

Culinary Lab Time Management Techniques

There is a huge difference between working in the restaurant industry and teaching students how to work in the restaurant industry. The biggest difference in the industry and the classroom is time. In the industry, employees are often up before the sun is and working deep into the night to make sure everything is up to the standard expected in this industry. By comparison, we as culinary arts teachers, are often asked to teach in a 45 minute class period what may take an accomplished chef hours to do in the industry. This is one of the toughest challenges facing culinary arts teachers. Below you'll find a few tips to help you face such challenges.

Organization

- Spend some time (before the first day of school if possible) organizing your lab to control the work flow in your classroom/kitchen on lab days. Make sure things are close to where they'll be used and that they are stored conveniently. The idea is to limit student trips across your classroom, saving you time.
- Make sure everything has a home and that there are labels identifying where everything belongs. Making sure everything has a home can make sure things STAY organized.
- Take pictures of what your shelves should look like, print and laminate them, and train students to make the shelves match the picture.
- Constantly analyze if things are in the right place. Be flexible with your storage. If you see something is not working, change it.
- Pull out equipment necessary for the day's activities and place it out for your students. In the same way a bellringer works, if your students come in and you have all they need for the day laid out for them, then they can get to the learning portion of the day quicker instead of spending a lot of time locating and gathering their wares. You'd be surprised how much quicker you can set out their equipment versus having them do it.

Expectations

- Spend whatever amount of time is necessary to make sure your students completely understand what you expect of them in a lab situation. If your students are allowed to form habits in the lab environment before they are told what is expected of them then you may never be able to break them of those habits.
- Make sure students know what is expected of them in the way of cleaning. There's nothing worse than having to clean up after a group of students on lab days. Or worse, having one class leave a mess at the end of a class and have the next period's students walk into that mess. More on this in the sidework section below.
- Make sure the students know what everything is called. You could use the laminated picture trick here too so that students learn and RETAIN the names of everything. Most of our students are visual learners so use this to your advantage. This tip alone can save you some headaches when lab time rolls around.

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- When it comes to working in the lab (and the classroom too, for that matter) set standards and expectations and make sure you hold the students to them. Whatever you set as the consequence for failing to meet expectations, **STICK TO IT**. Do not ever fail to follow through on those consequences. This is not a “be tough on your kids” piece of advice, but rather a “hold your students accountable at all times” piece of advice. Students **LOVE** boundaries. They love knowing where to be, what to do, when to do it by. Some of them will do what they can to get around the boundaries, but for the most part establishing those boundaries and sticking to them can make the difference when it comes to whether or not students successfully meet your expectations.

Sidework

- Sidework is a term that your students will see once they become a part of this industry, so it’s best to use that terminology.
- Sidework is any task assigned to employees that they are asked to do in addition to their typical work. Sidework is effective because it takes all of the tasks necessary and splits them up among people/groups so that not one individual/group feels that they have too much work to do.
- Sidework also helps students to be accountable for their actions. If they are assigned an area to clean or organize and they neglect to do so it will be obvious. This can help with grading purposes as well.
- The best way to start the process of assigning sidework is to list **ALL TASKS** that must be done in your lab over a certain time period and then start dividing that work out evenly among the number of students/groups you have.
- Rotate the sidework periodically so that students don’t get tired of doing the same sidework every time they are in the lab setting.
- Make the sidework list a fluid document. If something needs to be added then add it.
- Demonstrate the sidework for every student so they know what the expectations are. Make an entire class day out of it. You won’t regret it.
- List sidework for the start of class and for the end of class. The best strategy is to only assign **ONE** task per group for each part of class. For instance, Group 1 will **ONLY** have to check the hand washing station(s) and refill paper towels and soap when they come in. Then before they leave they will wipe down the hand sinks. Assigning more than one task per group can burden your groups and eat into valuable instruction time.
- Designate “Sanitation Managers” and have them “check out” all the groups, ensuring that their sidework was done. Make sure you rotate this responsibility amongst all students.

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Multiple Day Lab Technique

One of the best tricks to saving time in the kitchen is to split a lab into multiple days. A single lab can be split into any of the following activities. You could spend an entire day on each of these activities if the need was there.

- **Mise en place** – Consider spending a day to gather/measure/wrap/label ingredients and equipment that will be needed for a lab. This will ensure you the most time on production days.
- **Demonstrate** – Demonstrating one day and having the students duplicate what you did the next day can be a very effective strategy. Unless you have your students for 2-3 hours at a time, trying to squeeze your demo and their execution all into one day can be a nightmare.
- **Execute** – This is the day the students do what you’ve been teaching them to do. Since the students have already received all the instruction, all you have to do is go around the lab and perform corrective actions and quick refreshers to students.
- **Clean Up** – Although it’s ideal, not every lab can be cleaned up completely on the same day that it is executed. This may not sound ideal, but it just may be the time saving technique you need to do that exciting lab you’ve been afraid to tackle. Consider refrigerating “dirties” that would attract pests or start to smell until you get back the next day. This would include anything that had egg, butter, cheese, meat, honey, etc. You can also store dirties that had room temp ingredients unrefrigerated in an airtight container until the next day. This would include anything that had sugar, flour, water, shortening, etc.

Example of a Multiple Day Lab

This is a way to do bread for a whole class in a week with 45 minute class periods.

- **Day 1:** Have students mise en place WHITE PAN BREAD recipe. Mise en place your demonstration recipe as well.
- **Day 2:** Demo mixing the bread. Place your demo bread in the refrigerator to slow proof (works best with dry instant yeast).
- **Day 3:** As soon as students get to class, demonstrate shaping the bread for them by using your demo dough that you have brought up to temperature and risen. Then have students begin mixing their own dough. Once all of their dough is in the fridge then you can bake off the bread that you’ve been rising while they have been mixing. The smaller you shape your bread the less time it takes to bake. Dinner rolls can bake in as little as 7 minutes. Loaves can bake in as little as 10 minutes. You might have students running out of your classroom with hot rolls but they’ve at least seen you demonstrate everything to this point.

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- **Day 4:** As soon as students come into class you have their temped and risen dough on their stations with all of their equipment needed. The students shape their dough, rise it for as long as possible and then bake right before class ends. Worst case scenario is you get a 15 minute rise on your bread on the shaped bread before baking.
- **Day 5:** Clean up and recap. Make sure students understand the time constraints and challenge them to do this at home all in one day.