



## Manager's Corner

# Food Presentation

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# **Institute of Child Nutrition**

## **The University of Mississippi**

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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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## Professional Standards

### SERVING FOOD – 2200

**Employee will be able to correctly and efficiently serve food portions to meet all USDA school meal pattern 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: Food Presentation* 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: Questions

### 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 principles of good food presentation to help increase students' selection of a reimbursable school meal.

**Background information:** Good food presentation is important. It grabs the students' attention as soon as they enter the serving area. Good food presentation increases eye appeal and stimulates the appetite.

**Why it is important:** Food presentation is important because sight is one of the senses we use to judge something before we taste it. The food could be delicious, but if it does not look appealing, students are less likely to eat it. Set up serving lines to highlight the hard work your team has put into making the food. Adding a simple garnish, varying shapes and colors, and maintaining clean serving lines increases the appeal of your program.

## Questions for Staff

- **Why do you think food presentation is important?**  
**Answer:** The more appealing the food looks, the more likely the customer will select it.
- **In terms of food presentation, what do you think about making the items look appealing?**  
**Answer:** A variety of shapes and colors can enhance food presentation. For example, adding a few blueberries to cantaloupe or cutting a wrap at an angle are some ways to provide an appealing food presentation.

- **As school nutrition staff, what ideas do you think would engage students to find out their thoughts on the way we present our food?**

**Answer:**

- Ask students to participate in a focus group when plating or serving new menu items.
- Organize a menu item-naming contest among students that emphasize how items look or are presented on the line (for example, Rainbow Pasta, Confetti Corn, or Creamy Chicken).
- Invite students into the kitchen and have them design a display tray using existing menu items or set up the food bars that are more visually appealing.
- Request the student council representatives to hold a monthly meeting in the kitchen. While there, provide complimentary snacks if the budget allows and invite them to grade the appearance of food items. For those that score low, ask for their input to make it more appealing to students.

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

## Activity: Serving Line Set Up

**Activity materials included in this document:**

- **Principles of Good Food Presentation**
- **Food Garnishing by Color**

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

- Copies of the handouts
- Pens/Pencils

**Activity Instructions:**

- Print the handouts - **Principles of Good Food Presentation Handout** and **Food Garnishing by Color**.
- Distribute handouts.
- As a group, recall the day's menu items.
- Decide what colors and types of garnish would be appropriate for each dish.
- Discuss and describe how to set up the serving line and ways the staff can make it more appealing to students.

# Principles of Good Food Presentation

Good food presentation is important. It grabs the students' attention as soon as they enter the serving area. Good food presentation increases eye appeal and stimulates the appetite. Before planning for school meals, here are some tips to keep in mind.

## Increase Eye Appeal

### Light

- Make sure serving areas are well lit. Consider under-counter or track lighting to enhance the appearance of foods.

### Color

- Avoid using poor quality ingredients.
- Proper cooking is a must! It ensures bright, crisp colors.
- Garnish the food.
- Plan the fruits and vegetables in your menus to include at least two colors.

### Shapes

- Add interest by combining natural shapes or creating new shapes.
- Vary the cuts in the food and shapes of food on the line.
- Surprise customers with unexpected shapes—cut food into triangles instead of squares, diamonds instead of rectangles.

### Simplicity

- Place garnish in the center, side edge, or corner(s) of the pan.
- Clean lines attract the eye and focus the attention.
- Added decorations should enhance the food, not compete with it.

### Height

- Keep serving pans full, making it easy for students to see the complete array of options.
- Add height to meals with other ingredients. (For example, adding shredded lettuce to a sub sandwich may add a little cost, but increases appeal to students.)
- Choose containers that add height to the line.



# Principles of Good Food Presentation, continued

## Stimulate the Appetite

### Senses

- Make food more appealing by allowing students to experience it using their five senses.
- Sight: seeing beautifully presented food encourages students to select and try it.
- Smell: smelling the aroma enhances the attraction to food and increases the anticipation to taste it.
- Taste: fresh-tasting, well-prepared food provides positive experiences physically and emotionally.
- Touch: feeling a variety of textures and temperatures enhances the enjoyment of the meal.
- Hearing: the sound of crisp, crunchy food makes it fun to eat.

### Texture

- Choose textures that complement each other.
- Contrast textures in a dish.
  - Serve toasted sesame seeds sprinkled on green beans.
- Weave texture through the menu.
  - Serve toasty garlic bread, tender ravioli, and crunchy broccoli salad.

## Vary the Temperatures of Foods

- Serve hot vegetable soup with a cool, crisp green salad and crackers.

## Use Specialty Bars for Fun

- Use specialty bars to expand your cafeteria and make it a fun and ever-changing eating scene.

### Other Quick Tips

- Put fresh fruits and vegetables to the front of the serving line. By offering these selections first, students will select more instead of racing past them once they pick up their hot item.
- Pre-portion cooked vegetables and place the vegetables so students can help themselves.
- Display whole fruits in baskets near the register. Add a sign advertising these choices.
- Add static clings to the sneeze guard to remind students to select fruits and vegetables.
- Jazz up the names of the menu items, and add signage to your serving line.
- Display a sample meal, including salad and vegetable dish, for students to see before entering the line to make their selection.
- Offer tasting samples of new items as students enter the serving line or pass them around the lunchroom while they are eating, so they can taste test the fruit or vegetable before offered on the line. Promote these as "free samples."
- Make food fun by providing finger foods that add sensory stimulation and make sample tasting easy.

# Food Garnishing by Color

Green			
Vegetables			
Acorn Squash	Beet Greens	Broccoli	Brussels Sprouts
Cabbage	Carrot Tops	Celery Leaves and Stalks	Collard Greens
Corn Husks	Cucumber Skins	Edamame	Endive
Green Beans	Green Peppers	Green Tomatoes	Herbs
Kale	Leeks	Lettuce	Olives
Peas	Pickles	Scallion	Spinach Leaves
Watercress	Zucchini		
Fruits			
Avocado	Green Grapes	Green Apples	Green Applesauce
Green Plums	Kiwi Fruit	Limes	Papaya Skin
Pineapple Tops	Watermelon Skins	Honeydew Melons	
Red			
Vegetables			
Beets	Paprika	Pimento	Radicchio
Radishes	Red Onion	Red Cabbage	Red Chili Peppers
Red Skin Pears	Red Skin Potatoes	Red Peppers	Tomatoes
Fruits			
Apples	Cherries	Cranberries	Pomegranate
Plums	Red Raspberries	Strawberries	Watermelon
Yellow/Orange			
Vegetables			
Carrots	Butternut Squash	Corn	Pumpkin
Sweet Potatoes	Yellow Squash	Yellow Turnips	
Fruits			
Apricots	Bananas	Cantaloupe	Grapefruit
Lemons	Nectarines	Orange	Papaya
Peaches	Persimmons	Star Fruit	Tangerines
Cheese and Eggs			
Diced Hard Boiled Eggs	Grated Cheese	Shredded Cheese	Sliced Hard Boiled Eggs
Brown/Tan/White/Other			
Vegetables			
Cauliflower	Celery	Jicama	Mushrooms
White Onions	White Potatoes		
Fruits			
Black Raspberries	Blueberries	Raisins	
Breads, Pastas, Grains			
Bread Crumbs	Chow Mein Noodles	Croutons	

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