

# Cookin' at the Keyboard



David N. Blank-Edelman  
Northeastern University

*with*

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University of Washington

## Your Servers for Today



# *Amuse-bouche*

## Previous Talks

2001

If I Could Talk To The Animals



David N. Blank-Edelman  
Northeastern University CCS  
LISA 2001 Invited Talk

2002

SysAdmin, Stories and Signing:  
Learning from Communication Experts



David N. Blank-Edelman  
Northeastern University CCIS  
LISA2002

2003

Through the Lens Geekily:  
How SysAdmins Are Portrayed  
in Pop Culture



David N. Blank-Edelman  
Northeastern University CCIS  
LISA 2003

2004

System Administration  
and Sex Therapy:  
*The Gentle Art of Debugging*



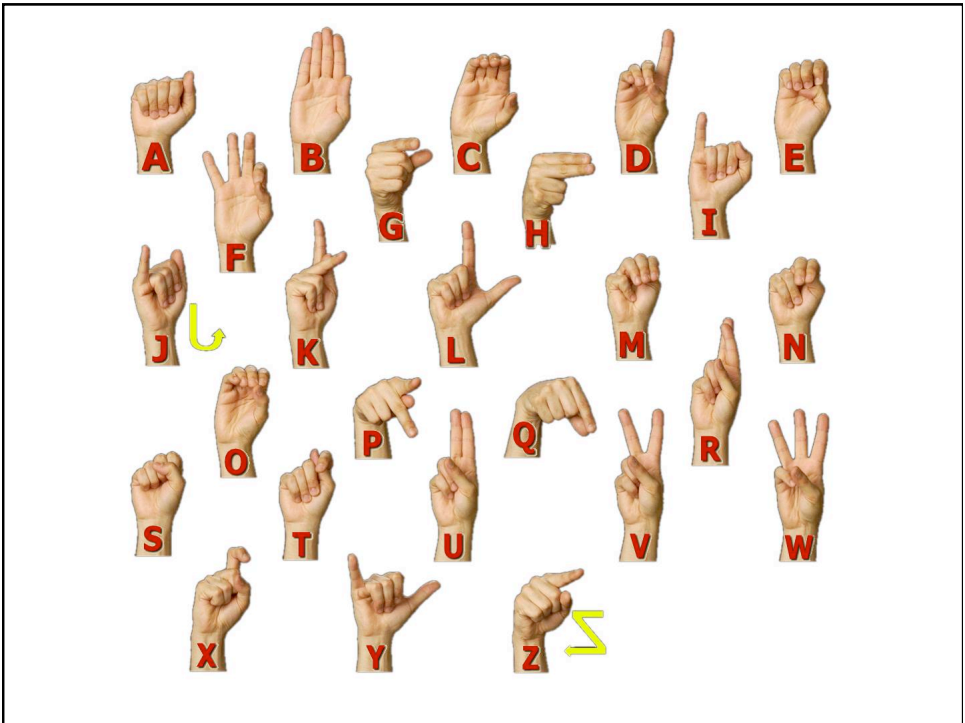
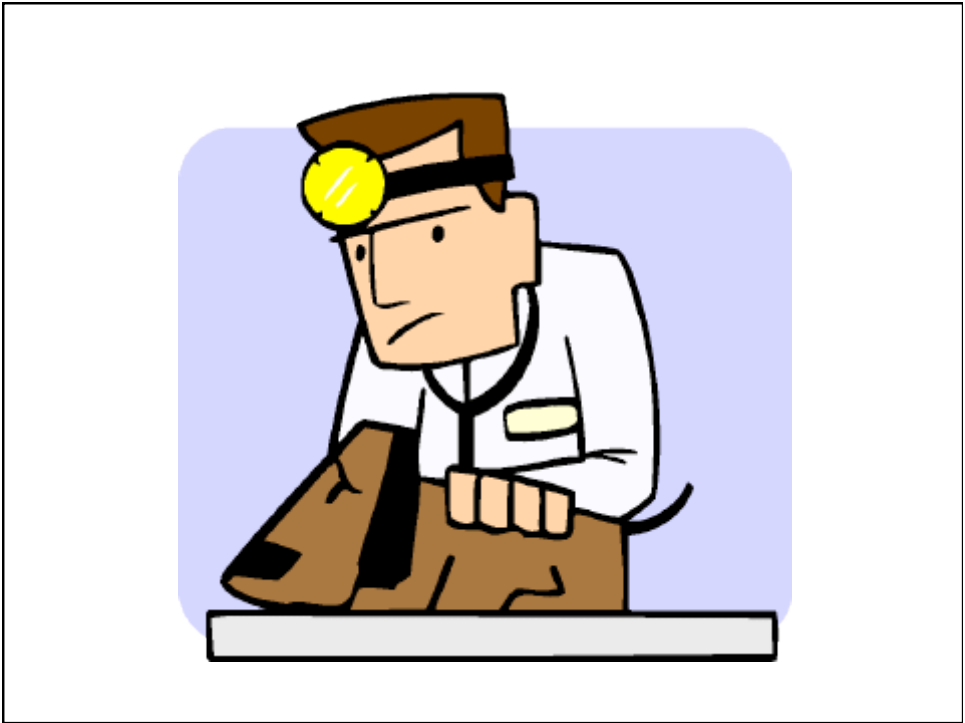
David N. Blank-Edelman  
Northeastern University CCIS  
LISA 2004

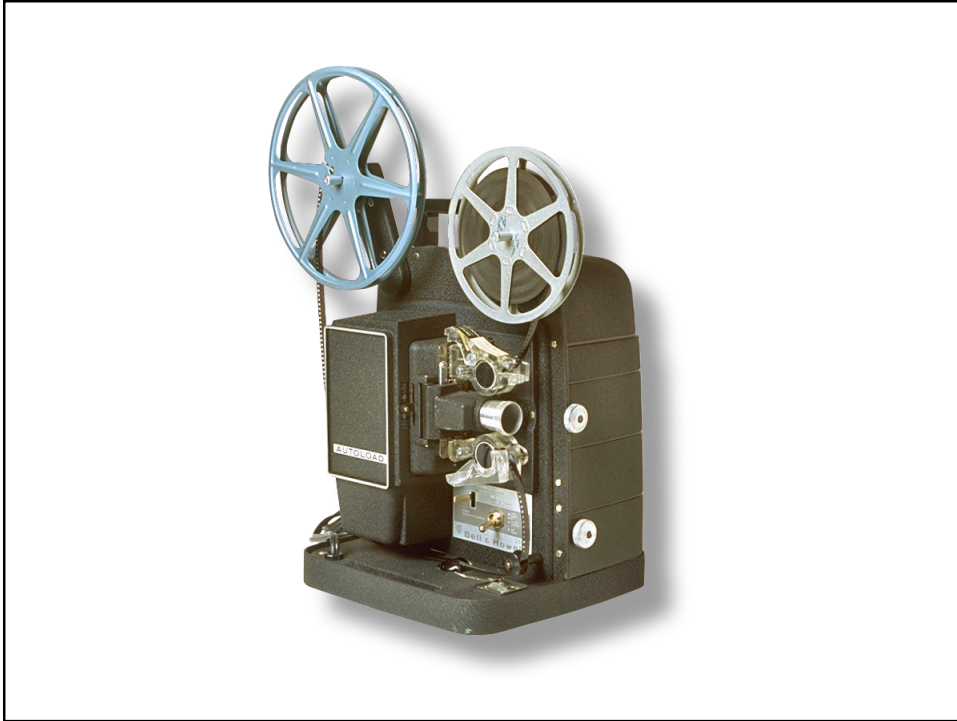
2005



2006











## Your Experience



## *Today's Menu*

### *Appetizer*

Why Cooking is Hard

### *First Course*

Recipes

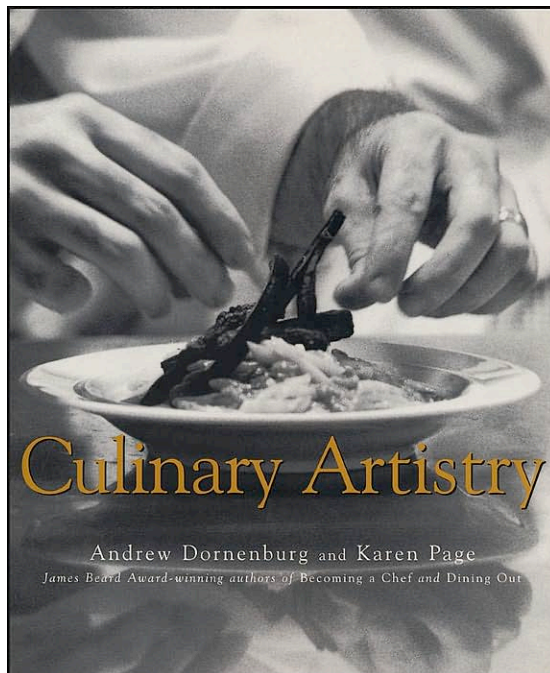
### *Second Course*

In a World-class Kitchen

### *Dessert*



# *Appetizer*



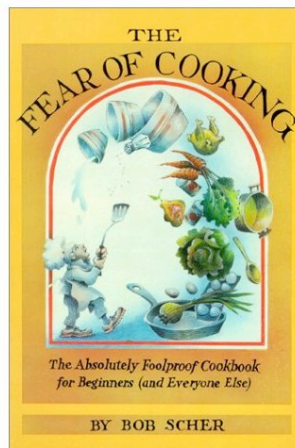
## Why Cooking is Hard

"To make a fine sauce, you can't just follow the recipe exactly, it's never exactly the same, so you always have to adjust. But that takes experience," he says.

"Do you need to add a touch of port to it, add a few more beets to the Bordelaise, reduce it down a bit to achieve a deeper, richer color? There are different things you need to adjust each time to make a sauce consistent. *You don't achieve consistency just by doing it the same way every time.*"

—Terrance Brennan in *Culinary Artistry* (emphasis mine)

## Why Cooking is Hard



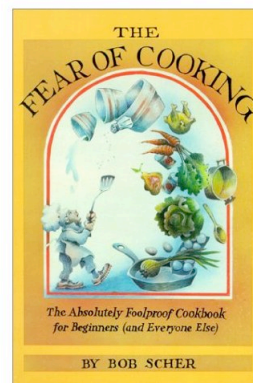




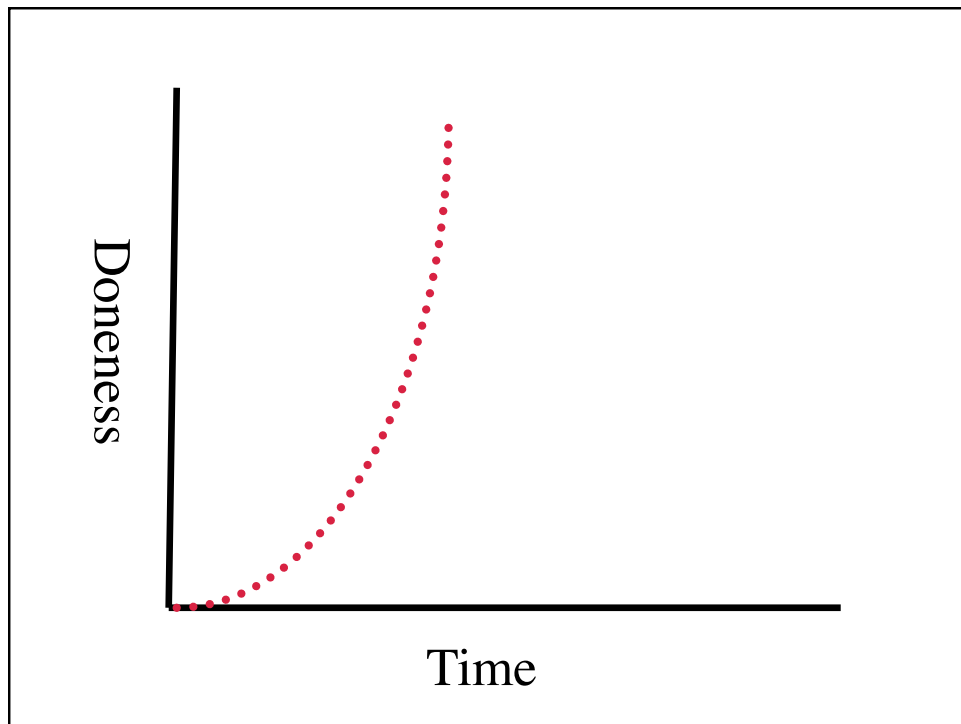
## Why Cooking is Hard

(Bob Scher)

- You aren't cooking.
  - At best, managing the conditions
- Number of variables are huge:
  - the weather, the season, the cook's disposition and mood, the quality and state of the ingredients, the equipment, altitude, etc.
- Cooking is very rarely a linear process.



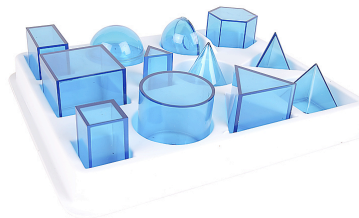




## Hierarchical Primes of Cooking

1. Interest in tasting food
2. Managing heat  
Precision, leeway and margins of error
3. Properties of each kind of food  
Understanding tools like oil, salt, sugar  
Understanding helpers like lemon, garlic, anchovies
4. Understanding effects of  
processes to modify foods  
(e.g. cutting)

(from Bob Scher)

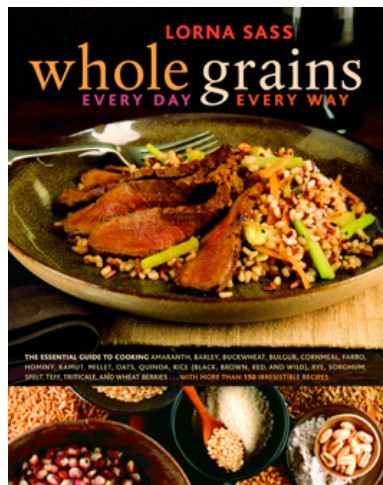
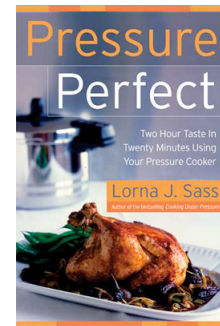
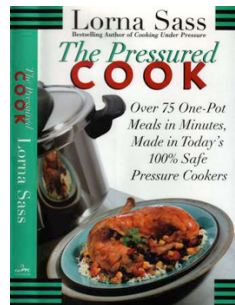
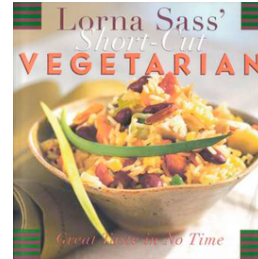
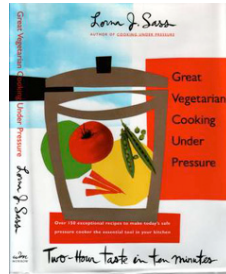
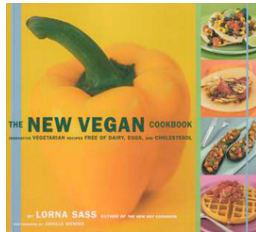


# *First Course*

## Creating Recipes



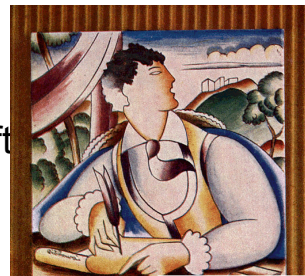
Lorna Sass



## Why Writing about Cooking is Harder

(Lorna Sass)

- You never make the same food twice.
- Really describing how to make a dish would scare readers.
- People no longer use common sense when cooking so you have to be more precise.
- Hard to write good instructions (requires repeated crossing of left right brain divide).



## You Never Make the Same Food Twice

- the weather and other environmental factors
- the season
- the quality and state of the ingredients
- the equipment
- the cook's disposition and mood
- Solutions:
  - recipes are general guidelines
  - “Never expect anyone to duplicate your recipe.”



## Writing Recipes is Hard

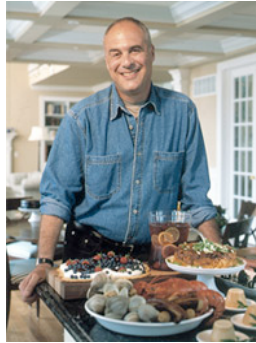
- assumptions about skill of cook and her or his cooking environment
- working with ingredients that are not part of culture (aside: recipes from caste systems)
- hard to describe visual things, taste, texture, especially “doneness”
- Solutions:
  - ingredients specified in common units
  - supply ranges of time
  - provide both time and visual/textual clues (to help reader make judgments)

## Hard to Write Good Instructions

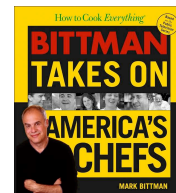
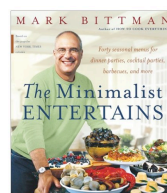
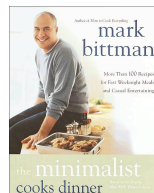
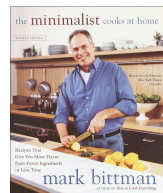
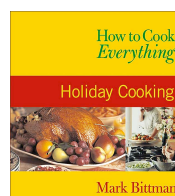
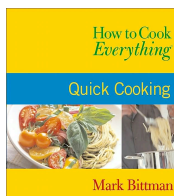
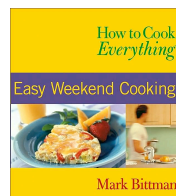
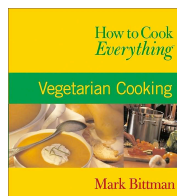
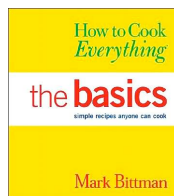
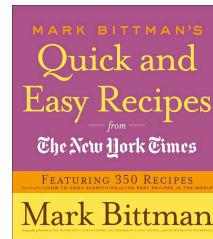
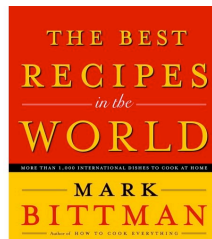
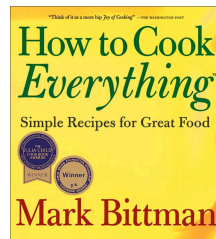
- Right/Left brain divide
- “Real” cooking is not about recipes
- Solutions:
  - “pair” recipe writing
  - more experience yields simpler recipes with fewer ingredients to achieve same or better flavors



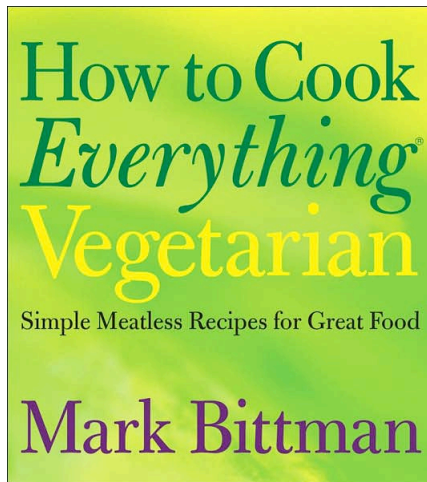
# Simplifying Recipes



Mark Bittman

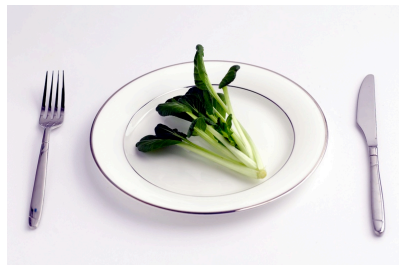






## Learning to Simplify

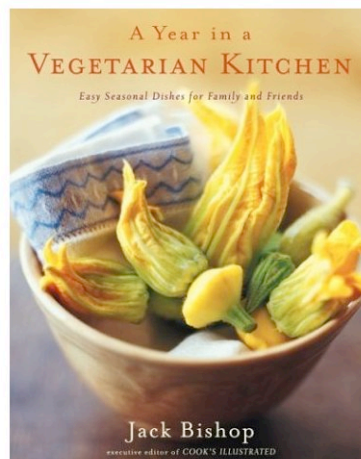
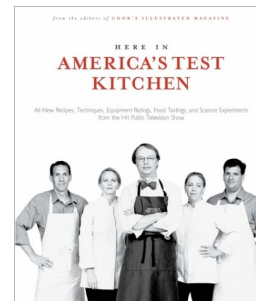
- Experience...  
experience...  
experience.
- How to simplify:
  - Learn where to cut corners
  - Learn to ask questions
  - Question every ingredient
  - Cooking is about compromise



# Testing Recipes



Jack Bishop





## Testing Recipes (the ATK Way)

1. Research, yield 5-7 recipes
2. Kitchen test all recipes to determine variables, important attributes, goals
3. Start to test each variable, one at a time (several weeks, 40-50 tests)
4. Find final candidate, approved by Test Kitchen director
5. Sent out to professional recipe tester, writes up formal report
6. Sent to “friends of Cooks” (1000-2000 people, 50-200 responses), sent back to #3?

## Testing Recipes #2

- Everyone in TK has formal culinary experience
- Testing is done communally at ATK
- Standard ATK training procedures (mentoring, etc)
- ATK work documented in recipe/test log
- Other authors (Sass/Bittman) also have assistants for testing



## Why Do You Care?



- Documentation
- Configuration management tools
- Ideas: pair writing, multiple clues, ways to simplify, general guidelines...

*Second Course*

## World-class Kitchens



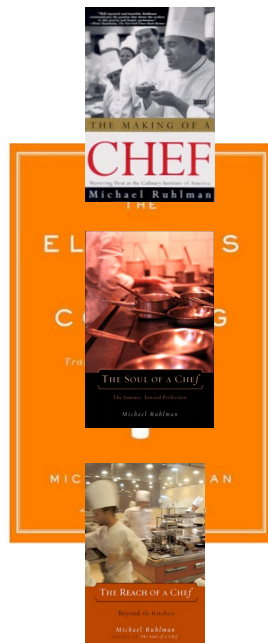
Michael Ruhlman



Chef Barbara Lynch



Chef Frank McClelland



Nº 9 PARK  
B&G OYSTERS LTD  
The Butcher Shop



PLUM  
PRODUCE





# Terminology

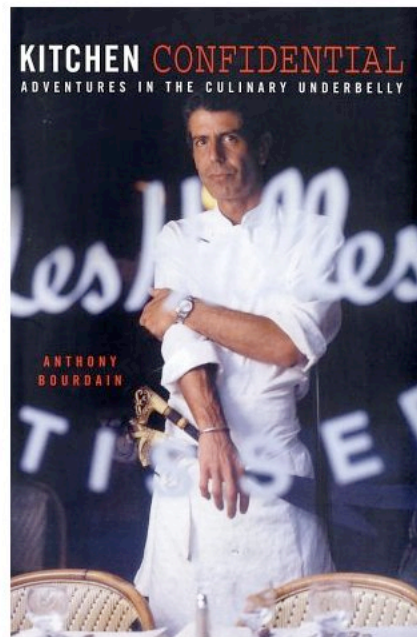
- Front/Back of House
- Service
- Covers/Top
- Brigade
- Stations
- The Pass/Expeditor



	<i>Trade</i>	<i>Craft</i>	<i>Art</i>
<b>Category</b>	"Burger-Flippers"	"Accomplished Chefs"	"Culinary Artists"
<b>Customer Goal</b>	Survival	Enjoyment	Entertainment
<b>Chef's intention</b>	Fill/Feed	Satisfy/Please	Transcend / Transport
<b>Price of Lunch</b>	Movie Ticket	Off-Broadway Theatre Ticket	Broadway Orchestra Ticket
<b>Who Determines Meal</b>	Customer ("Have it your way")	Customer/Chef	Chef (Tasting Menu)
<b>Chef's Primary Repertoire</b>	Hamburgers	Classic dishes	Chef's own dishes
<b>Number of Senses Affected</b>	5	5	6
<b>Customers Leave Saying</b>	"I'm full."	"That was delicious."	"Life is wonderful."

From *Culinary Artistry* by Andrew Dorenenburg and Karen Page, 1996

	<i>Trade</i>	<i>Craft</i>	<i>Art</i>
<b>Category</b>	Help Desk	Systems Administrator	Ubër SysAdmin
<b>Customer Goal</b>	Operational	Five 9's, etc.	Change Real Life
<b>SysAdmin's intention</b>	Fix	Build/Recreate	Transcend / Transport
<b>Price of Lunch</b>	Movie Ticket	Off-Broadway Theatre Ticket	Broadway Orchestra Ticket
<b>Who Determines Infrastructure</b>	Customer ("Have it your way")	Customer/SysAdmin	SysAdmin
<b>Admin's Primary Repertoire</b>	Point/click	CLI/Automation	Other People
<b>Number of Senses Affected</b>	5	5	6
<b>Customers Leave Saying</b>	?	?	?



“Cooking is a *craft*, I like to think, and a good cook is a craftsman—*not* an artist. There's nothing wrong with that: the great cathedrals of Europe were built by craftsmen—though not designed by them. Practicing your craft in expert fashion is noble, honorable, and satisfying. ”

— *Kitchen Confidential*, p. 62



“What most people don't get about professional-level cooking is that it is not at all about the best recipe, the most creative marriage of ingredients, flavors and textures; that, presumably, was all arranged long before you sat down to dinner..

— *Kitchen Confidential*, p. 56



“Line cooking done well is a beautiful thing to watch. It's a high-speed collaboration resembling, at its best, ballet or modern dance...”

— *Kitchen Confidential*, p. 55



## What Do You Need to Be A Line Cook in Their Kitchen?

- Chef Lynch says:
  - Urgency
  - Ability to take direction
  - Cleanliness
  - Precision
  - Food know-how
  - Initiative

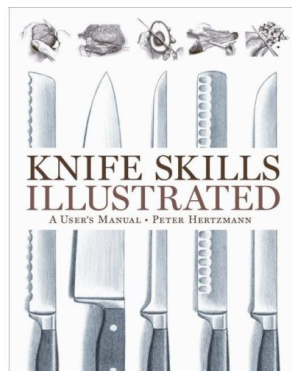


# What Do You Need to Be A Line Cook in Their Kitchen?

- Chef McClelland adds:
  - Focus
  - Dedication to craft/willingness to succeed in environment
  - Accepting the contract: will be professional, will chase perfection on a daily basis
  - Willingness to realize not an individual, work in unison/rhythms
  - Willingness to jump in to help
  - Ability to receive new information and produce with it



## Skills/Moves



## *Mise En Place*

“Everything in place”

- Physical
  - All food prepared and ready to cook
  - All sauces and garnishes
  - Cooking foods (oils, salts, etc)
  - Utensils/Equipment
  - Towels
- Arrangement
- Lynch: no cutting during service, only one slicing thing out if it is called for
- Team prepared at No.9 Park and L’Espalier, special highly trained chefs all day at L’Espalier

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| • Kosher or sea salt                           | • Carmelized apple sections  |
| • Crushed black peppercorns                    | • Garlic confit  |
| • Ground white pepper                          | • Chopped or slivered garlic   |
| • Fresh breadcrumbs                            | • Chopped shallots   |
| • Chiffonade parsley                           | • Softened butter  |
| • Blended oil in wine bottle with speed pourer | • Favorite ladles, spoons, tongs, pans, pots   |
| • Extra virgin olive oil                       | • All sauces, portioned fish, meat, menu items, specials and backups conveniently positioned for easy access |
| • White wine                                   |  |
| • Brandy                                       |  |
| • Chervil tops in ice water for garnish        |  |
| • Tomato concassée                             |  |

— *Kitchen Confidential*, p. 60-61



## *Mise En Place 2*

“Everything in its place”

- Mental
  - Chef McClelland used to race ski
  - Setting up things in a rhythm, thinking about the motion
  - Favorite approach:
    - have cup of tea, 3-5 minutes to go through each dish in his mind, evaluate, mentally prepare station, change it, try new things.
- Bourdain says...

## Working Clean

- McClelland: Clean as you go. Clean between tasks. Keeping yourself (apron, floor, cutting boards/knives) clean.
- Lynch: Start project, finish project (total focus).
- Why?
  - Clears your brain
  - Helps prepare for next task, clearing out the last
  - You are “working organized”
  - Ultimately saves time
- Bourdain recalls...

## Urgency and *dans la merde*

- Ruhlman: Fear
- McClelland: one thing you do when cook—fight against time from the minute show up
- Lynch: If one person is *dans la merde*, it can take down the entire line



## Getting Out of *dans la merde*

- Lynch: get help (chef + “incentive”/other cooks)
- McClelland:
  - Calm yourself down. Stop doing “rotating 360s.” Stand still, evaluate.
  - Come up with creative alternatives to pull your area back together and catch up (relieve pressure).
  - Notify team your area is overworked and is paying price, need a bit of relief.
  - Look for a way to delegate by asking for help (station has to be organized enough to delegate).
- Both talk about it as “teaching opportunity”

## What Does a Chef Do?

- Creation
- Management
- Perception/P.R.
- Standards/Tone

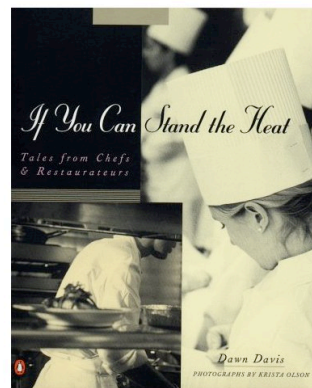
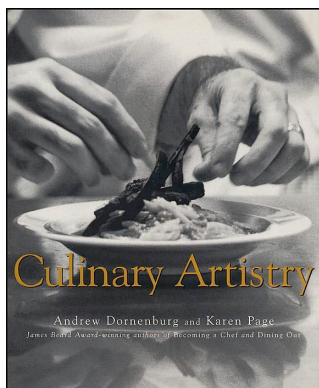


## Line Cook → Chef?

- Lynch: path is:
  - master station under pressure
  - in control enough to help other guy
  - start to shine (incl. show up early, take initiative)
  - throw an idea at you (e.g. special), see if person shines when given creative outlet
  - put in restaurant, then test admin side, communicate w/front of house...
- McClelland:
  - Takes 3-4 years of working a station every day to become good line cook, great only after 10+ years
  - Required to know 3 stations, work with junior/senior pairs
- *Stages*



## Chef Attributes



## Chef Attributes

- Ruhlman: love of food/cooking/serving, absolute focus & total immersion via passion, standards
- Lynch: passion, passion, passion
- McClelland: chase perfection on a daily basis, focus, attention to detail. Freedom to directly be a creator on a daily basis of your environment, to control it.
- Williams: "Nothing goes out until it is right. No exceptions, because if you let it slide once, you will the second, the third and the fourth times as well. It's important to me because my name is out there, and I won't accept anyone putting out a bad plate."
- Norman Van Aken: like to make plates

*Dessert*

## References

- *Kitchen Confidential* by Anthony Bourdain
- *If You Can Stand the Heat: Tales from Chefs and Restaurateurs* by Dawn Davis
- *Culinary Artistry* by Andrew Dornenburg and Karen Page
- *The Making of a Chef/The Soul of a Chef/The Reach of a Chef* by Michael Ruhlman
- *The Fear of Cooking* by Bob Scher

(plus many more...)

- Interviews with Jack Bishop, Mark Bittman, Chef Barbara Lynch, Chef Frank McClelland, Michael Ruhlman, Lorna Sass, Bob Scher

## Heartfelt Thanks to:

- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| • Jack Bishop          | • David Mack                              |
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| • Heison Chak          | • Michael Ruhlman                         |
| • Lee Damon            | • Lorna Sass                              |
| • Sarah Hearn          | • Bob Scher                               |
| • Philip Kizer         | • Devon, Tony and the<br>USENIX/MSI staff |
| • Chef Barbara Lynch   | • Hyatt Regency Dallas                    |



Dedicated to  
Cindy Blank-Edelman





## Bringing These Ideas into Your SysAdmin Life



- Write better “recipes” and recipe interpreters
- Develop your skills/moves
- *Mise en place*
- Work clean
- Focus and passion
- Chase perfection...

