



CARIBBEAN
HOTEL
ASSOCIATION

FOOD PRESENTATION GENERAL GUIDELINES





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Food Presentation General Guidelines

Special Acknowledgement:

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INTRODUCTION

Skilled culinarians must master the basics and principles of good cooking. This is a continuous learning experience through different aspects of the food & beverage, and other industries. However, cuisine is more than to properly implement some skills and techniques. Cuisine is also an art, and an opportunity for the culinarian to display his or her creative talents. A dish is the canvas where chefs express their skills and creativity.

Presentation is someone's first impression of a meal. Aesthetics and elegance are important to the eye, as it is through the sense of sight that other senses can be stimulated. An attractive and appealing appearance stimulates the desire to taste the food. By the same token, an improper or unattractive display can help to hide the magic and excitement that could tempt the guest to try food that may be excellently flavored.

Aware of the interest there exist for the subject the Caribbean Hotel Association is pleased to present the Food presentation Guidelines. These guidelines were funded partially by the Inter- American Development Bank and the Multi-Lateral Investment Fund as part of the Caribbean Tourism Credentialing Program for the professionalization of human resources in the Caribbean.

Although the explanations presented here are geared towards food presentation of plated items, not buffets, it is important to know that it is advantageous to reduce food items' size if used for the latter. Smaller items and portions lend themselves to more elegant presentations in buffet displays.

ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES

The most important factors for appropriate food presentation are the following:

- ☑ Practicality
- ☑ Balance
- ☑ Unity
- ☑ Focal Point

PRACTICALITY

Is your presentation a practical one? Please find next some highlights that help make presentations practical.

- Proper shingling of slices towards the customer
- Do not allow large items to hide any part of the presentation
- Ensure that the garnish and slice/ portion count correlate
- Sauce boat should be 2/3 full
- Make sure serving sizes are correct (total plates/servings)
- Place taller items or areas toward the rear of the plate/platter
(See picture)



From A Taste of the Caribbean 1999

BALANCE

The repetition should be avoided. The balance involves the following aspects:

- **Selection of food (simple vs. complex)**

Simplicity is of key importance in food presentation. Simplicity should not be confused with lack of skill or of imagination. Effective simplicity in food is one of the hardest things to accomplish successfully, as it requires a high level of both skills and imagination. Simplicity is beautiful and elegant.

Picture: Chicken Curry
Chef Debbie Metivier, Trinidad
General Session on Caribbean Cuisine
CHIC 2001



- **Color**

The presentation should exhibit a well balanced variety of color. Color is always important in food, but especially so in its presentation. Main colors should be soft, natural and compatible



Seared Tilapia on Breadfruit Galette
Chef Martin Maginley, Jamaica
Epicurean Escape - September 2001

Food Presentation General Guidelines

There are two primary categories of color to work with: earth tone and vibrant. Use of earth tones with vibrant color is often successful, and will make it easier to match food and colors. Show a variety in color without giving a "circus effect. Usually foods that taste good together will naturally harmonize in color. Natural color should highlight the cooking technique employed. Roasts caramelized on outside (use of glaze) as in the picture below.



Tamarind BBQ Duck
Chef Mark French, Puerto Rico
Grand Caribbean Dinner, CHIC 2001

- **Cooking Techniques:**

- ☑ Presentation should be varied and logically combined.
- ☑ Avoid repetition by using different and compatible methods.
- ☑ A variety of cooking techniques will automatically add a variety of textures to the presentation.
- ☑ Roasted whole meat with poached sausage.
- ☑ Baked crust with braised meats.
- ☑ Deep-fried fish with boiled vegetables, etc.

- **Nutritional Balance**

- ☑ There should be a proper balance between various food groups, such as meats and vegetables, protein and carbohydrates, among others. Additionally, ingredients and garnishes should harmonize with the main part of the dish and conform to contemporary standards of nutritional values.
- ☑ Texture of ingredients, flavorings and seasonings are also important elements requiring a harmonious integration. Flavor is the single most important factor in a meal. Through the use of ingredients with fresh, compatible flavors, the presentation will be enhanced naturally.

- **Shape**

- ☑ Avoid combining the same shapes on one plate.
- ☑ Avoid too many whole or stuffed vegetables or too many loose mixtures on the same plate.
- ☑ Use the natural shape of food to provide varied, but not extreme, drastic height. This will enhance the flow.



Picture from
A Taste of the Caribbean 1999

- **Accompaniments**

Accompaniments should be compatible with the entrée. The simpler the entrée, the more complicated the accompaniments. The more complicated the entrée, the simpler the accompaniments.

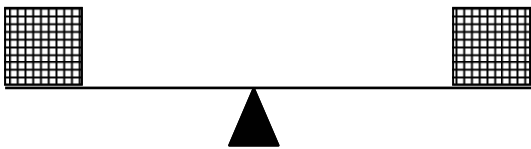
- ☑ Avoid serving accompaniments that have strong flavors with delicate entrées. Example, serving a hearty braised red cabbage with a delicate sole.
- ☑ Avoid combining fried vegetables and starches with fried entrées.
- ☑ Avoid serving a creamed vegetable or starch with an item that has a veloute, cream or bechamel-based sauce.

- **Layout**

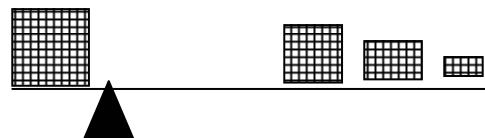
Balance, unity, focal point, flow and height should be well kept in mind to ensure a pleasing physical layout.

- **Spatial Balance - (symmetric vs. asymmetric)**

Symmetric Balance



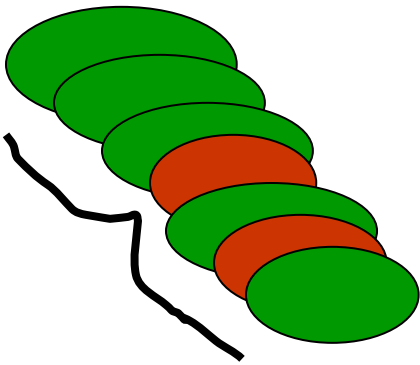
Asymmetric Balance



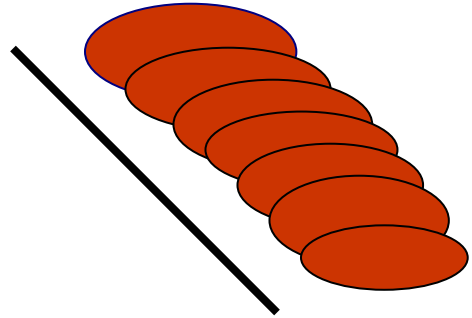
- **Sequencing**

A line of slices should be displayed in the same order in which the item was sliced. This will ensure the consistent progression of any particular pattern in the item. Often the natural marbling in a piece of meat or the diminishing size of the tail in a whole side of fish setup up a traceable pattern that can be easily disrupted by a skip or change in sequence.

Correct Sequencing in cutting
(from larger to smaller, uniformly)

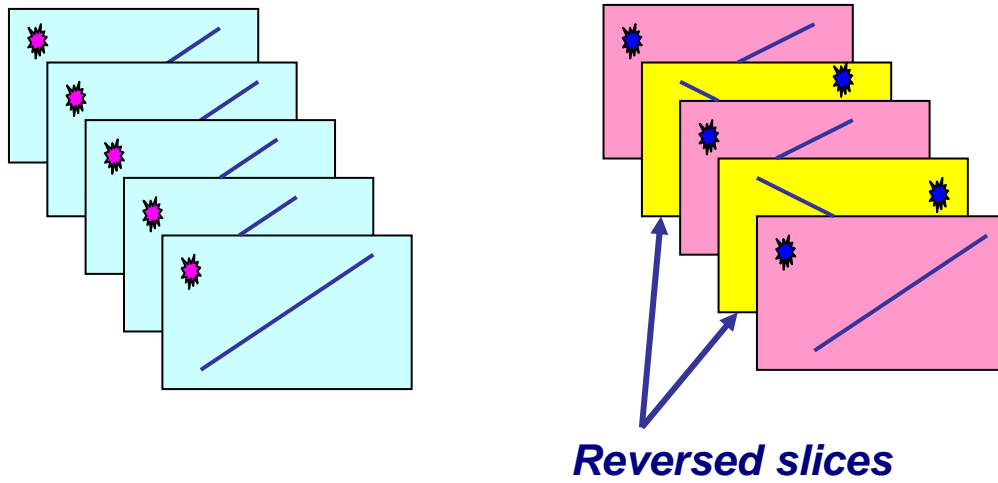


Skip in sequencing
(lack of uniformity)



Food Presentation General Guidelines

When shingling a line of slices, one should avoid placing one or more slices in a “reversed” position. This disrupts the rhythm of the line, and will consequently weaken it.

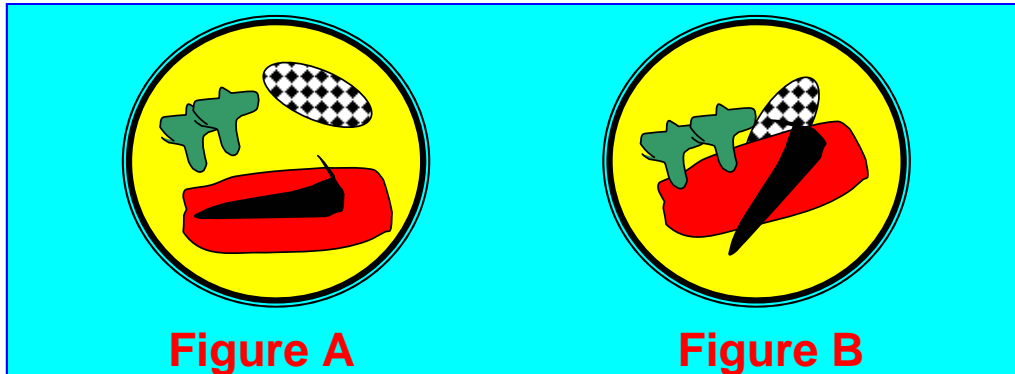


Cold food presentation from
the 36th Annual Jamaica
Culinary Arts Competition



UNITY

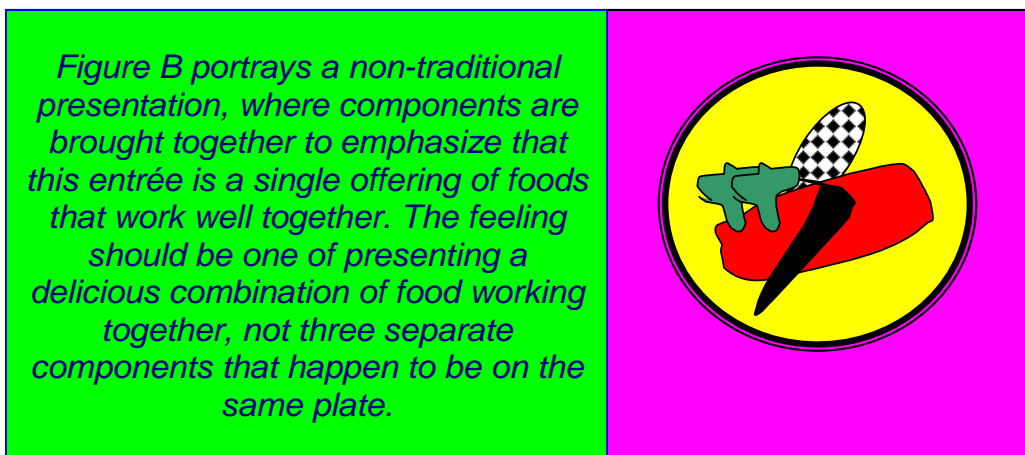
The lay-out should work as a cohesive unit. Since elegance typically follows from simplicity, the fewer areas of focus in the presentation the better. Note the difference in configuration of the following examples.



In figure A, food components are distributed throughout the whole plate. The plate may be filled, but the presentation is not unified. This style is considered a traditional presentation and has been associated with a clock face.

By placing the main item and sauce at six o'clock, starch at two o'clock and vegetable at ten o'clock, the presentation of the food looks like a smiling face. Traditional food presentation is quick, easy to do and can be accomplished with minimum training.

Banquet service and budget restaurants would benefit from this presentation style.



In figure B, two methods of presenting food are used. Structured and scattered are the terms associated with non-traditional food presentation. Non-traditional allows more creativity in presenting food items, but requires a stronger understanding of seasonality, taste, texture and flavor combinations.

Presenting food non-traditionally requires a higher level of training and is appropriate for moderate to upscale restaurants.

What is considered...?

- **Structured:** A bed of vegetables, starches or sauce is centered on the plate and arranged with the main item on top or around the center. Strict attention must be paid to the compatibility of the food items on the plate.
- **Scattered:** Both methods emphasize the compatibility and combination of food. The chef, through the non-traditional approach, will be able to offer guests more than just good tasting food.

FOCAL POINT

The platter or plate 'slay-out' should exhibit a, focal point. The placement and relationship of the various food components determines to a large extent the existence and location of this focal point.



*Picture from
A Taste of the Caribbean 1999*

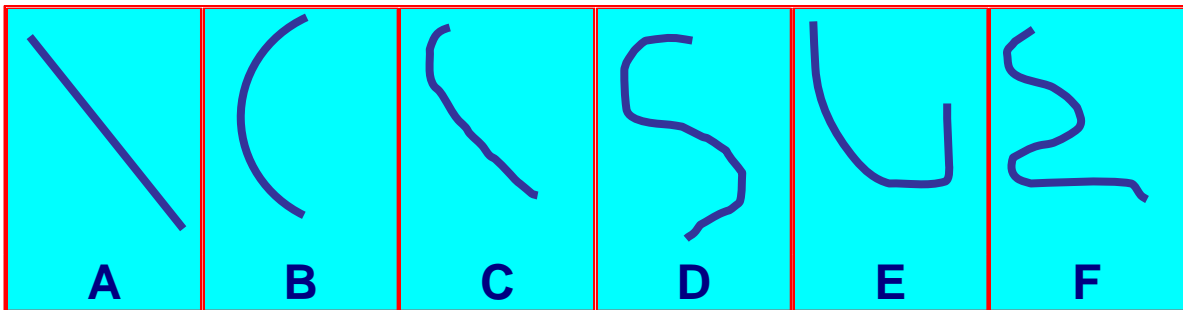
- **Flow** (Movement of the plate or platter)

Handled properly, balance, unity, and focal point can help develop a sense of movement or flow on the platter. If the layout is symmetrical, the sense of flow may be stifled by “locking” the eye in the middle of the plate or platter. If asymmetric, there is a stronger sense of flow.

If the presentation is not unified, the eyes will not be able to form a logical pathway; therefore, no flow will be evident. There will neither be a strong focal point, which is the necessary departure point from which the flow should emanate.

- **Strong Lines**

The understanding and development of strong and clean lines is important to a successful presentation. Strong lines make a strong statement of direction. Consider the following examples:



Line A would be considered the strongest. It sets a strong, definite direction.

Line B is the next in terms of “strength”; a smooth consistent curve.

Lines C and **D**, although composed of different curves, still indicate a general direction of movement.

Lines E and **F**, do not exhibit consistency or general direction. They are examples of weak lines.

WORKMANSHIP

Considers the elements of workmanship or skill exhibited in culinary competitions and which are related to food presentation, such as:

- ☑ Proper handling of ingredients
- ☑ Exactness and consistency in knife skills

- **Proper Handling of Ingredients**

INVOLVES:

- ☑ Cleaning (squid eyes, shrimp veins)
- ☑ Peeling (avocados, tomatoes)
- ☑ Scaling of fish
- ☑ Trimming of meat (clean boning, appropriate layer of fat)
- ☑ Proper preparation of forcemeats (smooth texture, moist, food color)

- **Exactness and Consistency in Knife Skills**

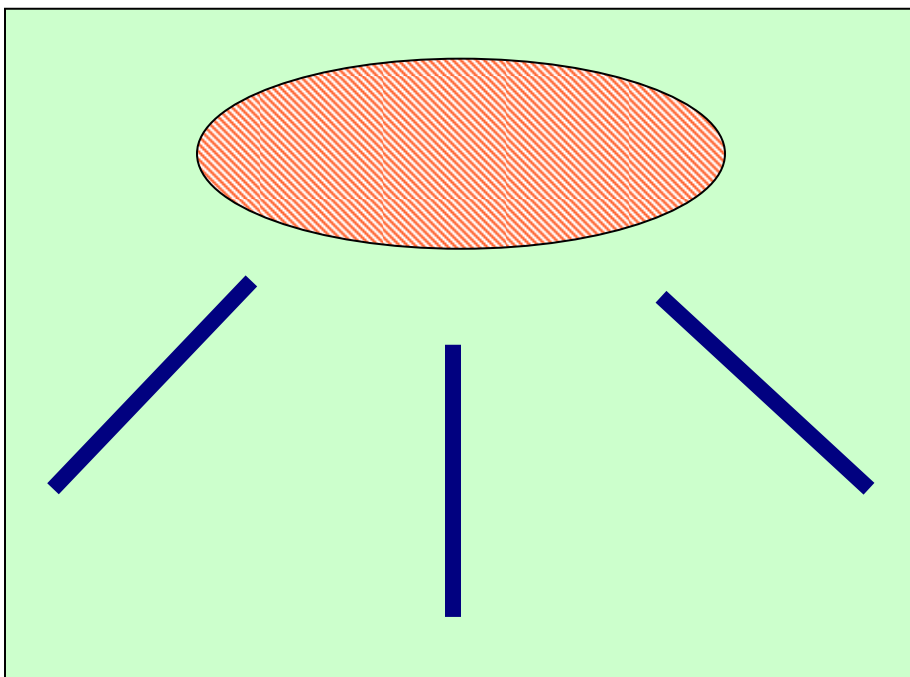
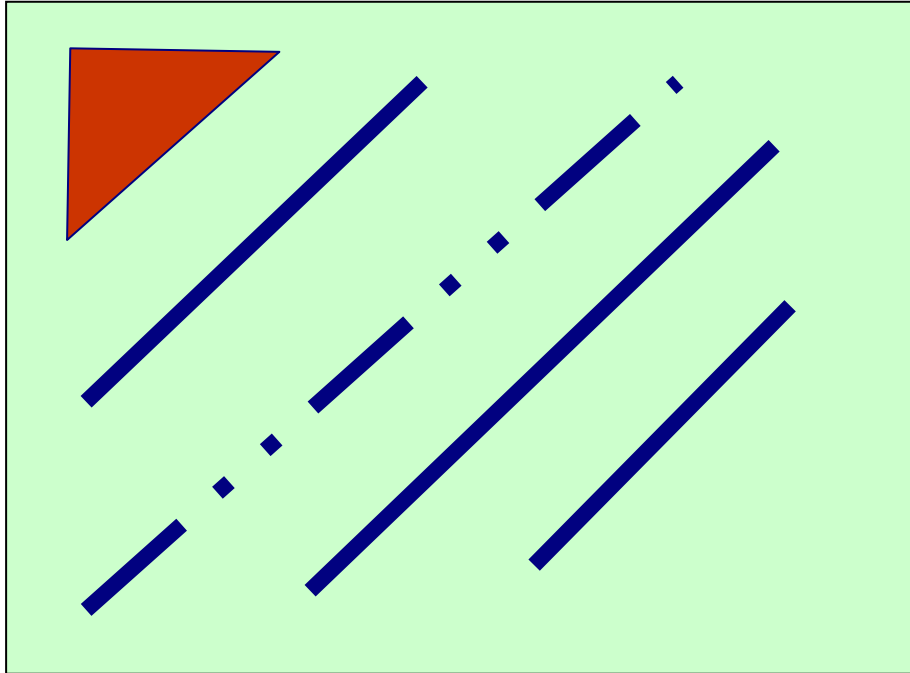
- ☑ Carving (complete, even slices, clean edges)
- ☑ Slicing (even, clean edges and faces)
- ☑ Shaping (tourne, figurines, parisienne, etc.)
- ☑ Dicing (dice, brunoise, batonette, julienne, etc.)

Cutting Hints!

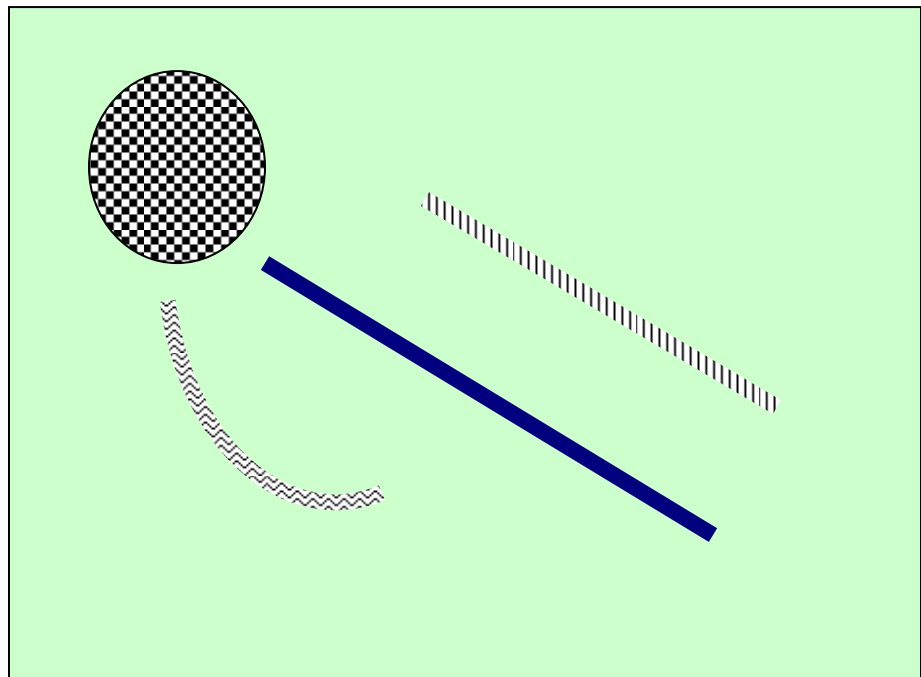
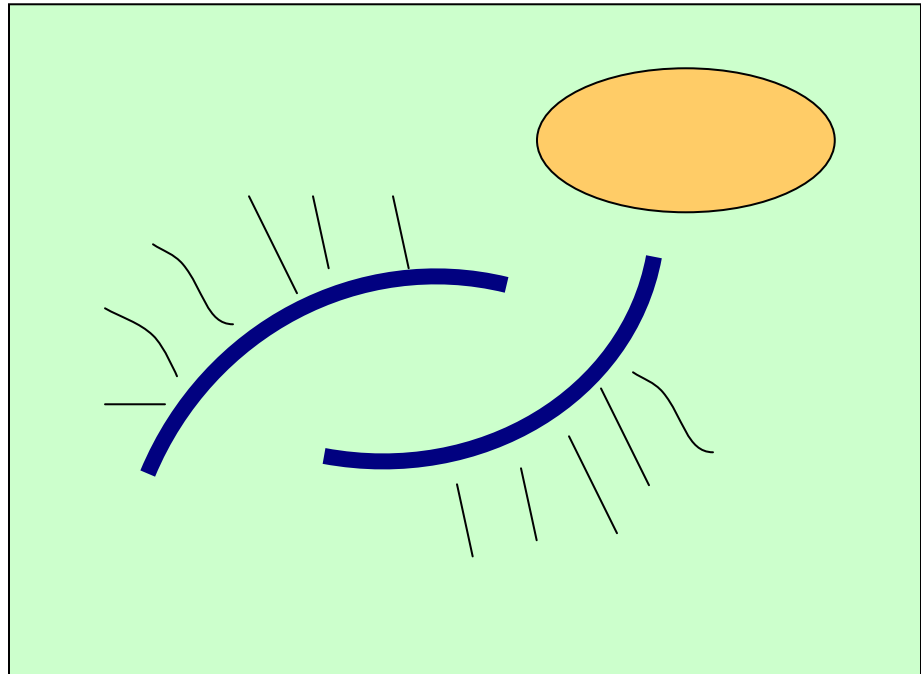
- Thin slices are always desirable over thick slices, ¼" thick maximum.
- If fruit is used to garnish meat, it should be cut into small pieces or sliced thinly.

PLATTER ARRANGEMENT

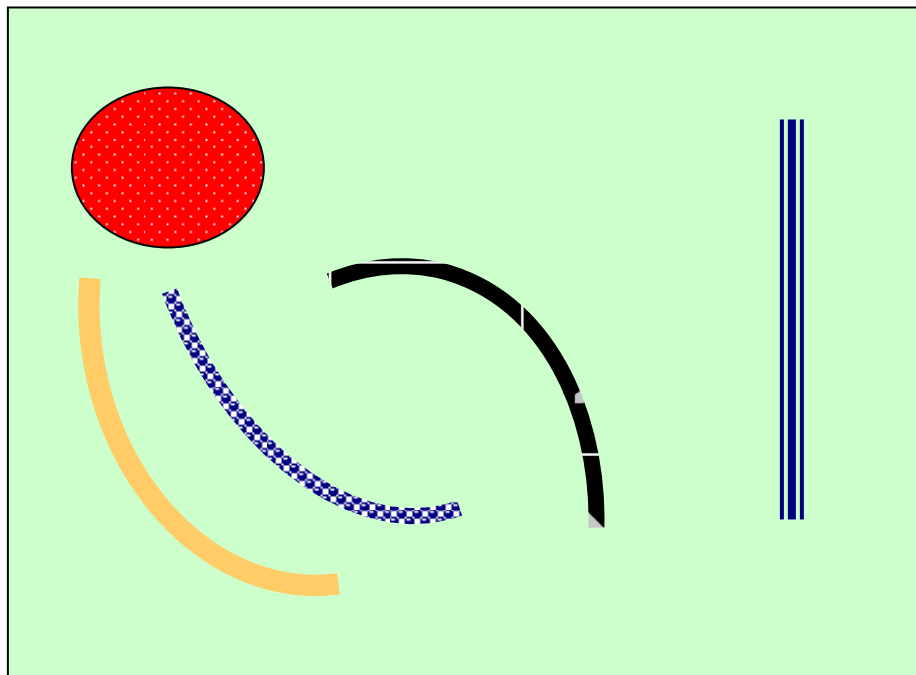
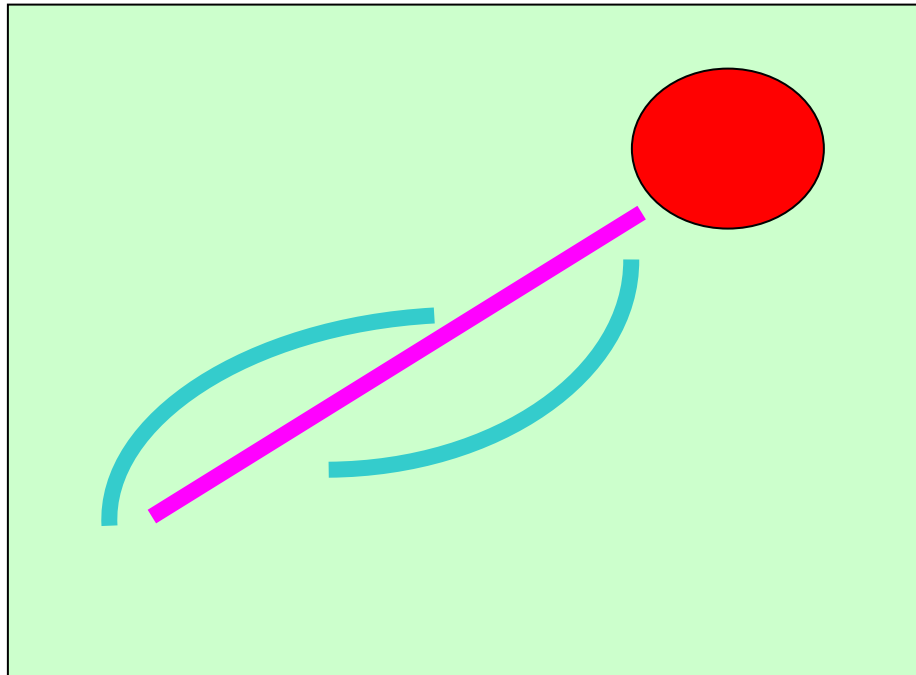
Some lay-out ideas...



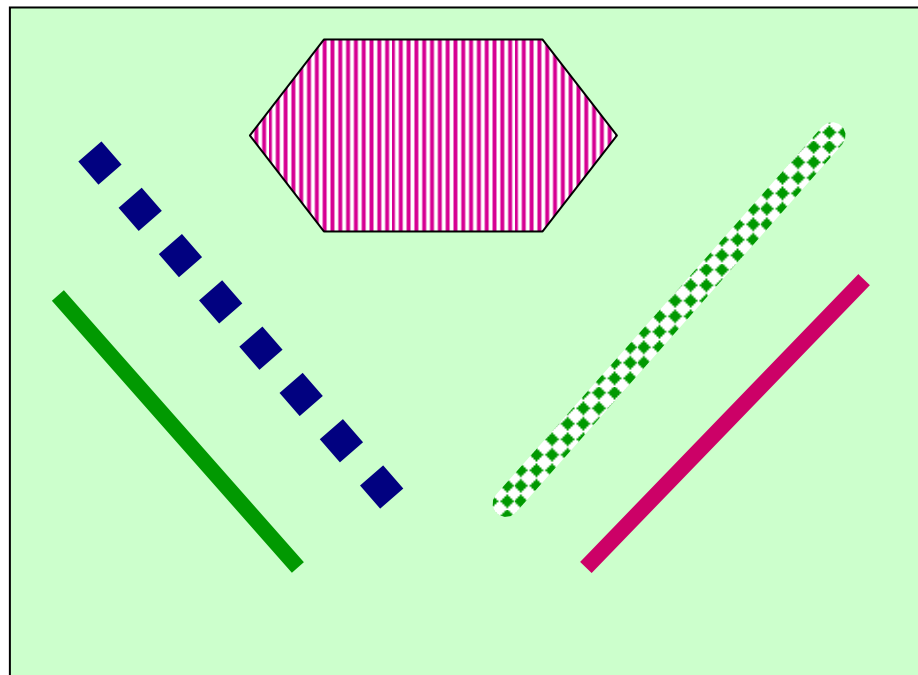
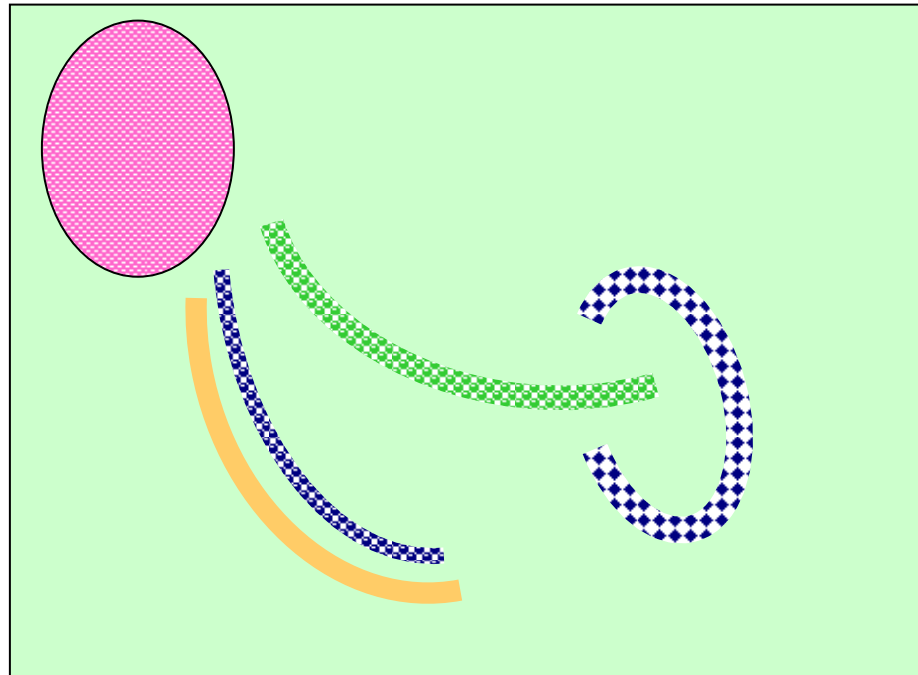
Some lay-out ideas...



Some lay-out ideas...



Some lay-out ideas...



COMPLEMENTS

Table Setting and Creativity are complements to food presentation.

• Table Setting

Serving dishes and non-food decorations are important element of table setting.

Serving dishes should:

- ⇒ Be practical in terms of sanitation (no unglazed wood, clay, etc.)
- ⇒ Harmonize (no ornate silver sauceboat with food served on a wooden plank)
- ⇒ Be properly maintained (clean, polished, free from damage)

Choose the plate design that best fits your dish. Or otherwise develop food around china.

Non-food decoration:

- ⇒ Should enhance the presentation of the food.
- ⇒ Should not overpower or obscure it (napkins, flower vases, etc.)

• Creativity

Culinary professionals must be both skilled and creative. Composition and presentation are two manners in which creativity should be demonstrated. Creativity has a lot to do with innovation.

Creativity can be demonstrated through:

- ⇒ New combination of food (composition)
- ⇒ New shapes (composition)
- ⇒ New layout ideas (presentation)
- ⇒ New garnishes which are functional (presentation)
- ⇒ New design of platter or china
- ⇒ Reworking or modernizing of traditional techniques and Presentation

REMEMBER!

When preparing food concentrate on:

- ⇒ Originality of dish
- ⇒ Numerical harmonizing of meat portions and garnishes
- ⇒ Practical portion size (cost and nutritional considerations)
- ⇒ Proper portion size, 15-20 oz. of solid food for a total meal
- ⇒ Respecting the integrity of food.
- ⇒ Ensuring proper color presentation and flavor combination
- ⇒ Presenting a natural appearance of taste
- ⇒ Cooking meats properly (not too rare)
- ⇒ Properly present sliced meats (arranged in order and size) Also, meat slices should be served with the carved surface upwards and not left as when carved
- ⇒ Cutting vegetables precisely
- ⇒ Coating food well

AVOID!

- ⇒ Birds in plumage touching food
- ⇒ Use of inedible materials
- ⇒ Excessively thick glazing
- ⇒ Use of unnecessary ingredients
- ⇒ Cluttering the platters
- ⇒ Serving food on the rim of the platter
- ⇒ Repetition in preparatory methods
- ⇒ Serving food on fat
- ⇒ Using meat and vegetable juices improperly to a point where they can make a dish look unappetizing.
- ⇒ Excessive use of food coloring
- ⇒ Use of plastic ornaments
- ⇒ Allowing garnishes from becoming the focal point. Garnishes are meant to enhance and complement.
- ⇒ Unsuitable serving dishes

AUTO EVALUATION FOR REFERENCE

Review each of the 20 statements that follow, and mark with an x whether is true or false.

Questions:	TRUE	FALSE
1. Practicality is not an important factor for appropriate food presentation.		
2. There are many similarities between chefs and painters.		
3. A presentation will be impractical if large items hide any part of it.		
4. Natural color should highlight the cooking technique employed.		
5. Foods that taste good seldom harmonize in color.		
6. A variety of cooking techniques automatically add a variety of textures to food presentation.		
7. Combining ingredients with fresh, compatible flavors will not enhance food presentation.		
8. Ingredients and garnishes should harmonize with the main part of the dish and conform to contemporary standards of nutritional values.		
9. Using an ingredient's natural shape will contribute to presentation flow.		
10. When shingling a line of slices, it is appropriate to place one or more slices in a "reversed" position.		
11. Complex accompaniments complement complex entrées well.		
12. The placement and relationship of the various food components determines to a large extent the existence and location of a focal		
13. The understanding and development of strong and clean lines are important to a successful presentation.		
14. Exactness and consistency in knife skills are not important in food presentation.		
15. Food presentation could be developed around china.		
16. The use of inedible materials is acceptable in Food presentation.		
17. An unattractive display can prevent customers from tasting food.		
18. Effective simplicity in food presentation is easy to accomplish.		
19. Similar food item shapes will enhance a plate.		
20. A focal point is an essential lay-out element of effective food presentation.		

Food Presentation General Guidelines

The information presented in this manual has been compiled from sources and documents believed to be reliable and representative of the best professional judgment of the Caribbean Hotel Association. However, the accuracy of the information presented is not guaranteed nor is any responsibility assumed or implied by the Caribbean Hotel Association, its employees or representatives for any damage or loss resulting from inaccuracy or omissions.



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