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International Union of Arab Master Chefs

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Describe the Dish Before Judging It: Sensory Notes in Culinary Competitions

Official article information

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Article code –	**Protection number** –

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Reference
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A sauce provides a practical distinction between sensory description, personal preference and a culinary judgement tied to a stated criterion.

What did the judge observe?

“The sauce failed” tells a chef little about what happened. “It coated the back of the spoon and stayed there when tilted” describes an observation. “I prefer it lighter” expresses a preference. “It was thicker than the category requires” compares an observation with a stated criterion. Readers can agree on the description while disputing the judgement.

The same attribute can lead to two decisions

Thickness may help a sauce intended to coat a main ingredient, yet hinder one meant to pour freely. A sensory profile provides language for attributes such as appearance, aroma, taste and texture.

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What remains after the score?

A written note can record the attribute, the conditions under which it was observed and the category expectation. For example, a thick layer pooled on the ingredient at service where the criterion called for a thin, even coating. This identifies what can be reviewed and leaves the cause open until the preparation is examined.

Why timing belongs in the note

A crust can be crisp on the first bite and soften where it touches sauce. When two conflicting notes omit the portion or time, it is difficult to tell whether the assessors perceived the same sample differently. “The outer edge was crisp on the first bite and the area touching the sauce was soft” can accommodate both observations. That scope matters when a competition result is reviewed days later.

From an outcome to a possible cause

Dryness can be described directly. Saying that the cook left the dish on the heat too long requires a record or a witness. Several preparation choices could lead to the same result. For a competition score, the note can stop at the observed texture and its relation to the criterion. A production review can then investigate the cause with the kitchen.

A tasting vocabulary others can understand

“Balanced” may be clear to the person who wrote it and still leave readers with questions. Does it describe acidity and sweetness, or the relationship between a rich sauce and a light accompaniment? Naming the elements makes the word more useful. If a dish changes during a bite, the note can record what appeared first and what lingered after swallowing. This gives the cook a clearer account of the eating experience and makes the comment easier to compare with other observations.

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