

Creating Portion Specs to Reduce Food Waste

GUIDELINE

Create and use portion specs for your top 5–10 most-ordered items.

WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE

- Culinary
- Stewarding
- Sales/Planning
- Event Management

HOW TO USE

Portion specs are your foundation for consistent portions and reduced waste. This guide uses a staged approach—start with your most-wasted items; perfect the process; then expand.

Rather than overwhelming your team by trying to spec every recipe at once, begin with 1–2 items that generate the most waste. This builds confidence, refines your process, and shows immediate cost savings.

Use and adapt this checklist to provide a simple process for your employees to create portion specs for your food offerings.

Creating Portion Specs to Reduce Food Waste

Determine how much guests actually eat to set accurate portion specs, reduce overproduction, and control costs.

Step 1: Identify Top Wasted Items

- Choose 1–2 top-wasted items. Start with bread and condiments before moving to entrees. Utilize plate waste audits to determine highly wasted items.
- Confirm current waste via photo audits and staff observations.
- Check in with Chef:** Review selected items and get approval to proceed.

Step 2: Record the Starting Spec

Write down exact quantities needed:

- Item name
- Total yield needed (number of portions)
- Portion size (weight or volume—weigh when possible)
- Portion cost per person (ingredient cost ÷ number of portions)
- Pan/vessel size (smaller vessels = better portion control)
- Serving utensil (scoops, ladles with ounce markings)
- Prep notes (as purchased amounts, trim loss, cooking yield)

Step 3: Test, Measure, Adjust

- Compare what was offered vs. what was eaten. (For example, if 20–30% goes uneaten, then the portion was too large. If food consistently runs out early, then the portion was too small.)
- Adjust recipe yield or serving utensil to match actual consumption.
- Recalculate portion cost if adjustments change ingredient amounts.
- Re-test at the next event.
- Check in with Chef:** Share analysis results and proposed adjustments.

Step 4: Approve & Standardize

- Compare what was offered vs. eaten (Culinary + Stewarding).
- Post specs near service line (Event Management).
- Once results are consistent, record final portion size, portion cost, utensil/pan used, and service style (see step 2).
- Check in with Chef:** Get final approval on locked spec before communicating.

Step 5: Share & Train

- Share specs across departments and throughout the culinary team.
- Post specs near the service line or include in BEO notes.

Step 6: Repeat for More Items

Once your first 1–2 items are consistent, add the next 1–2 most-wasted items. Repeat the process until all high-waste items have specs.

Quick Tips for Success

- **Weigh, don't guess** - Scales are your friend
- **Use smaller vessels** - Reduces overserving
- **Label everything** - Pan sizes, utensils, portion sizes
- **Test during actual service** - Not just in prep
- **Document everything** - Keep notes, take photos, record changes
- **Celebrate wins** - Share waste reduction results with the team

REMEMBER: Perfect specs on two items are better than mediocre specs on 20 items. Start small. Get it right. Then expand.