

Menu Design — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a build. Working alongside the four modules, you will audit a real menu, run a full menu-engineering analysis, draft engineered layouts and descriptions, and prepare both print and QR-ready files. Use the templates to keep your data and decisions in one place.

How Guests Read a Menu

Observe and measure how a real menu is actually read, then right-size it.

Exercise: Scan-Path Observation

Pick one real menu (your own venue or a local one). Watch three to five people read it, in person or by recording where their eyes and fingers go, and note the order in which they land on items. Compare what you see to the book-reading (top-to-bottom) pattern from the lesson.

- What format is the menu (single, bi-fold, tri-fold, laminated card) and how did that shape the read?

- Which item or section did people look at first, and was that the venue's intended hero?

- Roughly how long did each person scan before forming a shortlist?

- Where on the layout was attention wasted, and which high-margin item was being ignored?

Worksheet: Menu Size Audit

List every category on your chosen menu and count the items in each. Flag any category that is well above seven items or that reads as cluttered, and note candidates to cut based on the lesson's process.

Category name

Number of items in category

Over or under the ~7 guideline (over / under / on target)

Lowest-selling item in category

Cut, keep, or rework decision

Reason for the decision

Checklist: Sales-Document Mindset Check

- I have pulled the last 90 days of item-level sales mix from the POS
- I can name the average check and daily covers for this venue
- I have calculated what a 2 percent average-check lift would add per year

- [] I have identified which items the current layout is hiding
- [] I am treating every layout choice as a commercial decision, not just an aesthetic one

Menu Engineering and Pricing Psychology

Run the numbers, classify every dish, and design the pricing presentation.

Worksheet: Menu Engineering Matrix Build

For every item, fill in menu price and plate food cost, then calculate contribution margin (price minus food cost) and sales-mix share. Mark margin and popularity as high or low against the category average, and assign the quadrant. Use the engineering-matrix template to do the math.

Item name

Menu price

Plate food cost

Contribution margin (price minus food cost)

Units sold (period)

Sales-mix share (units / category units)

Margin high or low vs category average

Popularity high or low vs category average

Quadrant (star / plowhorse / puzzle / dog)

Action (feature / reposition / promote / cut)

Exercise: Anchor and Decoy Design

Choose one target dish you want to sell more of. Design a higher-priced anchor to sit above it and, if you sell sizes, a decoy size that makes the target look like the value pick. Write down the before-and-after you expect, then plan to test it for one menu cycle.

- Which target item are you trying to maximise, and why?

- What is the anchor item and price, and how does it reframe the target's cost?

- If using a decoy size, what are the three price points and which one should win?

- What sales-mix change will tell you the tactic worked after one cycle?

Worksheet: Pricing Presentation Decisions

Lock in your pricing-format conventions for this menu, grounded in the brand's positioning and the research from the lesson.

Currency symbol shown on item lines (yes / no)

Charm pricing (.95/.99) or rounded (.00) and why

Leader dots removed (yes / no)

Price size and weight relative to dish name

Any prix-fixe or bundle being introduced and its price

Mandatory fees or service charges and how they are disclosed

Checklist: Engineering Quality Check

- Profit axis uses contribution margin in dollars, not food-cost percentage
- Every item is assigned to exactly one quadrant
- Each star is slated for prominent placement
- Each plowhorse has a margin or repositioning plan
- Each puzzle has a promotion or repositioning plan
- Each dog has a cut, re-cost, or rework decision
- A date is set to re-run the matrix next quarter

Layout, Typography, and Description Craft

Turn the strategy into a readable, on-brand artifact with engineered copy.

Worksheet: Layout and Hierarchy Plan

Plan the structural skeleton of the menu before opening the design tool. Define the grid, the eye-magnet placement, and which star sits in the prime spot of each panel.

Menu format and panel count

Column grid (1 / 2 / 3) and margin size

Number of eye magnets per panel (aim for 1)

Star item placed at the eye magnet (per panel)

Section order top to bottom

Where white space is used to elevate a hero dish

Worksheet: Typography Specification

Specify the type system so the menu reads at arm's length in dim light. Record both families, sizes, and the licensing status before you commit.

Header typeface and weights

Body typeface and weights

Body text size in points ($\geq 10-11$)

Leading / line spacing (% of type size)

Line length target (characters)

Background and text contrast notes

Font license covers commercial print and digital (yes / no)

Exercise: Rewrite Three Descriptions

Take three plain dish names and rewrite each into a one-to-two-line description using sensory, provenance, technique, or nostalgia words from the lesson. Keep every claim completely true and truth-in-menu compliant.

- Original plain name versus your rewritten description for each of the three dishes.

- Which lever did you use for each (sensory / provenance / technique / nostalgia)?

- Is every claim literally true (no 'fresh' on a frozen item, correct origin and grade)?

- Did you keep each description to one or two lines so it gets read?

Checklist: Readability and Honesty Check

- No more than two type families used across the menu
- Body text is at least 10 to 11 point and tested in dining-room light
- Only one strong eye magnet per panel
- Highest-margin star sits at or beside the eye magnet
- Every descriptive claim is literally true and origin/grade-accurate
- Allergen and dietary tags are clear and consistent
- Font licensing for print and digital is confirmed

Print Production, Materials, and Digital Menus

Prepare durable print files, choose materials, and build an accessible QR menu.

Checklist: Print-Ready File Checklist

- Document set to trim size plus 3 mm bleed on all sides
- Text and key elements kept 3 to 5 mm inside the trim (safe margin)
- Colour mode is CMYK, not RGB
- Images linked at 300 dpi and fonts embedded or outlined
- Press-ready PDF exported (PDF/X-1a or PDF/X-4) with crop marks and bleed
- Rich black built as a CMYK mix for large solids
- Hard proof ordered and checked under dining-room lighting

Worksheet: Material and Finish Selection

Choose the stock, weight, coating, and any specialty finishes, and justify each against the venue's handling reality and brand. Use the production-spec template to capture quotes.

Paper weight (gsm or lb)

Stock type (coated / uncoated / synthetic)

Coating or laminate (gloss / matte / soft-touch / full lamination / none)

Specialty finishes (spot UV / foil / emboss / letterpress / none)

Handling reality it must survive (high-volume / fine-dining / outdoor)

Sustainability choice (recycled / FSC / soy ink / none)

Quoted unit cost

Worksheet: Seasonal Versioning System

Define how this menu will be updated without a full redesign, using styles, master pages, and a naming convention.

Paragraph and character styles set up (yes / no)

Swappable seasonal section or insert defined (yes / no)

Prices kept as live editable text, not baked into images (yes / no)

Version naming convention (e.g. dinner-menu-2026-spring-v2)

Handling for volatile-cost items (market price / insert)

Next scheduled menu review date

Checklist: QR Digital Menu Check

- Built as a responsive mobile web page, not a downloaded PDF
- Text reflows and resizes with no pinch-zoom or horizontal scroll
- Loads in well under three seconds on mobile data (images compressed)
- Uses a dynamic QR code so the destination can change without reprinting
- Meets accessibility basics: high contrast, real selectable text, alt text
- Carries the same engineered item order and eye magnets as print
- Printed menus kept on hand for guests who need or prefer them

Your Action Plan

1. Pull 90 days of item-level sales mix from the POS and record covers and average check.
2. Run the full menu-engineering matrix and tag every item star, plowhorse, puzzle, or dog.
3. Decide cuts and right-size every category toward roughly seven readable items.
4. Set pricing presentation: symbol, charm vs rounded, no leader dots, quiet price weight.
5. Design the layout on a grid with one eye magnet per panel holding your top star.
6. Specify a two-family type system at 10 to 11 point minimum and confirm font licensing.
7. Rewrite dish descriptions to be vivid, specific, and completely truth-in-menu accurate.
8. Choose stock, weight, coating, and finishes matched to handling reality and brand.
9. Prepare a press-ready PDF with 3 mm bleed and CMYK, then order and check a hard proof.
10. Build a responsive QR digital menu and set a quarterly menu-review date.

