

Quality in....Cooking

An article by Rachel Russell, the senior consultant with QualityWBT. Rachel has over ten years of experience as a quality professional and a lifetime experience of living in the world of Quality. She owns and operates a food truck around London, England. Rachel has diverse expertise in marketing, educational programs, event planning, and cheffery.



As quality is everywhere in our daily lives, we are starting a series of articles about how quality permeates many activities we do and impacts our decisions.

We have all had bad food. Sometimes we paid for it. Other times, it manifested itself in the home. For example, I certainly did not create a quality product one Thanksgiving when I tried to make mashed potatoes in the slow cooker. I took a risk that year and it did not pay off. Plenty of recipes (i.e., work instructions) are available for making mashed potatoes in a slow cooker. I could try again using different work instructions or analyze why the Thanksgiving recipe was not successful the first time. Alternatively (and my ultimate decision), I could go back to the previous method which worked every time; however, it didn't offer me the extra space on the stovetop that the slow cooker did. From failure to success, let's discuss an example of quality in cooking.

Where does quality begin in cooking? The best ingredients? Personally, I do not think so. Most of us cannot afford the best “quality” ingredients each and every day, but we want our food to be of good quality every day. And even if one could always afford the best ingredients, most folks have a dirty little secret food they like. What's yours? A hotdog? Possibly macaroni and cheese from a box? I am a perfectionist in the kitchen and also a risk taker. However, I also feel very strongly against food waste so try to keep my waste to a minimum. The specifications that I work toward are perhaps different than in a robot factory or for a Michelin-starred chef. However, what we do have in common are processes, budgets, procurement, preparing and processing the raw materials; assembling the meal and the reward of happiness while feeding people good quality food.

Let's start with the beginning of the process. Is it when my spouse asks “What's for dinner”? What are we going to eat tonight? Let's be simple and choose Spaghetti Bolognese. This is a process I know well and I don't need written instructions. Recently, when my daughter asked for the recipe, I typed it up and sent it to her. She needs written instructions. We can easily make a SIPOC chart for making Spaghetti Bolognese. As the chart suggests, my family are huge stakeholders in dinner every night!

Suppliers	Inputs	Processes	Outputs	Customers
Grocery store	2x cans of chopped tomatoes 150g(5 oz) cubed pancetta 500g (1lb) ground beef 500g (1lb) ground pork	In one dutch, oven crisp pancetta. Then add other two meats and brown, stirring to break up	Spaghetti Bolognese	My family
Store cupboard	2 lb Linguine Pasta 6 cloves Garlic 2x cans chopped tomatoes salt 2x Dutch ovens Wooden spoon Colander	Mince 6 cloves garlic, add to meat. Stir. Stir in 3 cans tomatoes, bring to simmer. Add salt to taste. Does it need the last can of tomatoes? Simmer uncovered for 30 minutes. In second dutch oven, bring salted water to boil.		
Refrigerator	Parmesan cheese	Once water is boiling add 1lb pasta and cook as package requires. Drain and serve.		
Garden	Basil	Garnish with cheese and fresh basil		

I need my raw materials (inputs) first. Pasta, protein, vegetables, seasonings, garnish. Our family has a weekly budget for food with preferred suppliers in our neighborhood. Our scope is to feed our family for the week within budget with enjoyable meals. Spaghetti Bolognese easily fits within this budget and is a favorite with everyone. I have checked the supply stock and we already have most of the ingredients needed:

- our favorite pasta shape for this process (linguine because we just like it better, while my dad liked the thinner spaghetti),
- the seasonings,
- the garnish,
- and we have two cans of tomatoes (but the ingredients list calls for three or four).

In addition, we do not appear to have any of our chosen protein in stock; so, it is off to our approved suppliers we go.

I have created this recipe/process to be easily measured while shopping to use up whole packets rather than measure out raw ingredients. I'm keeping it simple. Sometimes the best things in life are simple. Which brings us to our output...a beautiful, simple Spaghetti Bolognese that my family really loves. It brings us joy to sit and eat this quality meal together. This serves six and we love the leftovers!

And I know it's cringe worthy, but lately I've been calling this Sipoc-ghetti!