundation of all other culinary skills. Everyone in the kitchen needs to communicate using the same culinary language. Training your team on the culinary concepts and skills included in your standardized recipes is essential.

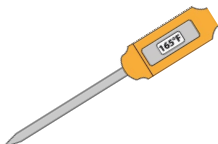
AND

- **Mise en place (preparing ingredients) and station setup** – Train your staff on how to prepare and assemble ingredients and use equipment. You can further help your team prepare recipes more efficiently by locating necessary tools and equipment near preparation stations.

**Additional skills include:**

- **Understanding measurements and measuring techniques** – Train staff to identify which type of measurement (volume, weight, count) to use in a recipe. For each type of measurement, train staff to follow specific procedures to ensure measurements remain accurate and consistent.
- **Learning food preparation techniques** – Staff directly involved with food preparation should learn how to mix ingredients correctly, implement cooking methods (baking, roasting, sautéing, steaming, etc.), and understand how undercooking or overcooking affects consistency and quality.
- **Using equipment properly** – Train staff on how to properly operate kitchen equipment AND how to use equipment to prepare food efficiently and safely. Teach staff who work with knives the correct knives to use and basic knife skills.
- **Implementing the Process Approach to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP)** – Ensure your staff is up to speed on the *Process Approach to HACCP*. Review the processes and procedures used to prepare each menu item and classify it into the appropriate category (Process #1 – No Cook; Process #2 – Same Day Service; Process #3 – Complex Food Preparation).

Refer to ICN’s [Writing, Revising, and Updating a HACCP-Based Food Safety Plan for Schools Workshop](#) and [Food Safety Standard Operating Procedures](#) for help with HACCP implementation.



Train your staff to recognize a failure in sanitation or temperature control, take steps to solve the problem, and verify the correction of the problem. If you have a combination of central and satellite kitchens, you must develop a plan for each site involved in the preparation and service of the item to clarify responsibilities for each location.

**SPEED-SCRATCH READINESS CHECKLIST**

Are you interested in implementing or working on incorporating a speed-scratch recipe into your menu rotation? Use the *Speed-Scratch Readiness Checklist* to help you determine which tasks you have already accomplished or still need to practice.

Tasks	Yes	No
<b>Staff Acceptance:</b> I explained to my staff the purpose of incorporating speed-scratch recipes into our foodservice operation. We discussed possible changes to their current roles and needed training. I gathered their input to best execute the changes.		
<b>Menu Evaluation:</b> I evaluated the menu and identified a heat-and-serve entrée to be substituted with a speed-scratch entrée. I noted how the product credited to the weekly meal pattern and its contribution toward calories, saturated fat, and sodium.		
<b>Procurement (Part I):</b> I reviewed ICN’s <a href="#">Working With Your Procurement Partners</a> worksheet and discussed possible speed-scratch recipes and value-added food products with my vendors.		
<b>Recipe/Equipment/Storage Identification:</b> I identified a potential speed-scratch recipe that can be made with products I can procure, adequately store, and produce with the equipment I have on hand.		
<b>Recipe Development:</b> I developed, tested, and standardized a recipe following the steps outlined in the <a href="#">USDA Recipe Standardization Guide for School Nutrition Programs</a> .		
<b>Staff Training:</b> I trained my staff on necessary food preparation techniques and how to use equipment required for the recipe, the <i>Process Approach to HACCP</i> , meal presentation, and serving line placement.		
<b>Procurement (Part II):</b> I discussed how to cost-effectively procure the ingredients needed for the recipe with my vendor and included the recipe ingredients in the upcoming bid.		
<b>Marketing:</b> I promoted our new product and requested feedback from my staff and students.		

## SPEED-SCRATCH ACTION PLAN

Many tasks outlined in *Speed-Scratch Readiness Checklist* require multiple steps and detailed planning. Use an Action Plan template like the one below to identify the task (goal) and list the milestones to help you to achieve it.

<b>Goal (measurable and specific):</b> By January 15, 202X, complete staff training for Speed-Scratch Personal Pizza.			
<b>Milestone</b> What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>
Train staff on the following preparation techniques: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proofing dough</li> <li>• Fitting dough to pan</li> <li>• Prepping seasoning blend</li> <li>• Prepping sauce</li> <li>• Organizing topping assembly line</li> <li>• Prepping pizza for baking</li> </ul>	Sam	01/07/202X	01/07/202X
Train staff on the following equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dough press</li> <li>• Conveyor oven</li> <li>• Pizza cutting tool (have staff try different tools)</li> </ul>	Vicki	01/07/202X	01/07/202X

Now you try!

<b>Goal (measurable and specific):</b>			
<b>Milestone</b> What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Target Date</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>

***Transitioning to a speed-scratch food preparation operation from a heat-and-serve and convenience foods model can help your program save money, time, and labor; increase the quality of your meals; and provide more control over the amount of sodium in your meals.***

This project was funded using U.S. Department of Agriculture grant funds. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

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Suggested Reference Citation:

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2022). *Shaking it up! Small changes lead to big flavors. Principles of speed-scratch food preparation.* University, MS: Author.

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