

Charcuterie & Cured Meats — Workbook

This workbook accompanies the Charcuterie & Cured Meats course and guides you through hands-on practice at each stage of the craft. Use the exercises to build your cure formulations from scratch, the worksheets to track every batch, and the checklists to lock in safe procedure before you start. Complete each section alongside the corresponding module before moving on.

Curing Science and Safety Foundations

Apply the four-hurdle model, practice safe nitrite dosing calculations, and audit your setup before beginning your first cure.

Exercise: Hurdle Analysis for Three Products

For each of the three products below, identify which of the four hurdles (water activity, salt, nitrite, pH) are active and rate their contribution as primary, supporting, or absent. Then explain in one sentence why refrigeration is still required for two of the three products.

- Fresh-cured pork belly (equilibrium-cured 7 days, not yet smoked or dried): which hurdles are active?

- Cold-smoked back bacon (cured + smoked, not cooked): what changes after smoking — which hurdles shift and why?

- Air-dried bresaola at 35 % weight loss: which hurdles are now sufficient for ambient storage, and which remain supporting?

Worksheet: Cure Ratio Calculator Practice Sheet

Complete the missing values in each row using the equilibrium curing formula. Use Prague Powder #1 at 0.25 % and NaCl at 2.0 % unless otherwise noted. Show your working in the Notes column.

Meat description

Green weight (g)

NaCl target %

NaCl amount (g)

Prague Powder type (#1 or #2)

Prague Powder target %

Prague Powder amount (g)

Sugar amount (g) at 0.5 %

Total cure blend weight (g)

Minimum cure days (1 day/cm thickness + 2 buffer)

Notes / working

Checklist: Pre-Cure Safety Audit

- Refrigerator verified at 2–4 °C with independent thermometer (not the built-in display)
- Scale accurate to 0.1 g confirmed for salt; scale accurate to 0.01 g confirmed for Prague Powder
- Non-iodised salt sourced (kosher, sea salt, or pickling salt — not table salt)
- Prague Powder type confirmed for the product duration (#1 for under 30 days; #2 for over 30 days)
- All surfaces and utensils sanitised with no-rinse sanitiser before handling raw meat
- Dedicated curing trays or vacuum bags available (no reactive metal containers)
- Trichinella freeze step completed if using pork for an uncooked product (" 15 °C for 21 days)
- Labels prepared: meat description, green weight, cure start date, target completion date
- Cure log template ready to record daily: temperature, observations, weight (if drying)

Dry Rubs and Brine Curing

Formulate and document your first dry cure and brine cure batches, then practice diagnosing failure modes from symptom descriptions.

Exercise: Formulate Your First Dry Cure

Choose a cut of pork from the list below and write out the complete equilibrium dry cure formulation by hand, showing every calculation. Then describe the procedure you will follow from weighing to vacuum-sealing to flip schedule.

- Choose one: pork belly (1.2 kg, 4 cm thick), pork loin (900 g, 5 cm thick), or pork shoulder coppa (1.8 kg, 7 cm thick). Write the full cure formulation including NaCl, Prague Powder, sugar, and any aromatics.
- Calculate the minimum cure days for your chosen cut using the formula: 1 day per cm at the thickest point, plus 2 buffer days. What date will you open the bag?
- Describe one risk specific to your chosen cut (e.g., uneven thickness, bone presence, high fat ratio) and how you will mitigate it.

Worksheet: Batch Cure Log

Fill in one row per batch. Record every data point at cure start and again at the end of the cure period. Leave the Outcome and Rating columns blank until you taste the finished product.

Batch number

Meat cut and species

Supplier / source

Green weight (g)

Thickest point (cm)

Cure method (dry / brine / injection)

NaCl amount (g)

Prague Powder type and amount (g)

Additional seasonings

Cure start date

Target completion date

Actual completion date

Post-cure weight (g)

Notes (daily observations)

Outcome (proceed to smoke / dry / slice)

Flavour rating (1–5) and tasting notes

Checklist: Failure Mode Diagnostic Checklist

- Grey interior: confirm Prague Powder was included and weighed correctly; check cure duration was sufficient
- Excessively salty: switch to equilibrium curing if using timed-immersion method; reduce NaCl % by 0.25 percentage points
- Slimy surface: verify refrigerator temperature was consistently below 4 °C; check for cross-contamination from other foods
- Bitter or metallic flavour: confirm non-iodised salt was used; verify Prague Powder was not above 0.25 %
- Puffy vacuum bag: discard immediately; check fridge temperature log for any excursions above 7 °C
- Off-odour (sulphurous or putrid): discard; review sanitation protocol for equipment and surfaces
- Uneven salt distribution: confirm cure was massaged into all surfaces; confirm bag was flipped daily

Cold Smoking Fundamentals

Plan your cold-smoke setup, document wood selection decisions, and track smoke session results across multiple batches.

Exercise: Cold-Smoke Setup Design

Design your cold-smoke chamber using the equipment available to you. Sketch or describe the layout, identify the smoke generator, air inlet, and outlet positions, and explain how you will maintain temperature below 25 °C in your climate.

- Describe or sketch your chamber (kettle grill, converted fridge, purpose-built cabinet, or other) including dimensions and ventilation points.

- What smoke generator will you use (ProQ, A-MAZE-N, homemade), and what wood species and form (dust, chips, pellets) will you use for your first project? Justify your wood choice based on the meat you are smoking.

- What is the typical ambient temperature where you will smoke? If it exceeds 15 °C, describe two strategies to keep the chamber below 25 °C.

- How will you form the pellicle and verify it is ready before loading the chamber?

Worksheet: Smoke Session Log

Complete one row per smoke session. A single product may require 2–3 sessions; give each session its own row. Record temperature readings at start, middle, and end of session.

Session number

Product and batch number

Date and time start

Date and time end

Wood species

Wood form (dust / chips / pellets)

Chamber temp at start (°C)

Chamber temp mid-session (°C)

Chamber temp at end (°C)

Smoke colour observation (thin blue / medium / thick white)

Any temperature excursions above 25 °C? (Y/N — describe if Y)

Post-session meat surface colour

Rest period before next session (hours)

Cumulative smoke time (hours)

Flavour notes after tasting end-slice

Checklist: Pre-Smoke Session Checklist

- Meat has completed full cure period and cure log is up to date
- Pellicle formed: surface is dry, tacky, and glossy; not wet or sticky when touched
- Smoke chamber cleaned of ash and residue from previous sessions
- Dual-probe thermometer calibrated and placed: one probe at chamber level, one near meat surface
- Smoke generator loaded and positioned so ash does not fall onto meat
- Air inlet and outlet dampers set for gentle draft (not fully open, not fully closed)
- Target wood species confirmed as hardwood (not resinous softwood)
- Ambient temperature checked: if above 20 °C, chamber cooling strategy in place
- Post-session rest plan confirmed: uncovered on a rack in the refrigerator for minimum 12 hours

Classic Whole-Muscle Cures and Charcuterie Board Assembly

Document the drying phase for pancetta and bresaola, evaluate your finished products against quality benchmarks, and plan your first charcuterie board.

Worksheet: Drying Progress Tracker

Record weight every 3 days during the drying phase. The % weight loss column is calculated by you — fill in each value as you weigh. Do not pre-fill calculated columns.

Product name and batch number

Green weight (g)

Post-cure weight (g)

Measurement date

Days since hang date

Current weight (g)

% weight loss since green weight

Chamber temperature (°C)

Chamber RH (%)

Surface mould observation (none / white beneficial / green-black — action taken)

Target % weight loss for this product

Target reached? (Y / N)

Exercise: Product Tasting Evaluation

Taste your finished bresaola or pancetta using the structured evaluation below. Write your answers in paragraph form, referencing specific sensory observations. Compare your results to the benchmarks described in the course.

- Appearance: describe the colour of the cross-section (deep burgundy / pink / grey / brown), the surface texture, and the fat distribution. Does it match the expected appearance for this product?
 - Aroma: describe the smell before tasting — smoky, fermented, mineral, acidic, off-notes? Identify any aromas that concern you and explain why they might be present.
 - Flavour and texture: rate saltiness (under / balanced / over), tenderness (correct / tough / crumbly), and overall flavour intensity (under / appropriate / aggressive). What would you change in the cure formulation or process to improve the result?
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Checklist: Charcuterie Board Assembly Checklist

- At least two house-made cured meats selected and sliced paper-thin immediately before service
- Meats allowed to reach room temperature (18–22 °C) before plating — not served cold from refrigerator
- At least three cheese types covering different textures (hard aged / soft creamy / blue or washed-rind)
- Acid element included: cornichons, pickled vegetables, or whole-grain mustard
- Sweet element included: honey, fig jam, quince paste, or fresh fruit
- Neutral vehicles provided: sliced baguette or water crackers for all guests
- Pungent elements (blue cheese, aged parmesan) positioned away from delicate items
- Board garnished with fresh herbs to signal flavour profile and add visual contrast
- House-made products labelled with product name and curing method
- Portioning confirmed: 60–80 g cured meat per person for starter, 120–150 g for main

Your Action Plan

1. Purchase a 0.01 g jewellery scale and verify your kitchen scale reads accurately to 1 g before starting any cure
2. Source non-iodised kosher or sea salt and Prague Powder #1 — confirm you have the correct type for your first product (PP#1 for bacon or pancetta within 30 days)
3. Set up your curing refrigerator: place an independent thermometer, confirm it holds 2–4 °C consistently for 24 hours before using it for meat
4. For your first project, cure a 1 kg pork belly for smoked bacon using the equilibrium method: calculate and weigh all cure ingredients before touching the meat
5. Build or configure a cold-smoke chamber before the cure is finished so it is ready when the pellicle is formed
6. Source beech or apple wood dust and test your smoke generator with an empty chamber before loading cured meat
7. Log every step in the Batch Cure Log and Smoke Session Log worksheets — these records become your personal recipe library
8. After completing bacon, move to pancetta tesa: this introduces Prague Powder #2 and the drying phase — track weight every 3 days and record in the Drying Progress Tracker

9. Start bresaola as your third project to experience a beef whole-muscle cure with a longer drying arc and paper-thin service style
10. Once you have three house-made products, assemble your first charcuterie board using the Assembly Checklist — photograph it, taste every combination, and note what to adjust for the next board

