

Knife Skills (Cooking) — Workbook

This workbook accompanies the Knife Skills course and turns each module into hands-on practice you can run at your own cutting board. Use the exercises to build muscle memory, the worksheets to track your progress quantitatively, and the checklists as go/no-go gates before moving to the next skill level. Bring the templates into your prep workflow from day one.

Safe Grip, Stance, and Board Mechanics

Drill the pinch grip, claw position, and board setup until they are automatic before adding speed.

Exercise: Grip and Claw Drill Session

Perform three consecutive 15-minute cutting sessions on different vegetables, focusing exclusively on grip and claw mechanics. Do not time your cuts — prioritize form over speed. After each session, answer the reflection prompts below.

- After session 1 (zucchini rounds): Did the blade contact your knuckle on every stroke? Where did contact break down?

- After session 2 (carrot rounds): Lay 10 rounds flat and measure thickness. What is your maximum deviation from your target thickness in mm?

- After session 3 (potato planks): Did you notice fatigue setting in? At what minute mark, and in which part of your hand?

Worksheet: Grip Mechanics Progress Tracker

After each practice session, fill in one row. Run at least 5 sessions before evaluating your trend.

Date

Ingredient practiced

Session duration (min)

Max thickness deviation (mm)

Blade-knuckle contact: consistent Y/N

Fatigue onset (min)

Notes / corrections made

Checklist: Board Setup Pre-Flight

- Counter height checked — elbow at approximately 90 degrees with hand flat on board
- Damp towel or non-slip mat placed under cutting board
- Hands dried before picking up knife
- All ingredients positioned to non-dominant side
- Scrap bowl or sheet pan placed at board edge
- Dedicated protein board separated from produce board
- Knife sharpness verified with paper test before starting

The Five Essential Cuts

Measure your cut accuracy against professional tolerances and identify which of the five cuts needs the most practice.

Exercise: Five-Cut Accuracy Challenge

Perform each of the five cuts on the specified ingredient. Measure a sample of 10 pieces per cut using a ruler. Record dimensions in the worksheet below. Run this challenge at the start of your training, then repeat after two weeks to see measurable improvement.

- Julienne (carrot): target 3 mm x 3 mm cross-section. What is your average cross-section and max deviation?

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- Brunoise (carrot from your julienne): spread 1 tbsp on a white plate. Describe the visual uniformity — are any pieces conspicuously larger or smaller?

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- Chiffonade (basil, 10 leaves): measure ribbon width. Target 2–3 mm. Any bruising or darkening visible within 5 minutes?

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- Batonnet (zucchini): target 6 mm x 6 mm x 6 cm. Measure 5 sticks. Max deviation from 6 mm cross-section?

Worksheet: Cut Accuracy Log

Fill in one row per cut per practice session. Calculate your improvement rate after 5 sessions.

Date

Cut type

Ingredient

Target dimension (mm)

Average measured dimension (mm)

Max deviation (mm)

Time to complete (min)

Pass / Needs work

Checklist: Cut Readiness Gates

- [] Julienne: 10 consecutive sticks with max deviation under 0.5 mm cross-section
- [] Brunoise: 1 tbsp on white plate shows no visually outlying pieces
- [] Chiffonade: 10 basil leaves rolled and sliced with no bruising, ribbons 2–3 mm wide
- [] Batonnet: 10 sticks measuring 6 mm x 6 mm, length within 5 mm of target
- [] Bias cut: 10 spring onion ovals at consistent 45-degree angle verified by protractor or angle guide
- [] Full stir-fry mise en place (all five cuts): completed in under 22 minutes

Breaking Down Proteins

Track your yield percentage and sanitation compliance when breaking down poultry and filleting fish.

Exercise: Chicken Breakdown Yield Drill

Break down three whole chickens across separate sessions. Weigh the whole bird, then weigh your total recovered meat (eight pieces). Calculate yield percentage each time. Compare across sessions to measure improvement.

- Session 1: What was your yield percentage? Did you hack through any bone, or did all joints separate cleanly?

- Session 2: Were you able to locate the fat line on each thigh-drumstick joint before cutting? Did it make separation cleaner?

- Session 3: How many total bone fragments (if any) appeared on your board? What technique adjustment reduced them?

Worksheet: Protein Breakdown Yield Log

Complete one row per protein breakdown session. The yield % and improvement delta cells are for you to calculate by hand.

Date

Protein type (chicken / fish species)

Whole weight (g)

Total recovered meat weight (g)

Yield %

Bone fragments on board: 0 / 1–3 / 4+

Time to complete (min)

Key technique note

Checklist: Protein Work Sanitation Protocol

- [] Protein-dedicated board (red or colour-coded) in use — never the produce board
- [] Blade washed and sanitized with food-safe solution between protein and produce work
- [] Board sanitized with 1:50 bleach solution or quaternary ammonium spray after protein use

- Cut proteins covered and refrigerated within 30 minutes of prep if not cooking immediately
- No raw protein pieces left on board at room temperature during vegetable prep
- Knives hand-washed and immediately dried — never soaked or left wet
- Hands washed with soap for 20 seconds after handling raw poultry or fish

Knife Selection, Honing, and Sharpening

Audit your knife kit, establish a consistent honing habit, and document your first full whetstone sharpening.

Exercise: Kit Audit and Sharpness Baseline

Test every knife in your current kit with the paper test and the tomato test. Record results. Then hone each knife using the stationary-rod method and re-test. Document before and after results in the worksheet.

- Before honing: which knives passed the paper test (clean slice, no tearing)? Which failed?

- After honing with 18-stroke sequence: did any failing knives now pass? Which still failed?

- Which knives in your kit require a whetstone session rather than honing? How did you determine this?

Worksheet: Knife Kit Inventory and Maintenance Schedule

List every knife you own. Fill sharpness test results and last-sharpen date. Use this as a living document — update after every sharpening session.

Knife name / type

Brand and steel type (German HRC 56–58 / Japanese HRC 60+)

Blade length (cm)

Paper test result before honing: pass / fail

Paper test result after honing: pass / fail

Needs whetstone: Y / N

Last whetstone sharpening date

Next scheduled sharpening date

Notes (chips, handle issues, etc.)

Checklist: Pre-Session and Post-Session Knife Routine

- Hone chef's knife with 18-stroke sequence (5+5, 3+3, 1+1) before every cutting session
- Verify edge with paper test after honing
- Confirm blade is dry before storing
- Store knives on magnetic strip, in block, or with individual blade guards — never loose in a drawer
- Check for visible chips or rolled edge on blade under bright light before each session
- Schedule whetstone session when honing no longer restores clean paper-test pass
- Flatten whetstone surface with lapping plate after every 3–5 sharpening sessions

Your Action Plan

1. Day 1–2: complete the board setup pre-flight checklist and drill pinch grip + claw on a single vegetable (zucchini or carrot) for 15 minutes each day — no speed, only form
2. Day 3–4: add the ruler test for slice thickness; target max deviation under 2 mm before progressing to the five cuts
3. Day 5–7: practice julienne and brunoise on carrots; measure accuracy after each session using the Cut Accuracy Log
4. Week 2, Day 1–2: add chiffonade (basil) and batonnet (zucchini); include bias cut on spring onions
5. Week 2, Day 3: run the full stir-fry mise en place drill (all five cuts, sequenced correctly) and time yourself
6. Week 2, Day 4–5: break down your first whole chicken; weigh and calculate yield; log in Protein Breakdown Yield Log
7. Week 3, Day 1–2: fillet three trout across two sessions; calculate yield percentage each time and compare
8. Week 3, Day 3: audit your knife kit using the Knife Kit Inventory worksheet; hone all knives and re-test
9. Week 3, Day 4: complete your first whetstone sharpening session on the knife that failed the post-honing paper test
10. Week 4: run the Five-Cut Accuracy Challenge again as a benchmark; compare deviations against your Week 1 baseline

