

Burger Joint Checklists

Receiving Goods · Thawing & Prep (Mise en Place) · Opening & Starting the Line · Grill & Fryer Temperatures · Keeping Food Hot & Building Orders · Closing & Food Cost

Receiving Goods

The cook line is only as safe and as cheap as what comes through the back door. Check the temperature, count it, date it, and start tomorrow's thaw today.

CHECK AND REJECT AT THE DOOR

- ☐ **Check the temperature of every chilled protein delivery. Reject anything above 5°C (41°F).**
Warm patties and chicken arrive already part-way through their shelf life. Keeping food cold is the check that fails most often in fast food - 68.24% of the time. Do not start the shift already behind.
- ☐ **Check that frozen patties, chicken and fries are frozen solid. Reject cases with ice on top, clumped blocks, or an odd shape.**
A case that thawed during delivery cannot be safely refrozen, and it never cooks back to good quality. Rejecting it at the door costs nothing. Finding out at the grill costs you the whole batch.
- ☐ **Count and weigh the cases against the order and the invoice before you sign.**
A delivery that is short on protein means you run out of your best-seller at your busiest hour. A delivery that is too big turns into food you throw away later. Write down every mismatch and ask for credit the same day.
- ☐ **Check buns, tortillas and fresh produce for crushing, mould and staleness.**
A crushed bun or a split tortilla means you make the order twice and pay for it twice. Reject damaged cases and write them down for supplier credit, instead of covering the cost yourself.

DATE IT BEFORE IT GOES IN THE WALK-IN

- ☐ **Write the delivery date and use-by date on every case when it arrives.**
Date marking fails in 32.09% of fast-food inspections. You cannot rotate stock or throw it out on time if nobody wrote the date on it.
- ☐ **Use the oldest stock first (FIFO): put new cases at the back, and move the oldest cases to the front of the walk-in and freezer.**
This way the oldest stock sells first, and nothing quietly goes bad at the back. This is the cheapest kind of waste in the building to prevent.
- ☐ **Move tomorrow's frozen protein straight into the thaw fridge. Never put it on a bench or in a sink.**
Thawing in the fridge is the method the food code requires, and it takes overnight. Deciding to do this when goods arrive is what stops a rushed bench thaw at 11am.

Thawing & Prep (Mise en Place)

Every order time and every remake is decided here, before service starts. Thaw by the rule, batch to match the time of day, and label everything.

THAW AND HANDLE RAW PROTEIN BY THE RULE

- ☐ **Thaw frozen patties and chicken in the fridge at 0–5°C (32–41°F). Keep them covered, on the bottom shelf.**
Thawing in the fridge is our house method, and it is one of the four methods allowed by FDA Food Code 3-501.13. A bench thaw is not one of them. It leaves the surface at an unsafe temperature (danger zone) for hours while the middle is still frozen solid.
- ☐ **Label every thaw tray with the date it went in and the date it must be cooked by.**
An undated thaw tray gets cooked too late or thrown away too early. Both cost money, and date marking already fails about a third of the time in this business.
- ☐ **Prep raw chicken only on boards, tools and gloves set aside just for raw chicken. Wash your hands before doing anything else.**
4 in 10 managers say they do not always have boards set aside just for raw meat. 1 in 4 say gloves are not always used with raw chicken. Chicken is the one ingredient regulators openly allow to arrive with Salmonella on it.

BATCH TO MATCH THE TIME OF DAY, NOT THE RECIPE CARD

- ☐ **Prep sauces, slaws and dressed items to match the forecast for THIS time of day.**
45% of hospitality food waste happens during food prep. Over-prepping is the cheapest waste to stop, because you have not cooked it or held it yet.
- ☐ **Portion sauces, dressings and cheese with a scoop, pump or scale. Never guess by eye.**
Median food cost for limited-service restaurants is 32.4%. Guessed portions never drift in your favour, and you never see it on a single order.
- ☐ **Write down how much you prep against yesterday's sales and yesterday's waste.**
This number is what lets you cut the next batch instead of prepping the same amount again. Without it, over-prepping stays invisible.

LABEL IT OR LOSE IT

- ☐ **Label every prepped container with the product name, prep date and use-by date.**
Date marking fails in 32.09% of fast-food inspections. An unlabelled tub gets thrown out too early (waste) or served too late (risk).
- ☐ **Throw out prepped ready-to-eat items after 7 days at the most, or sooner if the recipe says so.**
FDA Food Code 3-501.17 makes the 7-day limit a top-priority rule. The tub nobody threw out is the one an inspector finds.
- ☐ **Fill line bins to the normal stock depth (par) only. Deep bins go back in the fridge, not on the rail.**
Keeping food cold fails in 68.24% of fast-food inspections, and over-filled rail bins are the reason: the top third of a deep bin never reaches a safe temperature.

Opening & Starting the Line

Grill hot, fryer hot, oil tested, probes calibrated, cold rail cold - all before the first order, not after the first complaint.

START THE EQUIPMENT AND CHECK IT IS RIGHT

- ☐ **Preheat the grill or griddle to the target temperature. Check BOTH zones with a surface thermometer before you cook the first patty.**
A cold zone gives you an undercooked burger. A hot zone shrinks food you already paid for. No published data tracks how much grills drift off temperature, so measuring it yourself is the only way to know.
- ☐ **Bring fryers to the target temperature. Check that the oil temperature recovers after the first basket.**
Oil that never recovers between baskets cooks food slowly and greasy. That is a quality problem and a speed problem at the same time.
- ☐ **Check probe thermometers for accuracy (calibrate them) using ice water, and write down the result.**
About 1 in 3 managers say thermometers are checked for accuracy less than once a month. An uncalibrated probe makes every cook-temperature check in this pack worthless.

COLD FOOD STAYS COLD FROM THE FIRST ORDER

- ☐ **Check and write down the walk-in, prep fridge and cold rail temperatures BEFORE you load the line (0–5°C / 32–41°F).**
Loading a rail before it has cooled down starts the day at an unsafe temperature. This is the single most-failed inspection item in fast food.
- ☐ **Load the rail straight from the fridge, not from room temperature, and only to the normal stock depth (par).**
Food that sat out during setup is already warm before the first order, and nothing on a rail ever cools back down.
- ☐ **Check that hot-holding cabinets and wells are AT the right temperature before any food goes in.**
Keeping food hot fails in 23.95% of fast-food inspections. Loading a cabinet while it is still heating up starts a discard timer on the first batch that nobody set.

SET UP TO SELL

- ☐ **Check that best-seller ingredients and buns are stocked (at par) for the PEAK hour, not for the whole day.**
Running out of your number-one build at your busiest hour loses a sale at your most valuable hour. No substitute is what the customer actually wanted.
- ☐ **Check that promo and limited-time-offer (LTO) ingredients, prices, and the menu and confirmation boards are live and correct.**
US drive-thru order accuracy is 8 percentage points higher when the order is confirmed on the confirmation board. A broken board costs you accuracy and extra sales at the same time.

HYGIENE & SAFETY

- ☐ **Check every handwash sink has soap, hot water, and paper towels. Check glove boxes are stocked at every station.**
Staff must be able to wash hands and glove up before they touch food.
- ☐ **Ask every staff member if they feel well before their shift starts. Send home anyone with vomiting, diarrhoea, or a fever.**
A sick worker can pass illness to customers through the food they touch.
- ☐ **Test your sanitizer with a test strip before you fill the wipe-down buckets or 3-compartment sink. Mix it to the right strength (around 200 ppm).**
Weak sanitizer will not kill germs on surfaces and tools.
- ☐ **Check the allergen menu, board or app shows the right information for today. Set up a separate space and tools for allergen orders.**
Wrong allergen information can cause a severe reaction in a customer.

Grill & Fryer - Cook to Temperature

The one check no shortcut survives: put a probe in it. Colour, juices and feel are opinions, not real measurements.

COOK TO TEMPERATURE, EVERY TIME

- ☐ **Check ground beef patties reach 68°C (155°F) for 15 seconds. Put the probe stem across the thickest part.**
12% of 234 burgers observed cooking in restaurants finished below 155°F. 81% of managers rely on at least one guess-based way to check doneness. The probe is the only method that is a real measurement.
- ☐ **Check chicken and all poultry reach 74°C (165°F).**
Fewer than half of kitchen managers knew chicken should reach 165°F. Regulators allow up to 15–25% of raw poultry samples to test positive for Salmonella (FSIS 52-sample window). Cooking is the only step that kills it.
- ☐ **Check and write down the temperature of one item per batch: the first one off, the last one off, and after any equipment change.**
Cooking still fails in 10.65% of fast-food inspections. Writing down each batch temperature is what turns a good grill cook into a system that works every time.
- ☐ **Do not serve an undercooked-burger request unless you have the written policy and customer warning your local food code requires.**
40% of medium-rare burger requests came out undercooked, against 8% of well-done requests. This request is exactly where the failure rate is four times higher.

KEEP RAW AWAY FROM COOKED

- ☐ **Keep separate tongs, spatulas, boards and gloves for the raw side and the cooked side of the grill.**
At least 53% of restaurants showed two or more risky ground-beef handling habits in a single visit. A properly cooked patty is only as safe as the tongs that moved it.
- ☐ **Wash your hands and change gloves between handling raw protein and doing any assembly task.**
Proper handwashing failed in 72.8% of fast-food inspections. It is the most-failed behaviour in this business, the cheapest to fix, and one failure can cost a single store \$4,000 to \$1.9 million.

FRYER OIL IS AN INGREDIENT AND A COST LINE

- ☐ **Test fryer oil daily with an oil-breakdown meter. Throw the oil out at 24% total polar materials.**
28 of the 46 restaurants sampled in the only published field survey were frying in oil over the 24% limit. Past that point, you pay for oil that actively makes the food worse.
- ☐ **Skim the oil between baskets and filter it on schedule. Write down filter cycles and how much oil you top up.**
Carbon left in the fryer speeds up oil breakdown. Top-ups that aren't logged hide the real oil cost inside your 32.4% food cost line.
- ☐ **Load baskets to the marked line and shake them by the timer. Never overload a basket to catch up.**
An overloaded basket drops the oil temperature and makes the cook take longer. The fix that looks fastest for a queue is actually the slowest way to cook.

Keeping Food Hot, Building Orders & Speed of Service

Keep hot food above 57°C, cold food below 5°C. Put every batch on a timer, and check every bag before it leaves the window.

HOT STAYS HOT, COLD STAYS COLD

- ☐ **Write down cold rail and hot-holding temperatures at least 4 times a day and at every rail changeover.**
Keeping food cold fails in 68.24% of fast-food inspections, and keeping food hot fails in 23.95%. Both go wrong exactly in the time between checks.
- ☐ **Hold cooked food at 57°C (135°F) or hotter, or on a written time-only timer. Never leave it in between.**
Wrong temperatures during service are a contributing cause in up to 13.6% of US outbreaks. A cabinet that is just 'warm' is the most common way this business gets it wrong.
- ☐ **Reheat any cooked food going back into hot holding to 74°C (165°F). Do this once, then throw it out.**
Reheating fails in 16.03% of fast-food inspections. A lukewarm chilli or pulled-protein refill drags the whole pan back through the unsafe temperature range (danger zone).

TIMERS AND THROW-OUT RULES, NOT GUESSWORK

- ☐ **Every held batch carries a timer or tag showing the minute it went in and the minute it must be thrown out.**
Held patties, fried chicken and fries show no visible sign when their time is up. During a rush, the timer is the only thing that actually tells you to throw them out.
- ☐ **Throw food out when the timer ends. Write down the item and amount. Never reset the timer by topping up an old batch with fresh food.**
Topping up an old batch resets nothing and just hides the loss.

- ☐ **Food on a time-only timer must have its throw-out time written down, and must be cleared out at the limit your food code allows.**

Using time instead of temperature as a safety control (Food Code 3-501.19) only works if the timer is written down. An unwritten timer is not a control - it is just someone's memory.

BUILD IT RIGHT, BAG IT RIGHT, MOVE IT FAST

- ☐ **Build to the picture: same order of steps every time, measured sauce, the correct fold, sealed and labelled.**
Average US drive-thru order accuracy is 87%. About one order in eight leaves with a mistake, and the customer finds it before you do.
- ☐ **Read the order back to the customer and confirm it on the screen or confirmation board before you start building it.**
Accuracy is 8 percentage points higher when the order is confirmed on the confirmation board, and 15 percentage points better when the speaker audio is clear. The cheapest fix is at the order point, not the pickup window.
- ☐ **Check every bag against the screen when you hand it over, including sauces, sides and drinks.**
Average total drive-thru time is 335.4 seconds, of which 254.6 seconds is service time. A missing side costs you the remake AND slows down the queue behind it.

Closing, Waste & Food Cost

Write down the waste, work out the day's cost, and set tomorrow's thaw. The numbers you record tonight fix tomorrow morning's order.

WRITE DOWN TONIGHT'S NUMBERS

- ☐ **Write down every item you throw away, the reason, and the amount: expired holds, over-prepping, remakes, or drops.**
45% of hospitality food waste happens during prep, and 21% comes from spoiled food. You cannot cut either one until you know which one you actually have.
- ☐ **Write down remakes and accuracy complaints by cause: wrong build, missing item, cold food, or long wait.**
Accuracy averages 87% across this business. Knowing WHICH step failed is the difference between coaching your team and just guessing.
- ☐ **Write down stockouts and the exact time they happened.**
A stockout at your busiest hour is a lost sale at your most profitable hour. Once you time it, it becomes a real stock target (par level) instead of just a story.

COST THE DAY

- ☐ **Compare today's food and labour cost against your target. (32.4% and 31.7% are 2024 US limited-service medians - set your own local target.)**
Profitable US limited-service operators run labour costs at 30.0%, against 34.1% for operators losing money. Four points is the whole gap between the two groups.
- ☐ **Recalculate the cost of your top three builds whenever a protein, oil or bun price changes.**
A build priced on last quarter's beef cost is quietly selling below your target profit margin on every order.

LEAVE THE LINE SAFE AND READY

- ☐ **Break down, clean and sanitise the grill, fryers, rail bins and hot-holding cabinets. Write down the oil condition and filter it.**
Writing down oil condition every night is what turns the 24% oil-breakdown discard point into a clear decision instead of an argument. A clean rail bin also holds temperature better the next day.
- ☐ **Cool, cover, date and store all leftover prep. Nothing goes back in the walk-in without a label.**
Date marking fails in 32.09% of fast-food inspections, and the closing shift is where most unlabelled tubs come from.
- ☐ **Set up tomorrow's thaw: move frozen protein to the thaw fridge and label it tonight.**
Thawing in the fridge needs overnight. Skipping it tonight is exactly what forces an unsafe bench or sink thaw tomorrow.

HYGIENE & SAFETY

- ☐ **Empty and clean the ice machine bin and chute. Check for mould, slime, or scale build-up inside.**
A dirty ice machine can contaminate every drink you serve tomorrow.
- ☐ **Take the trash out. Do a quick visual check for droppings, gnaw marks, or insects while you close down.**
Catching signs of pests early stops a small problem from becoming an infestation.

Weekly Checks

Do these checks once a week, not every day.

PEST, CALIBRATION & DEEP CLEAN

- ☐ **Do a full pest inspection once a week. Check bait stations, entry points, drains, and storage areas, not just a quick glance.**
A full check finds hiding spots and early signs that a quick daily glance can miss.
 - ☐ **Do a full calibration check on every probe thermometer once a week, not just the daily ice check. Test the boiling point too and write down each result.**
A probe can read right at freezing but wrong at cooking temperature. Both ends need testing.
 - ☐ **Take the grill plates and fryer vats apart once a week. Deep-clean and sanitise every part, including joints, vents, and behind the equipment.**
Daily wipe-downs miss grease that builds up in hidden spots over time.
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