

Food Photography — Workbook

This workbook gives you practical exercises, structured worksheets, and ready-to-use checklists that accompany each module of the Food Photography course. Work through each section as you complete the corresponding lessons. By the end you will have a personal reference system, a repeatable shoot workflow, and a portfolio of practice images.

Styling and Scene Building

Build your visual instincts by practicing the core decisions — hero selection, prop restraint, color palette, and finishing technique — on real dishes before moving to client work.

Exercise: The Three-Element Constraint

Choose one dish from your kitchen. Style it three separate times using a maximum of three supporting elements per scene. Photograph each version, then compare the results and identify which arrangement was most effective and why.

- What was your hero element, and did it remain the clear focal point in all three versions?

- Which supporting elements added to the story of the dish and which distracted from it?

- How did removing one element from the busiest version change the feel of the image?

- What would you change about your color palette choices if you repeated this exercise?

Worksheet: Scene Planning Sheet

Complete this sheet before setting up any styled food scene. Fill in every field before touching a prop or plate.
Dish / hero element

Story or mood (one word)

Dominant color from the dish

Background choice and texture

Supporting element 1

Supporting element 2

Supporting element 3 (optional)

Negative space direction (left / right / top / bottom)

One element I am consciously leaving out

Checklist: Pre-Shot Styling Check

- Hero element is clearly dominant and placed off-center
- Supporting props are limited to three or fewer distinct objects
- Color palette has one dominant tone and at most one accent
- Plate rim is wiped clean with a damp cloth
- Herbs and greens have been spritzed with water within the last two minutes
- Sauces are precisely placed with a squeeze bottle, not poured freely
- Negative space is visible and intentional — not just empty by accident
- I have checked the scene from the shooting angle, not from standing upright
- I have removed at least one element and confirmed the frame improved or stayed the same

Lighting for Food

Practice placing and shaping light on a real dish to understand how direction and modifiers change the mood and texture of your images.

Exercise: The Three-Position Natural Light Test

Using the same dish and the same window on the same day, shoot three sets of images: one with backlight, one with side light, and one with front light. For each position, also shoot one version with a white reflector opposite the window and one without. Compare all six images and document your findings.

- Which light direction made the food look most appetizing and why?

- How much did the reflector change the shadow detail in each position?

- Which position created the most interesting texture on the dish surface?

- What type of dish or mood would you pair with each light direction based on what you observed?

Worksheet: Lighting Setup Log

Record the details of every lighting setup you use so you can recreate successful setups and learn from unsuccessful ones.

Date and time of shoot

Light source (window / LED / strobe)

Light position relative to dish (back / side / front)

Distance from light to dish (cm)

Modifier used (softbox / scrim / bare / reflector only)

Reflector position and distance

Color temperature or white balance setting (Kelvin)

Overall result rating (1 to 5)

What to change next time

Checklist: Lighting Setup Checklist

- Single color temperature confirmed — no mixed sources (window plus household bulbs blocked off)
- White balance set to a fixed Kelvin value, not Auto
- Light source is large enough relative to the dish to produce soft shadows
- A reflector or flag is placed on the shadow side to control contrast
- Reflective surfaces checked for distracting hotspots — flags positioned if needed
- A test frame has been reviewed on a computer display before the full shoot begins
- Light position and power settings recorded in the lighting log
- Camera is on a tripod to allow direct comparison of lighting variations without framing changes

Exercise: Flag and Reflector Control Drill

Set up a one-light scene. Starting with no modifiers, take a base shot. Then add a white reflector, shoot again. Replace the white reflector with a black card, shoot again. Add a flag to block light from the background, shoot again. Export all four images side by side and write a caption for each describing the effect of the change.

- Which modifier created the most dramatic change in the overall mood of the image?

- How did the black card affect the perceived richness or depth of the dish?

- Where would you use each combination in a real client shoot and for what type of food?

Composition and Camera Technique

Develop consistent compositional instincts and build muscle memory for manual camera controls so technique stops being a barrier between you and a great image.

Exercise: The Same Dish, Three Angles

Style one dish and photograph it at a true overhead angle, at 45 degrees, and at eye-level without changing the styling between shots. Review all three and determine which angle best serves the visual story of that specific dish.

- Which angle revealed information about the dish that the other two hid?

- Which angle required the most prop adjustment to work correctly and why?

- What type of dishes is each angle least suited for? Give a specific example for each.

Worksheet: Camera Settings Reference Sheet

Fill in your tested settings for each common food shooting situation. Use this as a starting point reference for future shoots rather than guessing each time.

Styled scene — natural window light: Aperture / Shutter / ISO

Styled scene — artificial LED setup: Aperture / Shutter / ISO

Flat lay overhead with full scene sharpness: Aperture / Shutter / ISO

Shallow depth of field — single hero: Aperture / Shutter / ISO

Pouring shot or motion with strobe: Aperture / Shutter / ISO

Lens used for most setups (focal length)

White balance fixed value used most often (Kelvin)

File format (RAW / JPEG / RAW + JPEG)

Checklist: Pre-Shoot Camera Setup Checklist

- Camera set to Manual mode
- Shooting RAW or RAW + JPEG
- White balance set to a fixed Kelvin value
- Single moveable AF point selected — not zone or auto area
- Aperture chosen based on depth of field needed for this specific scene
- ISO set to lowest usable value for this light setup
- Shutter speed confirmed to avoid camera shake (minimum 1/60s for handheld)
- Lens focus confirmed via Live View 10x magnification before the shoot starts
- Camera or phone lens cleaned — fingerprints cause soft images and reduce contrast
- Memory card has sufficient space and has been formatted recently

Editing and Commercial Work

Build a repeatable editing workflow and practice the professional communication and delivery habits that define reliable, bookable photographers.

Exercise: Before and After Edit Practice

Select three RAW files from your practice shoots — one underexposed, one with a color cast, one with flat contrast. Edit each using the seven-step Lightroom sequence from the course. Export before and after versions side by side and write a one-sentence description of the primary correction made in each case.

- Which step in the sequence had the largest single impact on each image?

- Did the HSL adjustments improve the food colors without making the image look processed or artificial?

- Which image took the most editing time and what would you change at the shoot stage to reduce that time?

Worksheet: Client Shoot Brief Summary

Complete this sheet when receiving any brief from a restaurant, recipe, or brand client. Fill it in before replying to confirm the booking.

Client name and business type

Shoot date and location

Number of dishes or products to photograph

Primary usage (menu / social / website / print / e-commerce)

Required aspect ratios and image dimensions

Style direction (premium / rustic / bright / moody — client's word)

Any mandatory props, colors, or brand elements to include

Any forbidden props, colors, or competitor references

Number of final retouched images agreed in contract

Delivery date and format

Licensing scope (digital / print / duration)

Checklist: Post-Shoot Delivery Checklist

- All RAW files backed up to a second drive before editing begins
- Selects culled to agreed quantity plus 20% extras for client review gallery
- Client review gallery sent before final retouching — approval confirmed in writing
- Final images edited using consistent preset as a starting point
- Files named using the agreed convention (ClientName_Dish_Angle_v1.jpg)
- Web-optimized JPEG exports confirmed at 72dpi and under 2MB per file
- Full-resolution exports confirmed at 300dpi for any print usage
- Delivery link tested and confirmed accessible before sending to client
- Invoice issued with day rate and expenses itemized separately
- Follow-up message scheduled for five days after delivery to confirm receipt and satisfaction

Exercise: Mock Restaurant Shoot Simulation

Treat one home-cooked meal as a restaurant client shoot. Create a shot list in advance covering: one hero dish from two angles, one detail close-up, and one table-context wide shot. Stick to the shot list without improvising additional setups. Edit and deliver the images to yourself as a ZIP file within 48 hours of shooting.

- Did the shot list help you stay efficient, or did you feel it was too restrictive?

- Which image on the shot list was hardest to execute and why?

- Looking at the final delivered set, does it tell a complete story of the dish and the eating experience?

- What would you add or remove from the shot list if you repeated this for a real client?

Your Action Plan

1. Gather your core starter prop kit this week — two neutral plates, one cutting board, two linen napkins, and one dark and one light background
2. Shoot the three-position natural light test with a single dish using only window light and a white foam core reflector
3. Complete the scene planning worksheet before every practice shoot for the next four weeks until it becomes automatic
4. Set your camera to Manual mode and fill in your personal camera settings reference sheet using your tested results
5. Edit three RAW files from your practice shoots using the seven-step Lightroom sequence and save your starting settings as a named preset

6. Build a mood board for three different food photography styles — rustic, premium, and bright editorial — using images you admire as reference
7. Contact one local restaurant or food business and offer a small complimentary shoot in exchange for permission to use the images in your portfolio
8. Complete the mock restaurant shoot simulation exercise and deliver the edited images to yourself within the 48-hour window
9. Review your delivered portfolio set and identify the three strongest images and the three weakest — write one sentence on what made each strong or weak
10. Apply for one paid food photography gig, recipe blog collaboration, or brand shoot within 30 days of completing the course

