

Meal Planning & Prep — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a running system you operate every week. Each section maps to one course module and mixes hands-on exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists. Work through it with your real calendar, your actual grocery prices, and the food already in your fridge so the plan, budget, and prep routine fit your life, not a textbook example.

Planning the Week: Your Repeatable System

Lock in a planning day, build your core-recipe rotation, and plan a week around your real calendar so the loop actually runs.

Worksheet: Build Your 10-Meal Rotation

List dinners you already know how to cook, sorted by category, then add new recipes only where a category is empty. Mark each as fast (under 30 min), medium, or batch-friendly. This becomes your reusable menu.

Chicken meal 1 (speed: fast / medium / batch)

Chicken meal 2 (speed)

Beef or pork meal 1 (speed)

Beef or pork meal 2 (speed)

Fish or seafood meal (speed)

Vegetarian meal 1 (speed)

Vegetarian meal 2 (speed)

Pasta or grain-bowl meal 1 (speed)

Pasta or grain-bowl meal 2 (speed)

Wildcard or homemade-takeout meal (speed)

Exercise: Plan a Week Against Your Real Calendar

Open this week's calendar and label each night busy, normal, or open. Assign fast meals to busy nights, batch or new recipes to open nights, and schedule a planned-leftover night after each batch meal. Plan only four to five cooking nights and leave one flex night.

- How many nights this week are genuinely open for cooking, and did you over-plan past that number?

- Which dinner did you assign as a planned leftover, and what dinner does it come from?

- What is your flex-night fallback pantry meal if a plan falls through?

Checklist: Weekly Planning Loop Setup

- I chose one fixed day and time each week to plan and shop
- I scheduled a separate 2 to 3 hour prep slot
- I built a rotation of about ten meals sorted by category
- I planned fewer cooking nights than days and left a flex night
- I wrote the plan somewhere the whole household can see it

Budget and the Smart Shopping Trip

Price your meals by the serving, turn the plan into a store-mapped list, and apply budget tactics that need no coupons.

Exercise: Cost Out Three Dinners Per Serving

Pick three meals from your rotation. For each, total the cost of the ingredients you actually use, add 50 cents for oil and spices, and divide by the number of servings it makes. Rank them cheapest to most expensive.

- Which of your three dinners was the cheapest per serving, and what made it cheap?

- Which was the most expensive, and was it the protein driving the cost?

- What one swap would lower your most expensive meal without ruining it?

Worksheet: Store-Mapped Shopping List

Go meal by meal through your week's plan, list every ingredient with a quantity, then cross off what you already have. Group what remains under these store-section headers so you shop one efficient path.

Produce (item + quantity)

Proteins / meat / fish (item + quantity)

Dairy and eggs (item + quantity)

Frozen (item + quantity)

Dry, canned, and pantry (item + quantity)

Bread and bakery (item + quantity)

Household and other (item + quantity)

Already have at home (crossed off the list)

Checklist: Smart Shopping Trip Checklist

- I checked the fridge, freezer, and pantry before writing the list
- I grouped the list by store section
- I compared unit prices, not package prices, on key items
- I anchored two or three meals to this week's sale items
- I ate before shopping and stuck to the list

Batch Cooking and Prep Sessions

Choose your prep style, plan a cook-once-eat-twice base, and run the session in overlapping order with containers ready.

Worksheet: Design Your Component-Prep Session

Plan one batch-prep session using component prep. Choose grains, proteins, vegetables, and sauces to cook in bulk, then list which weeknight meals each component will build. Keep components plain so sauces can vary.

Grain(s) to cook in bulk

Protein(s) to cook in bulk

Vegetables to roast

Vegetables to prep raw

Sauce or dressing 1

Sauce or dressing 2

Meal 1 built from these components

Meal 2 built from these components

Meal 3 built from these components

Exercise: Plan a Cook-Once-Eat-Twice Base

Choose one versatile base to cook in bulk (shredded chicken, ground meat, beans, or roasted squash). Plan two or three meals that use it in different formats with different seasonings so it never feels like the same leftover.

- What base will you cook once, and what three formats will it appear in?

- How will you change the seasoning each time so it feels like a new meal?

- Can you use the bones or scraps for a stock or soup to get a final meal?

Worksheet: Prep Session Order of Operations

Write your session as an overlapping timeline so the oven, stove, and your hands all work at once. Fill in what goes where in each stage for your specific plan.

Step 1 - Oven items started first (roasting / baking)

Step 2 - Long stovetop items (grains / beans / stock)

Step 3 - Hands-on while those cook (wash and chop)

Step 4 - Sauces, dressings, and marinades

Step 5 - Cool and pack as each item finishes

Containers needed (single-serve / family / freezer)

Checklist: Prep Session Readiness

- I started oven and long-cooking items before hands-on tasks
- I prepped components plain so each meal can take a different sauce
- I used clear, correctly sized containers
- I cooled hot food in shallow containers before sealing
- I labeled every container with contents and date

Storage, Safety, and Killing Food Waste

Apply the safety rules, freeze and thaw correctly, and run a FIFO rotation with a use-it-up shelf so nothing spoils.

Worksheet: Sequence the Week by Perishability

Using the storage times from Module 4, order your planned meals so the most perishable get eaten first.

Note the safe window for each so you know your deadline.

Most perishable meal (raw ground meat / fish) - eat by day

Next most perishable (cooked leftovers) - eat within 3 to 4 days

Mid-week meal and its storage window

Later-week meal (freezer-safe) and its window

Items moved to the freezer and date frozen

Use-by-date items that must be respected this week

Exercise: Fridge Audit and Use-It-Up Shelf

Open your fridge and apply FIFO. Move older items to the front, designate one eat-me-first shelf at eye level, and place anything nearing its end there. Record what you found and rescued.

- What items did you find at the back that were close to spoiling?

- What use-it-up meal (stir-fry, soup, frittata) could you make from them this week?

- Which date labels were quality dates you can judge by smell and look versus hard use-by dates?

Checklist: Food Safety and Anti-Waste Checklist

- My fridge is at or below 40 F and my freezer at 0 F
- I refrigerate cooked food within 2 hours (1 hour if hot out)
- I plan to eat refrigerated leftovers within 3 to 4 days
- I thaw frozen food in the fridge, in cold water, or in the microwave, never on the counter
- I keep a use-it-up shelf and check it before deciding any meal

Your Action Plan

1. Pick one fixed planning-and-shopping day and one prep day, and put both on your calendar
2. Build a rotation of about ten dinners sorted by protein and format, marking each fast, medium, or batch
3. Plan next week against your real calendar with only four to five cooking nights plus a flex night
4. Cost out three of your dinners per serving and swap the most expensive one for a cheaper build
5. Write a store-mapped shopping list after auditing your fridge, freezer, and pantry
6. Run a 2 to 3 hour component-prep session in overlapping order: oven first, then stovetop, then chopping
7. Cook one versatile base once and turn it into three meals with different seasonings
8. Label and date every container, refrigerate cooked food within 2 hours, and eat leftovers within 4 days
9. Set up an eat-me-first shelf and rotate groceries first-in-first-out every time you unpack
10. Do a 10-minute fridge sweep before each shop and run one use-it-up meal a week to clear what is left

