

RESTAURANT MENU GUIDE



For a restaurant to make a compelling and lasting impression, they must include the menu. Along with distinguishing the brand, a menu is an important tool for promoting and selling delicious dishes and creative cocktails.

Must haves for a menu include an attractive look and feel that aligns with your dining environment, well organized layout and enticing descriptions.

Read these tips for organizing, writing and designing your picture perfect menu.

MENU ORGANIZATION

Does your Restaurant Serve Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner?

Consider the two primary options.

1. Create a separate menu for each meal service
2. Develop one menu with distinct sections for the offerings of breakfast, lunch and/or dinner

Useful Tip: To prevent confusion, clearly label each menu or menu section, and use unique colors or designs to help identify each one.

Know Where People Look First.

For insight on how customers read your menu, consider using an [eye tracking service](#). These snapshots will demonstrate how a menu performs with your customer base and give insight on any changes you may want to make.

First and last two items in a list are more likely to be remembered. Place your most profitable menu items in these locations, giving them the most attention.

On tri-fold [menus](#), customers start at the top center and move in a counter-clockwise direction. For bi-fold menus, the eye drifts to the top right corner first.



Keep It Simple.

Begin with your starters and end with desserts in the same order customers would enjoy their meal. Over complicating the order of your menu can lead to unnecessary confusion for guests and missed opportunities to promote incremental sales, which can adversely affect your bottom line.



Limit the Choices.

Studies show customers prefer 7 to 10 options in each category in a fine dining setting. If you have any specials to feature on the menu, consider doing an insert or [table talker](#) to bring attention to these non-daily items. A menu with too many choices can be overwhelming; pare back your offerings to allow guests to order with ease.

Don't Forget About the Drinks.

Beverages are often added to the end of a menu or featured on a separate menu. If you have an extensive wine or cocktail program, a separate beverage menu is the way to go. For a small list of drink options, get creative on how to make them stand out with special graphics and captivating descriptions.

PINPOINT YOUR PRICE POINT

Keep the Focus on the Dishes, not the Price.

Emphasize and spotlight the food and reduce attention on prices by removing dollar signs and making the font size slightly smaller. Let your dish descriptions be the driving force behind a customer's choice.

Be Consistent on Price Format.

To mix and match amounts like \$12.66 and \$18.95 can look sloppy. Your menu

will appear more polished and sophisticated by using whole dollar amounts. If that format doesn't fit your restaurant, consider having everything end in .99 or .50.

Be Strategic with Price Placement.

With pricing on the right side of the menu opposite the dishes on the left, your guests will be more likely to choose a dish based on price point. Keep the price for each dish close to the description.

A Refresher on Calculating Prices.

This [helpful article](#) from The Houston Chronicle provides a quick overview on which factors to take into consideration. It's also vital to have a strong plan in place when thinking about any sort of price increase. [Restaurant Hospitality](#) offers an easy outline to get started.



INSIDER TIP

For the total cost of each dish, don't forget to calculate associated expenses such as condiments, dressings and "free" offerings like bread and butter. While restaurants don't typically charge for these items, they should be accounted for in your pricing structure.

DELICIOUS DESIGN

Make a Great First Impression.

Your menu's look and feel should complement your establishment. This can be a big undertaking reliant on your vision. Depending on the budget, you may want to hire an outside graphic designer to bring life and uniqueness to the menu. There are also [online services](#) available that offer templates for a quick and easy personalized menu.

Embrace White Space.

Without sufficient negative space, the patron may feel overwhelmed. White space can improve reading comprehension - important for making a customer confident in their order. Also, be sure margins are aligned evenly on all sides of the menu.

Optimize Your Orientation.

Depending on the finished product, you'll want to consider a landscape (horizontal) or portrait (vertical) page orientation in the design phase. If your menu will be one page with multiple columns, the landscape orientation is the way to go. In that format, more information can fit on the page without overcrowding.





Spotlight Exclusive Dishes.

Use a design element to call attention to your specialty and best-selling items. This can be as simple as outlining the item in a box, listing the dish in a different font color or including a fun symbol next to the description. The creative possibilities are endless.

Limit Listings to One or Two Columns.

Having any more than a one or two column format can be visually over-stimulating and confusing. As with menu organization, design should be user friendly.

Find the Right Font.

Be sure to choose a font that is clear and legible; this helps to avoid frustration for customers if they are unable to read your offerings. Also, use two different fonts at most. Any more than that and a menu can look chaotic. If you are looking to switch up the look slightly between section headers or dish descriptions, consider using the same font, but in different sizes, bold or italics. Different sizes and weights call attention to important pieces of information, but keep a cohesive look. There are plenty of websites that offer [free fonts](#) to choose from.

Pick the Perfect Paper.

Paper is just as important as the font and organization. Since the menu is often the first thing a customer touches, make sure they have a pleasant first impression. Heavier paper weights in a creamier hue ooze elegance and luxury while brighter whites in a lighter weight are more appropriate in a casual setting. When selecting paper, factor in printing capability, plastic protectors to prevent staining, the natural texture of the paper and the per piece cost.

Know How to Keep It All Together.

Don't forget to take the binding of the menu into consideration. How your menu is bound is another subtle way to set the tone for your dining room. A [menu cover](#) offers a more formal feel whereas a [single wood board](#) is great for rustic settings.





WRITING THE PERFECT MENU

Images vs. Descriptions

For some restaurants, like family-focused establishments, using photos and images work well. For others, this may not be the best way to communicate the overall atmosphere or theme of the restaurant.

Descriptive words, detailing each item, are important not only for selling a meal, but to also portray a restaurant's personality. When describing a dish, texture, taste and appearance are the three most important factors.

Also, consider your audience. Family-friendly restaurants may opt for more straight forward wording while a higher end establishment should use a sophisticated tone. Not sure where to start? World Food & Wine offers a [list of words](#) to entice your guests.

Avoid Generic Terms on the Menu.

Instead of using the word "Entrée", break out offerings by Pasta, Fish, Poultry, etc. to easily guide customers as they read through the menu and help in their selection process.

Keep It Short.

While it is imperative to use enticing words to ignite the palette, it's unnecessary to list every ingredient. Focus on the main ingredients and any spice or sauce that gives your culinary creation that special something.

Outsource, If Needed.

Wordsmithing is an art. If your talents are not in writing a hunger-inducing menu, turn to the experts! There are professional menu copywriters you can hire to translate your masterpieces for the page.

DON'T FORGET

Before printing, double check for spelling and grammatical errors.

Ask several trusted associates to review the menu for honest opinions before going to print.

Keep the disclaimers to a minimum. Too many can be off putting.

Check out your competition for both design and pricing to give yourself a competitive edge.