



Secondary Schools Culinary Challenge Criteria 2026

Each year the Australian Culinary Federation (ACF) conducts a cooking competition for secondary school students in each Australian state. The aim of this competition is to give students an insight into the hospitality industry and to identify and encourage students who demonstrate a talent and a passion for cooking. This competition also opens the doors for competitors for future training and employment.

The competition is open to unlimited entries from each school. If you are in years 10, 11 or 12, enrolled in a secondary school and are studying either a Hospitality, Commercial Cookery, Home Economics or Food Tech course, then you are eligible to enter.

Competitors must be aged 19 years or less on 31st October 2026

2026 will see the introduction of a Dessert competition as well as the original Main Course competition

There will be 2 overall winning teams in each region & the National Final.

Please read the following entry criteria carefully and if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact your Region Competition Convenor

All Region Finals are to be completed by 30th June 2026

***In the event that the number of entries exceeds the maximum capacity the committee reserves the right to limit the number of teams based on the merit of each entry submitted.*

Disclaimer:

The committee of the Australian Culinary Federation and the Management of hosting venues shall not under any circumstances be responsible for any loss or damage to any exhibit, display, goods, equipment, tools, personal effects or injuries. The Competitor shall be responsible for all damages caused to the complex by any person in attendance at the competition (other than those under the control or direction of the Operator/Committee) and shall forward and pay to the organisers on demand the cost of rectification of any damage

Competition Rules Conditions of Entry

1. A submitted entry form shall constitute acceptance by the competitor to agree to abide by the competition rules. **ALL TEAMS MUST REGISTER USING THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM DOWNLOADED FROM THE WEBSITE**
2. Each team must consist of two students comprising of a Team Captain and an Assistant
3. Schools can enter the Main Course competition or the Dessert Competition or both Competitions. Each team can only compete in one competition
4. Entrants must be enrolled in Secondary School (in years 10, 11 or 12 only) with a finishing date no earlier than 31st October 2026
5. Entrants must be studying a Hospitality or Cookery course, Home Economics or Food Tech course
6. The winning teams are advised to consider appropriate travel insurance protection for travel to the National Final
7. A workflow plan, recipe, and a photo of the dish must accompany each entry, using the recipe and workflow template: see separate attachment.
8. All entries must be on an official entry form and signed by all parties & become the property of The Australian Culinary Federation and will be used in but not limited to promotions, media, sponsorship.
9. All competition work, food and dishes, must comply with current health regulations.
10. The judges have the right to inspect, cut, open, test and taste all entries.
11. All judges' decisions will be final, and no correspondence will be entered into.
12. Time limit to prepare and produce all items is 1 hour. Time keeping of the judges will prevail.
1 point per minute will be deducted for late presentation to a maximum of 5 points from the service criteria after 5 minutes the jury will determine if the dishes can be presented.
13. ACF and the Chairman of the Culinary Committee, reserve the right to rescind, modify or add to any of the rules and conditions, and their interpretation shall be final.
14. All correspondence for the competition must be directed to the responsible Region Convenor.
15. No additional electrical equipment other than stick blenders will be allowed into the kitchen. MUST BE TAGGED BY A CERTIFIED ELECTRICIAN. Noncomplying equipment will not be permitted.
16. Each team is responsible for providing all ingredients, except for the protein, needed to create their dish for regional heats
17. All competitors are required to use the product as stipulated in criteria.
18. All ingredients are to be prepared on the day of competition by the competitors. Exceptions as per What you can bring in on page 3
19. All submitted recipes will become the property of Australian Culinary Federation and may be used for promotional purposes.
20. Any communication between competitors and their respective coaches / teachers during the competition is prohibited.

What You Can Bring In

What you can bring into the competition

- Basic stock/mother sauces– can be brought in, but must have further fabrication Samples must be supplied for tasting
- Salads - cleaned, washed but not mixed or cut
- Vegetables can be cut/trimmed (any shape) **BUT** must be raw
 - vegetables like tomatoes may be blanched and peeled
 - broad beans may be shelled
 - Dried Vegetable powder permitted
 - Vegetable ash & homemade spice mixture permitted

Poultry

- proteins cannot be minced or ground
 - sausages must be made on site
 - The use of transglutaminase (Meat glue) is not permitted
- Smoked fish, prosciutto, chorizo, bacon, are allowed as long as they are further processed in the kitchen.
 - Pasta & other doughs allowed can be flavoured and rolled into sheets but not portioned and not cooked
 - Pastry sponge, biscuit
 - can be brought in, but not cut, sliced or stencilled
 - macarons need to be baked on premise, mixture may be bought in
 - Fruit pulps and Fruit purees
 - can be brought in, but not reduced, seasoned or thickened. Final sauce or coulis must be prepared on site. Samples for tasting.
 - Dried fruit powder permitted
 - Dehydrated fruit or sheets permitted
 - Decor elements - 100 % done on site
 - No titanium dioxide – no metallic powder no artificial food colours are permitted
 - Do not use gold or silver leaf
 - Eggs - can be separated and pasteurized, but not processed in any other way
 - Dry ingredients - can be Pre weighed and measured
 - Flavoured oils & butters are allowed

Competition Guidelines Main Course

- Each team must prepare, cook and display a main course for two people on two separate plates within a time limit of 1 hour. They will have 30 minutes to set up (in which time a briefing will be held) prior to the competition starting, and 30 minutes to clean up after the competition. Points will be deducted for late service and for failure to clean up to an acceptable level and within the allocated time frames. **Hygiene and safety standards must be observed at all times.**
- Students must use chicken as the main component of their dish. ½ No. 16 chicken or similar will be provided, to be prepared into two main course portions, within the allotted competition time. The dish must contain an appropriate starch, vegetable, garnish and white & dark meat must both be used from the chicken. The chicken should be broken down using correct butchery procedures, and unused portions must be packed down and stored appropriately using HACCP procedures.
 - A minimum of 2 precision vegetable cuts to be displayed, e.g. brunoise, macedoine, etc.
 - A minimum of four (4) accepted cookery methods to be shown in your preparation of your menu.
 - (1) one indigenous product must be used to complement your dish
 - Main Course is to be served 60 – 70 minutes after competition commences
- White plates must be used, no boards, slate, tiles or coloured plates your venue has all basic equipment needed. Anything larger than what would be expected to fit in a knife kit will not be permitted.
- All competitors must wear full Chef's uniform (hat, necktie, jacket, check pants, apron), if possible. If this is not possible, school uniform with long pants will be permitted. Footwear, only hard shoes or clogs which offer complete protection to the foot. (No joggers) Shoes must be clean and in good condition. Hair must be covered. Special note: Jewellery should not be worn during the competition. Visible piercing will need to be covered or removed. Nail polish is not permitted to be worn.
- Your knives must be clean, sharp and ready for use.
- Disposable gloves are only to be used for Ready to Eat products i.e. Chicken Salad
- Standard recipe cards, a preparation list and workflows must be displayed on the day of competition.

Competition Guidelines Dessert

- Each team must prepare, cook and display a dessert course for two people on two separate plates within a time limit of 90 minutes. They will have 30 minutes to set up (in which time a briefing will be held) prior to the competition starting, and 30 minutes to clean up after the competition. Points will be deducted for late service and for failure to clean up to an acceptable level and within the allocated time frames. **Hygiene and safety standards must be observed at all times.**
- Students must use one Queen product (NOT Food colouring). The dish must contain a variety of temperatures & textures
- Dessert is to be served 90-100 minutes from start of the competition
- White plates must be used, no boards, slate, tiles or coloured plates your venue has all basic equipment needed, including plates. Anything larger than what would be expected to fit in a knife kit will not be permitted.
- All competitors must wear full Chef's uniform (hat, necktie, jacket, check pants, apron), if possible. If this is not possible, school uniform with long pants will be permitted. Footwear, only hard shoes or clogs which offer complete protection to the foot. (No joggers) Shoes must be clean and in good condition. Hair must be covered. Special note: Jewellery should not be worn during the competition. Visible piercing will need to be covered or removed. Nail polish is not permitted to be worn.
- Your knives must be clean, sharp and ready for use.
- Disposable gloves are only to be used for Ready to Eat products i.e. Chicken Salad
- Standard recipe cards, a preparation list and workflows must be displayed on the day of competition.

Awards and Prizes

All Australian Culinary Federation Competitions follow Worldchefs guidelines, this means all competitors start with 100 points and a gold medal. Points will be deducted for incorrect skills and preparation, personal hygiene, taste and flavour of dish, unsafe storage and food handling procedures, and excess wastage.

The Team with the highest points will be announced the winner. This year's winning school will receive a Trophy, and students will receive individual trophies. The ACF Host Region will pay the registration fee for the winning team to compete in the National Secondary Culinary Schools competition in August Venue & Date TBC. They will also provide a suitable ACF member as chaperone to accompany the team. The winning school will be responsible for airfares for the 2 team members & airfare & rego should a teacher be required to accompany the team, ACF Region Committees will assist the schools with fundraising endeavours

All Competitors will receive a certificate for their participation in the competition. Gold, Silver and Bronze Medal will be handed out to teams who finish in the follow's points brackets.

- Gold with Distinction 100 points
- Gold, 90-99 points
- Silver, 80-89 points
- Bronze, 70-79 points

Presentations will be at the completion of the competition. Teams will receive a general de-brief before presentations. If a team requires a more detailed de-brief, then judges will be made available after the presentations have been held.

Equipment

Crockery

Each team will have the use of round 26cm - 30cm white plates

Alternately, teams may use their own plates

NOTE: TEAMS MUST PROVIDE THEIR OWN KNIVES.

Please contact the Competition Convener in your Region [Website>>](#) to confirm the following is available

Per team:

- 4 burners on a stove with oven gas or electric
- Fridge, minimum 2 shelves
- Workstation to accommodate 2 competitors
- Rubbish Receptacles that comply with local regulations

General access to the following:

- Commercial food processors
- Grill plate
- Microwave
- Salamander
- Scales
- Pasta machines
- Cryovac machine plus bags

Small equipment:

- LIMITED Assorted stainless steel mixing bowls
- LIMITED Assorted stainless-steel saucepans and frypans
- Baking trays and sheets
- Can opener
- Chinois
- Colander
- Ladles
- Spoons
- Tongs

General products:

- Cleaning chemicals
- Disinfectant/sanitiser
- Foil
- Cling wrap
- Baking paper/silicon paper
- Sponges / scourer
- Mops/ brooms / brushes
- First aid kit, Safety equipment, Fire blanket and extinguishers

Judges Tips

- Ensure all parts of your uniform are clean and tidy and your appearance is impeccable (these are easy points)
- Work must be clean and well organised
- Complete all required paperwork - recipes, workflows and prep lists are judged
- Ensure all cooking techniques are correct and well-rehearsed
- Starch is within harmony to protein.
- Vegetables in harmony with the protein
- Sauce and garnishes that complement the dish and are not over complicated
- Work as a team, not two individuals
- If you are not sure, ask; use all resources at your disposal
- Brown & white meat must be included in your menu.

THE FIVE KEYS FOOD SAFETY IN COMPETITIONS

- (1) Keep clean
- (2) Separate raw and cooked.
- (3) Cook correctly
- (4) Keep food at safe temperatures
- (5) Selection of safe raw materials to produce the items.

HAND WASHING:

It is a 30 second process which must take place.

- At the start of the actual competition
- When hands become soiled
- After handling raw proteins
- When each task is finished
- After mise en place has been set
- After visiting the washroom
- After handling rubbish
- Always upon returning to the kitchen

BEST PRACTICES

1. **Plastic** is something that the world and gastronomy is eliminating.
 - Avoid plastic bags unless necessary
 - Plastic containers are permitted to transport and store items in and must be reusable and are not to be thrown away after one use, they need to be cleaned and packed away.
2. **Competition Timing/ on Time** – is an important part of our profession whether in a restaurant or competition, food served at the correct temperature and on time allows a pleasant eating experience for the guests.
3. **Plate temperature** – Good Practices is to have cold food and desserts served on room temperature plate to avoid condensation; warm food should be served on warm plates

Judging

Each Team starts with 100 points and points are deducted in accordance with the following measurable elements:

MISE EN PLACE **5 points**

Personal Presentation	1
Set up workstation	1
Correct Mise en place level	3

HYGIENE & FOOD WASTE **10 Points**

Correct sanitation processes	5
Correct food waste preparation	2
Utilising trim & offcuts	3

PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION **20 Points**

Technical skills displayed	6
Correct methods of preparation	8
Efficient utilisation of time/organisation skills	6

SERVICE **5 Points**

Timeline adhered to, penalised one point for each minute delayed

PRESENTATION **10 Points**

Suitable temperature	1
Originality/flair	2
Appropriate too class/true to menu description	2
Portion size	1
Clean arrangement and dish	2
Nutritional balance	2

TASTE **50 Points**

Does the major component taste good	8
Does the sauce/garnish taste good	6
Do the complements add to the taste of the major	
Balance of textures	6
Does the sauce/garnish taste good	6
Balance of flavours	6
Do the complements add to the taste of the	
major ingredient	6
Seasoning	6
Taste of food preserved	6