

# how to correctly read recipes

Believe it or not, but recipes are written using a "secret formula" helping to ensure you are successful at understanding the steps and processes of making baked goods. This precise language only helps if you understand the formula, though, and the reasoning behind how recipes are written is rarely shared.

Many times, the problem with how your recipes turn out is simply that the recipe itself was written in a way that could be easily misunderstood.

Whether you are preparing something time-tested from an old family cookbook or a recipe from a favorite blog, the same rules apply. You should have understanding of the structure of the recipe and be able to question when things don't make sense.

These are a few guidelines to follow that will help you see why recipes are written the way they are, and how to use that knowledge to your advantage for successful baking (almost) every time.

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## No. 1: READ THE RECIPE COMPLETELY BEFORE BEGINNING

The first step in reading a recipe is to be sure to read through the ingredients needed as well as the instructions for what you will be doing before you ever begin mixing your batters or doughs. It seems like an easy solution, but more often than not, things that go wrong are because of something that was "hidden" in the body of the recipe.

- **Many times there are things like water that may not be listed in the ingredients list and could be overlooked as you're preparing your dish.**
- **A recipe may need an ingredient to be, but not say that specifically in the ingredients list.** For example, when making [Oven Baked Corn](#), egg yolks are added into the mixture first, while egg whites are folded in later. It's possible that the recipe would only mention needing two eggs and without checking over the instructions, you may not notice that they need to be separated until it is too late.
- **Pay attention to steps that need to take place before you actually start the recipe**, such as allowing butter or cream cheese to soften, allowing eggs to come to room temperature, or boiling water.

- For some recipes, **you may need to lower the temperature of the oven at some point during the baking process.**
- **The instructions may point out specific tools or supplies that you need and should gather ahead of time.** For example, does it suggest using parchment paper on your baking sheet or does it say to use a stand mixer for preparing the dough?
- **Pay attention to the specific type of ingredient the recipe is calling for.** Is it all-purpose flour, cake flour, or self-rising flour? Granulated white sugar or brown sugar? Also keep an eye out for when a recipe lists baking powder or baking soda. They look very similar in name and appearance, but can alter the success or taste of your baking if the wrong one is used.

## No. 2: NOTICE THE ORDER

**Ingredients in a recipe should be listed in their order of use.** The item listed first is the item that will go into the bowl first.

**And if ingredients are put into the recipe at the same time like spices, they are in order by amount from largest to smallest.** A Tablespoon of cinnamon will appear before a teaspoon of ginger, for example.

## No. 3: PAY ATTENTION TO THE COMMA

You'll often find that there are specific instructions in the ingredients list for what to do with each a particular item. But those instructions can be confusing without understanding the meaning of the comma.

- When a measurement is listed with a description of the ingredient (like 1 cup chopped walnuts), follow the instructions for what needs done (the chopping of the walnuts), and then measure the ingredient's volume.
- Every chop, melt, grind, or dice instruction that appears **after** a comma in the ingredients list should be done **after** the ingredient has been measured whole (1 cup walnuts, chopped).

## No. 4: KNOW YOUR ABBREVIATIONS

Sometimes, amounts are written in abbreviations. Know that tsp. stands for teaspoon, Tbsp (normally written with a capital T) stands for Tablespoon, c stands for cups, and oz stands for ounces.

## No. 5: RECIPES TELL YOU HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOUR FOOD IS DONE

**Near the end of your recipe will be a time range for how long what you are making should stay in the oven or on the stove top.** It is not normally an exact time, but rather a range such as 8 to 10 minutes.

**There should also be a description of what the food will look, smell, or taste like.** (Light brown in color, smells nutty, a knife inserted into the center comes out clean.) The baking time gives you a general idea of how long your food should cook, but those visual and scent clues are equally important.

When you see that your dish has achieved the right color or texture, it should be removed from the heat even if you haven't reached the desired baking time. And there may be times that you must let the food cook a few minutes longer than the recipe suggested in order to meet the condition described.

You'll find that the more baking you do, the more lenient you'll be with following the recipe exactly as written. As you become more adept, you'll be comfortable substituting different ingredients or maybe mixing everything together at one time rather than separately as the recipe calls.

As a beginner with any recipe, though, it is important to learn the basic steps before experimenting or trying to make something from scratch.

A recipe is like a road map for the kitchen. And it isn't just for giving you a list of ingredients and series of steps to follow. If you truly know how to read and follow a written recipe, there is no reason why you can't be successful at preparing basic desserts and baked goods.