

Cocktail Making — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into deliberate practice. Each section matches a course module and asks you to assemble a working kit, classify drinks by the sweet-sour-strong-weak template, drill shaking and stirring side by side, make and label real syrups and an infusion, muddle and dose bitters with intent, and finish drinks with garnish, layering, and a tight repertoire. Work through it with real bottles and a jigger and you will finish able to build any classic to balance, pick the right technique every time, sweeten and flavour by ratio, and serve a small set of cocktails as cold, clean, and well-garnished as a bar makes them, with logs so your good drinks repeat.

Foundations: Kit, Glassware, and the Balance Behind Every Drink

Assemble the kit and base spirits that matter, set up your glassware and ice, and learn to taste any drink against the four balance levers.

Worksheet: Bar kit and bottle audit

Lay out everything you own for cocktails and fill in what you have versus the beginner kit and the five-spirit starter shelf, so you buy only the gaps. Prioritise a jigger and a couple of decent base spirits over gadgets and a wall of cheap bottles.

Jigger on hand? (yes / no — most important single tool; note the sizes)

Shaker type (Boston tin set / cobbler / none)

Mixing glass and bar spoon? (yes / no)

Strainers owned (Hawthorne / fine mesh / neither)

Muddler and citrus juicer/press? (yes / no)

Base spirits on shelf (gin / vodka / white rum / blanco tequila / bourbon or rye)

Modifiers on shelf (sweet vermouth / orange liqueur / Angostura bitters)

Gaps to buy before the next drink

Worksheet: Glassware and ice plan

Map the glasses and ice formats you have to the drink families, so every drink gets the right vessel and the right ice. Note what you need to add or freeze.

Coupe / Nick and Nora for up-drinks? (count — Martini, Daiquiri, Sour)

Rocks / Old Fashioned glasses? (count — spirit-forward over a cube)

Highball / Collins glasses? (count — long drinks over ice)

Big clear cubes or spheres for slow-melt sipping drinks? (yes / no)

Cube / cracked / crushed ice available for shaken and long drinks?

Ice made from clean water and kept covered (no freezer odours)? (yes / no)

Glasses to chill ahead (freezer or ice water)?

Glassware or ice format to add

Exercise: Sweet-sour-strong-weak tasting drill

Build one Sour-template drink to 2:1:0.75 (for example 2 oz spirit, 1 oz citrus, 0.75 oz simple syrup), shake, and taste it with a clean straw before straining. Then deliberately make it too sour and too sweet in separate tries and correct each one back to centre by nudging a single lever.

- On the balanced version, which lever (strong, sweet, sour, weak) did you notice first, and was anything missing?

- When you over-soured it, how much sweet (in barspoons) brought the edges back, and when you over-sweetened it, did citrus or bitters cut it better?

- When a version tasted hot and harsh, did more dilution (longer shake or a splash of water) fix it, and did you always taste before straining?

Checklist: Foundations readiness check

- Jigger in use for every pour; no more pouring by eye
- Five base spirits and the three modifiers on the shelf, all sippable quality
- Right glass chosen and chilled for the drink (stemmed up / rocks / tall)
- Shaker or glass filled with plenty of fresh, clean ice
- Drink classified by the balance template before mixing
- Tasted with a straw before straining
- One lever adjusted at a time to correct balance
- Bottled and old freezer ice avoided so nothing tastes flat or stale

The Two Core Techniques: Shaking and Stirring

Drill the shake and the stir side by side, learn the shake-versus-stir rule cold, and build a lively Highball that keeps its fizz.

Exercise: Shake-versus-stir side-by-side

Make the same spirit two ways to feel the difference. Shake a citrus drink (Daiquiri) hard for 10 to 15 seconds until the tin frosts and double-strain it; separately stir a spirit-forward drink (Negroni or Martini) smoothly for 20 to 30 seconds until the glass frosts and strain it clear. Compare clarity, temperature, and texture.

- Did the shaken drink come out frosty, lively, and lightly hazy, and did double-straining leave it free of ice shards and pulp?

- Did the stirred drink come out crystal clear and silky, and did you resist shaking it (which would cloud it)?
- Did each reach genuinely frosted-cold, or did you stop the shake or stir too early and leave it under-chilled and harsh?

Worksheet: Technique decision sheet

For each drink you make this week, record which technique you chose and why, building the shake-versus-stir rule into instinct.

Drink name

Contains citrus / juice / egg / cream? (yes / no)

Technique chosen (shake / stir / build)

Reason (cloudy ingredient = shake / spirits-only = stir / fizzy = build)

Shake or stir time and frost reached? (seconds / yes-no)

Double-strained (shaken) or strained clear (stirred)?

Came out as expected? (frosty-lively / clear-silky / fizzy-cold)

Fix for next time

Exercise: Highball build drill

Build a Highball in the glass to keep the fizz: fill a tall glass with fresh ice, add the measured spirit, top with cold carbonated mixer at roughly 1 part spirit to 3 parts mixer, and stir just once gently from the bottom up. Garnish and serve immediately.

- Was the glass packed with cold ice and the mixer cold, so the drink stayed crisp rather than going flat and watery?
- Did you stir only once, gently, so the carbonation survived, or did extra stirring knock the bubbles out?
- Did the 1:3 ratio taste right to you, and how would you adjust it next time?

Checklist: Egg-white and double-strain check

- [] Ingredients added to the small tin, then the shaker filled with fresh ice
- [] Shaker sealed firmly and pointed away from people
- [] Shaken hard with both hands for 10 to 15 seconds until the tin frosts
- [] Hawthorne plus fine mesh used to double-strain smooth drinks
- [] Egg-white drinks dry-shaken (no ice) first to whip the foam, then shaken with ice
- [] Stirred drinks built in a mixing glass with plenty of solid ice
- [] Stirred smoothly and quietly for 20 to 30 seconds until the glass frosts
- [] Clear drinks strained off the ice into a chilled glass

The Pantry: Syrups, Infusions, Muddling, and Bitters

Make and label the base syrups, infuse a flavoured syrup or spirit by taste, and muddle and dose bitters and fresh juice with intent.

Exercise: Two-syrup make-and-compare

Make a 1:1 simple syrup (equal parts sugar and water, warmed and stirred until clear) and a 2:1 rich syrup (two parts sugar to one part water). Sweeten two identical drinks, one with each, using the same volume, and taste how much sweeter the rich version is so you learn to adjust the amount.

- How different was the sweetness and thickness of the two syrups at the same pour, and how would you reduce the rich syrup amount to match?

- Did either fully dissolve without warming (the shake-in-a-jar method), and was the finished syrup clear?

- Did you label each bottle with its ratio and date so you will know its strength later?

Worksheet: Syrup and infusion log

Record every syrup and infusion you make so the recipe, steep time, and result are repeatable, and you do not over-extract next time.

Name (simple 1:1 / rich 2:1 / honey / ginger / mint / spirit infusion)

Ratio or recipe (sugar:water, honey:water, etc.)

Flavouring added and amount

Steep time and tasted-as-it-cooled? (minutes / yes-no)

Strained through fine mesh or cloth? (yes / no)

Made date and use-by estimate (1:1 ~2-4 wk, 2:1 ~1 mo)

Best drink for it

Too strong / too weak? — adjustment for next batch

Exercise: Muddle and bitters intent drill

Muddle two ways to feel the difference: press limes and sugar firmly for a Caipirinha-style base, and press mint gently for a Mojito, just bruising the leaves. Then take a flat or over-sweet drink and add bitters a dash at a time to lift it. Squeeze all citrus fresh for both.

- Did firm muddling extract the lime juice well, while gentle muddling released mint aroma without turning the drink bitter and grassy?

- How many dashes of bitters lifted the flat drink before it began to taste medicinal?

- Comparing fresh-squeezed citrus to any bottled juice you have, how much brighter and livelier was the fresh version?

Checklist: Pantry quality check

- [] Syrups made to a known ratio and labelled with ratio and date
- [] Flavoured syrups and infusions tasted frequently and strained the moment they were right
- [] Delicate flavourings (mint, cucumber) steeped under an hour; sturdy ones (ginger, cinnamon) longer
- [] Spirit infusions sampled daily and pulled before going harsh
- [] Fruit and sugar muddled firmly; tender herbs muddled gently
- [] Bitters used as seasoning, a dash or two, never overpowering
- [] Citrus squeezed fresh the day of use, never bottled
- [] Syrups refrigerated in clean sealed bottles and discarded if cloudy or off

Garnish, Presentation, Layering, and Your Repertoire

Garnish for aroma not clutter, layer and float by density, and assemble and serve a tight set of classics smoothly.

Exercise: Express-the-twist drill

Cut a wide strip of citrus peel with little pith, hold it skin-side down over a finished drink, and pinch to spray the oils across the surface; smell the drink before and after. Then rim a glass with salt or sugar on the outside only and compare a well-chosen garnish to an over-decorated one.

- Could you see and smell the citrus oils misting over the drink, and did the aroma change the first sip?

- Did keeping the salt or sugar crust on the outside of the rim avoid over-salting or over-sweetening the drink itself?

- Did one or two purposeful garnishes look more finished than a crowded pile, and were yours all fresh and edible?

Exercise: Layer-and-float by density

Build a simple layered drink or a float using density. Pour the heaviest, sweetest liquid first, then pour each lighter liquid slowly over the back of a bar spoon resting on the surface so it floats rather than mixing. Try a single float (such as a spirit floated on a shaken drink) first.

- Did pouring densest first and high-proof spirit last keep the bands separate, and did a quick test tell you which liquid was heavier?

- Did pouring slowly over the back of the spoon let each layer settle, and what happened when you poured too fast?

- Did resting the spoon against the glass wall steady the pour and sharpen the boundary?

Worksheet: Repertoire build sheet

Choose and record your starter repertoire of six classics, one per family, with the technique and key ratio for each, so you can make any of them on demand without a recipe.

Spirit-forward stirred (e.g. Old Fashioned) — spirit, sugar, bitters, technique

Shaken Sour (e.g. Daiquiri or Margarita) — ratio 2:1:0.75, technique

Bitter equal-parts (e.g. Negroni) — parts and technique

Stirred spirit-and-vermouth (e.g. Martini) — ratio and garnish

Built long drink (e.g. Gin and Tonic / Highball) — ratio ~1:3, technique

Muddled herbal (e.g. Mojito) — build and muddle notes

Which technique each one drills (shake / stir / build / muddle)

Garnish and glass for each

Checklist: Host-and-serve check

- Mise en place done before guests: garnishes cut, syrups chilled, citrus juiced, glasses chilled
- Crowd-friendly built drinks and batched stirred drinks chosen over shaking each to order
- Stirred classics batched in advance with the spirits pre-mixed
- Dilution accounted for in batches (roughly 20-25 percent water added)
- Each drink made with the right glass, ice, and technique
- Citrus twist oils expressed and a purposeful garnish on every drink
- Drinks served cold and fresh, none left warming on the side
- Every drink tasted and adjusted to balance before it goes out

Your Action Plan

1. Assemble the kit from your audit, prioritising a jigger and five sippable base spirits plus sweet vermouth, an orange liqueur, and Angostura bitters over gadgets.
2. Set up glassware and ice: a coupe for up-drinks, rocks glasses for spirit-forward, tall glasses for long drinks, clear cubes for sipping, and clean covered ice; chill glasses ahead.
3. Learn the sweet-sour-strong-weak template and the Sour ratio 2:1:0.75, and practise tasting a drink before straining and correcting one lever at a time.
4. Drill shaking: shake citrus and egg or cream drinks hard with both hands for 10 to 15 seconds until the tin frosts, then double-strain through a fine mesh.
5. Drill stirring: stir spirits-only drinks smoothly and quietly for 20 to 30 seconds until the glass frosts, then strain clear into a chilled glass.
6. Build long drinks in the glass over plenty of ice with cold mixer at about 1:3, stirring once gently so the fizz survives.
7. Make and label 1:1 simple and 2:1 rich syrup, then infuse one flavoured syrup or spirit, tasting as it steeps and straining the moment it is right.
8. Muddle fruit firmly and herbs gently, treat bitters as a dash-or-two seasoning, and squeeze all citrus fresh the day you use it.
9. Finish drinks with intent: express a citrus twist over the surface, rim glasses on the outside, layer or float by density, and use one or two fresh, edible garnishes.
10. Lock a six-drink repertoire across the families, prep mise en place and batch the stirred drinks with their dilution built in for groups, and log every drink's recipe and result.

