



Archangel Ink

Cookbook Style Guide

**Adapted from *The Recipe Writer's Handbook*
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Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to pursue publishing a cookbook! Even if you are a seasoned author, you may find that writing a cookbook is a very different experience than writing other types of nonfiction. Cookbooks are a genre with very specific requirements:

- They require a high degree of organization and structure without sounding formulaic or trite.
- Cookbooks need to be very clear—authors cannot take for granted that readers will understand every term or piece of instruction because most readers do not have a deep knowledge of culinary technique or lingo. (However, it's important that the tone of the cookbook is not patronizing or condescending.)
- Consistency is key. There are so many small elements in a cookbook that it can be hard to be consistent in all of them throughout the entire project. A few things to remember include the following:
 - » Recipes need to refer to ingredients by the same name. For example, do not use “scallions” in one recipe and “green onions” in the next.
 - » Each recipe must have a yield, and this needs to be phrased the same way throughout the book. The simplest way to do this is the “Makes . . .” construction. For example, “Makes 4 servings,” “Makes 1 cup,” or “Makes 2 dozen.”
 - » Each recipe must have a headnote (i.e., a paragraph or two that introduces the recipe with a story about the recipe's history or creation, some interesting facts about the recipe, or some helpful tips that readers can use while making it).
 - » Each recipe name throughout the cookbook should be consistent in tone. If you like fun and abstract recipe names (e.g., “Cool as a Cucumber Salad”), use that tone throughout the book. However, if you prefer more straightforward names, please ensure each recipe name is consistent in that regard (e.g., “Cucumber Salad with Fresh Dill”).
- Because cookbooks contain so many details, it's best to keep a style sheet of your work. A style sheet is a tool used by editors to keep track of their editorial decisions (e.g., particular spellings, abbreviations, whether to use numerals or spelled-out numbers, formatting notes, and so on). Keeping a similar list while you write your cookbook will help ensure consistency as well as a record you can use to refresh your memory if you take breaks between writing recipes. A few things to record on your cookbook style sheet could include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - » **Spellings.** For example, will you spell it “fillet” or “filet” as a noun?

- » **Terms.** Will you use “fresh lemon juice” or “freshly squeezed lemon juice”?
- » **Formatting.** What size of font will you use for recipe names? For yields? For headnotes? Will you number the steps in the directions or simply use paragraph breaks?
- » **Duplicate directions.** For example, if you have a chapter on smoothies, and the steps in the directions are all essentially the same (e.g., “Blend on high for 1 to 2 minutes, or until smooth”), write down your directions in the style sheet and then copy and paste them into your manuscript in the appropriate place.
- » **Questions and comments for your editor.** If you know you will have questions or notes for your editor after you complete the manuscript, keep a running list in your style sheet. Then, when you submit your cookbook for editing, all you will have to do is copy and paste your questions and comments into an e-mail!

Don't let these requirements intimidate you as you write your cookbook. Cookbooks are a labor-intensive genre, but by following the preceding and following guidelines, writing your first (or tenth!) cookbook will be much easier and more efficient. Observing the advice in this style guide will also help ensure a quicker turnaround at the editorial stage—the less rewriting and reorganizing your editor needs to do on your manuscript, the sooner it can appear in print for cooks everywhere to enjoy.

Now that we've covered a few generalities, let's look at more specific requirements as you write your recipes.

Ingredients

A well-written ingredient list is far more important to a recipe's success than many people think. Without a clear, organized, detailed ingredient list, readers may have a bad experience making your recipe (possibly causing them to view your cookbook in a less than positive light) or they may feel confused or overwhelmed just looking at the recipe and skip it altogether (possibly alienating your audience, who may feel they've wasted their hard-earned money on a user-unfriendly cookbook).

With these things in mind, let's look at a few guidelines that will assist you in creating ingredient lists to catch readers' eyes and whet their appetites.

Sizes and Amounts

Sizes and amounts are vital to a clear, concise ingredient list. Please observe the following guidelines.

Produce

When your recipes call for fresh produce, always specify sizes and weights as applicable. For example:

- 1 large bunch kale
- 2 small onions
- 1 (1-inch) piece fresh ginger
- 2 pounds russet potatoes
- ¼ cup tightly packed fresh basil leaves

Please keep in mind that not all produce requires sizes. Some exceptions include the following:

- Garlic (bulbs and cloves; however, if the garlic is minced or chopped, please mention the amount in teaspoons, tablespoons, and so on)
- Green onions
- Cherry/grape tomatoes
- Grapes
- Berries (except strawberries)
- Green beans

- Brussels sprouts

Please note that the preceding list is not exhaustive. If you're ever in doubt if a piece of produce needs a specific size, include the size anyway. It's much more efficient for the editor to delete an unneeded size than it is for them to query the author and wait for the changes to be made (this makes revisions easier on your end, as well).

Remember that even if a size is not needed, an amount is. For example:

- 6 cloves garlic
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes
- 8 ounces fresh blackberries

Packages

If your recipes call for canned, bagged, boxed, or otherwise packaged ingredients, please list the size of package as specifically as you can. For example:

- 16 ounces penne
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans
- 2 (2-liter) bottles club soda
- 1 (8-ounce) package rice noodles

Other Guidelines

While I've provided a few tips and examples above, please remember that each ingredient will need some sort of amount. The only exceptions would be ingredients used for garnishes, decorations, textual consistency (e.g., water to thin out a soup), and to season to the cook's preferences. For example:

- Chopped fresh cilantro, for garnish
- Cooked brown rice, for serving
- Powdered sugar, for dusting
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Water, as needed

Here again, if you're in doubt as to whether to include an amount, please do include it.

Measurements

Easy-to-understand measurements can make or break a recipe. If readers are unsure of the measurements, they may become frustrated and move on to a different cookbook. Or they may misread your measurements and end up with a too-salty soup, a too-sweet scone, or a too-dry casserole. To ensure clarity (as well as consistency), please be sure to follow these measurement guidelines:

- Spell out *all* measurements. A few include:
 - » Teaspoon
 - » Tablespoon
 - » Ounce
 - » Pound
 - » Cup
- Remember that there is a difference between measurements listed before the ingredient and after the ingredient. For example, “1 cup chopped walnuts” is going to yield a different result than “1 cup walnuts, chopped.”
- Be consistent when using liquid measurements. For example, don’t call for “4 ounces water” in one recipe and “½ cup water” in another.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not use decimals to indicate measurements. Instead, use fractions. For example:
 - » “1½ ounces dark chocolate” (not “1.5 ounces dark chocolate”)
 - » “¼ cup vegetable broth” (not “0.25 cup vegetable broth”)

Ingredient Preparation

Many recipes require ingredients that have been chopped, peeled, or somehow prepped prior to being used in a particular recipe. When your recipe requires a prepped ingredient, please keep the following guidelines in mind.

Chopping, Mincing, and the Like

- Remember that there is a difference between measurements listed before the ingredient and after the ingredient. For example, “1 cup chopped walnuts” is going to yield a different result than “1 cup walnuts, chopped.”

- When an ingredient is chopped prior to being used, specify as often as possible the size of pieces needed. For example:
 - » 1 large russet potato, cut into ½-inch cubes
 - » 1 medium green bell pepper, cut into ¼-inch thick strips
 - » 2 small carrots, cut into ½-inch thick pieces
 - » 1 large butternut squash, cut into 1-inch cubes

- However, if the exact size of cuts doesn't matter to the result of the recipe (e.g., vegetables used to create a vegetable broth, fresh herbs used as garnish), please choose among these terms:
 - » “coarsely chopped” (or “roughly chopped”; please be consistent)
 - » “finely chopped”
 - » “thinly sliced”
 - » “minced”
 - » “cubed”
 - » “quartered,” “halved,” and so on

- Here are a few examples of the preceding guidelines:
 - » 1 large bunch fresh cilantro, coarsely chopped
 - » 1 large shallot, finely chopped
 - » 1 small rib celery, thinly sliced
 - » 3 cloves garlic, minced
 - » 1 medium sweet potato, cubed
 - » 1 large onion, quartered

Peeling, Pitting, and the Like

Some ingredients (particularly produce) will require removing skins, removing seeds, draining and rinsing, and so on. Here are a few tips as you write recipes calling for these ingredients:

- Write each ingredient entry so that it follows a logical order of preparation. For example:
 - » 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, drained and rinsed (since “rinsed” implies draining the rinse water, do not use “rinsed and drained”; “drained” refers to first draining the

cooking liquid away from the chickpeas)

- » 1 large Fuji apple, peeled and cored (readers will likely find it easier to peel the apple and then cut the center out of it than vice versa)
 - » 1 small avocado, pitted and peeled (it would be very messy to pit a peeled avocado)
 - » 1 pound extra-firm tofu, drained and pressed (water-packed tofu will need to be drained before it can be pressed to remove excess moisture)
- Please note that while in *Merriam-Webster* “stemmed” can refer to something that has the stem intact or something that has had its stem removed, for clarity in cookbooks, “stemmed” generally refers to something that has had the stems removed. Therefore, “1 pound kale, stemmed” means readers should remove the leafy greens from the stems prior to using the kale in the recipe. However, if you prefer, you can be even clearer by using a construction similar to this one:
- » 1 pound kale, stems removed
- The preceding point also applies to the term “seeded.” To ensure clarity, please specify whether readers should remove the seeds using a construction similar to this one (do not use “deseeded,” as that is not an actual word according to *Merriam-Webster*):
- » 1 medium butternut squash, peeled, halved, and seeds removed
- If an ingredient can be peeled or unpeeled (e.g., apples, carrots, potatoes, and the like), always specify. Also, please remember to write the ingredient entry in the order of the steps needed, if applicable. For example:
- » 1 pound red potatoes, peeled
 - » 2 large Fuji apples, unpeeled and cored
 - » 1 small carrot, peeled and finely chopped

Equipment

To ensure clarity, always specify the sizes of skillets, pots, pans, bowls, measuring cups and the like. Some equipment, like skillets and pots, can be referred to in general terms. For example:

- a large skillet
- a small saucepan
- a medium stockpot
- a large measuring cup
- a medium bowl

Other pieces of equipment—like baking dishes, cake pans, and cookie sheets—will usually need have their dimensions specified. For example:

- a 5-quart slow cooker
- a 9 x 13-inch cake pan
- an 8 x 8-inch baking dish
- a 2-quart baking dish

The best tip to keep in mind when referring to equipment in recipe directions is the more specific, the better.

Directions

Writing recipe directions is all a matter of balance. Some cookbook authors write very long, cumbersome directions (e.g., directions that are redundant, that are tangential, or are just too conversational). Others tend to write vague or confusing directions (e.g., directions that do not specify vital steps, like preheating the oven; or directions that assume readers will know advanced cooking terms and techniques).

Please note that perhaps the best way to write recipe directions (aside from relying on this style guide, of course!) is to use recipe testers and implement their feedback. Recipe testers can be friends, family, trusted blog readers (if you're a food blogger), or anyone else willing to make your food and give you brutally honest feedback on your recipes while also being trustworthy enough not to pilfer or publish your recipes. While recipe testing is certainly not necessary in order to publish with Archangel Ink, it can often make your job as author easier overall because you will have already gotten valuable feedback about the clarity of your directions as well as the general appeal of your food.

This section of the style guide will help you write clear, concise, understandable directions while retaining your authorial voice.

Order of Steps

Be sure to always write the directions in the order that the recipe needs to be cooked. If a cake needs to be baked at 350°F, the first step in the directions should be “Preheat the oven to 350°F.” This kind of writing ensures that readers won't have to wait around after making the batter while the oven heats up; it also applies to things like boiling water and heating oil. Always ask yourself, “What needs to happen first, second, third, and so on?” Recipe directions must follow a logical, efficient order of steps.

Calling for Ingredients

Few things are as confusing to cooks as recipe directions that do not call for ingredients in the order used in the ingredient list. For example, if the first step of making a casserole is to sauté the onions and garlic, be sure that the oil, onions, and garlic are mentioned first in the ingredient list *and* in the directions. For example:

- 2 tablespoons grapeseed oil
- 2 small onions, cut into ½-inch pieces

- 4 cloves garlic, minced; *then*:
- Heat the grapeseed oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onions and garlic . . .

Heat Levels

Be sure to always specify the heat level needed in various applications (boiling, simmering, sautéing, baking, and so on). For example, if readers need to bring soup to a boil then reduce it to a simmer, construct the directions accordingly:

- Bring the soup to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium and simmer for 20 minutes.

When the oven is being used, be sure to list the preheating step in the most logical place in the directions. If a dish is baked immediately after cooks prepare it, the preheating step should be the first step mentioned in the directions. If a dish's preparation takes a long time (or it needs to marinate, ferment, or something similar), mention preheating after preparation but before baking. Always specify the exact temperature when using the oven, unless it is being used to keep something warm. For example:

- Preheat the oven to 425°F; but:
- Put the pancakes on an oven-safe plate and place them in a warm oven while you prepare the blueberry compote.

Cooking Times

Many readers (especially those who are inexperienced in the kitchen) will find approximate cooking times helpful in recipe directions. Here again, please be as specific as possible, providing both a suggested cooking time as well as a “doneness test” when possible. (This is especially important in recipes using meat, as it could introduce food-safety concerns.) Following are some examples:

- Bake the breadsticks 7 to 10 minutes, or until golden brown on the bottom.
- Roast the chicken for 1 hour, or until the meat reaches an internal temperature of 165°F.
- Sauté the bell peppers for 5 minutes, stirring frequently.
- Simmer the stew for 20 minutes, or until it is thick and fragrant.

Concision

Recipe steps should not be too short, but neither should they be too long. Readers need specifics, but they can be easily overwhelmed. Authors who have a very conversational tone tend to bring that conversational tone into recipe directions. Similarly, authors who are very knowledgeable regarding cooking terms and techniques can write directions that become tangential as they define and explain every word and step. In the end, it's the editor's job to make sure that recipe directions are clear, easy to follow, and true to the author's voice while also being as concise as possible. However, as the author, please remember that some conversational or technical tangents would be best reserved for sidebars or chef's notes rather than appearing in the middle of directions for what may be an already complex recipe.

An example of this follows. This may be a very friendly-sounding direction, but it's a bit long (32 words) and disorganized (note that the author mentions flouring the surface *after* kneading):

- Knead the dough for 3 to 5 minutes. I think it's best to coat your hands in a little flour before you knead the dough. You should also flour the work surface.

A revised example of this direction will be shorter (21 words) and clearer (notice the order of steps are in a more logical form) but still retain the author's voice:

- Sprinkle some flour on a work surface and coat your hands as well. Knead the dough for 3 to 5 minutes.

Remember, Your Editor Is Your Friend

While this style guide may seem overwhelming, remember that you alone are not responsible for every aspect of your cookbook. Your editor is in your corner, in your book's corner, and in your readers' corner. Your editor will help you bring your cookbook dreams to fruition by doing the following:

- Your editor will ensure that this style guide (and any other applicable style guides) are followed throughout the manuscript to create a consistent, professional-quality cookbook.
- Your editor will ask you questions, pointing out where revisions are needed to clarify, organize, and generally strengthen your book.
- Your editor will make sure culinary terms are used correctly, that directions are clear and easy to follow, and that ingredient lists are in the proper order.
- Your editor will watch for nitty-gritty details, like yields, formatting, grammar, punctuation, usage, and the like.
- Your editor will treat your cookbook as the unique creation it is, ensuring that it's the best it can possibly be before being published.

You and your editor are a team. By following this style guide as closely as possible, you help your teammate-editor by providing a cleaner, more organized manuscript. This means your editor can work more efficiently and go deeper in their edits because they won't be having stop and change every instance of "tbsp" to "tablespoon." In return, your editor will help you by returning your manuscript sooner and with more helpful feedback than "Please specify the size of skillet" (although your editor will certainly not neglect those details if they need revised).

Once again, congratulations on pursuing your publishing goals! We at Archangel Ink look forward to working with you to bring amazing recipes to your readers.