

Fifty questions to ask *before* the recipes are gone

Five rounds · one afternoon

The person who cooks from memory will say “a bit of this, a bit of that” and mean it. These are the questions that get past it — fifty of them, in the order that works. Take this to the kitchen table. Press record.

Before you sit down

- 1 **Record it. Don't take notes.**
Put your phone on the table, press record, and forget about it. When you reach round two, film their hands.
- 2 **Ask the rounds in order.**
Round one gets them talking. Round three — the actual recipe — goes better twenty minutes in. One round a sitting is fine.
- 3 **Don't correct. Follow up.**
When an amount is vague, ask the follow-up on the divider. “Whose hand?” gets you a measurement.

The five rounds

- I The kitchen you grew up in *And then what happened?*
- II Hands *Show me.*
- III The dish itself *Whose hand?*
- IV The table *Who else was there?*
- V What you want kept *Why that one?*

Free to print and to share. Made by Mise, the cookbook studio that turns the answers into a printed hardcover — with every recipe exactly as it was told.

misebook.io/guides/family-recipe-interview-questions

I The kitchen you grew up in

WHEN IT'S VAGUE, ASK

And then what happened?

- ☐ 01 What did the kitchen smell like on a Sunday morning?
- ☐ 02 Who did the cooking in your house, and who was never allowed near the stove?
- ☐ 03 What was the first thing you were trusted to make on your own? How old were you?
- ☐ 04 What was on the table on an ordinary Tuesday?
- ☐ 05 Was there a dish you dreaded as a child that you'd give anything to eat now?
- ☐ 06 What did your mother make when someone was ill?
- ☐ 07 Where did the food come from — a garden, a market, a shop with a name?
- ☐ 08 What did the stove look like? Wood, coal, gas?
- ☐ 09 Which pot or pan was never put away?
- ☐ 10 What did you eat when there wasn't much money?

II Hands

WHEN IT'S VAGUE, ASK

Show me.

- ☐ 11 How do you know when the dough is ready? What does it feel like under your fingers?
- ☐ 12 What do you do that the recipe never says?
- ☐ 13 How do you tell the oil is hot enough without a thermometer?
- ☐ 14 Which step does everyone rush that you never do?
- ☐ 15 Is there something you do with your hands that you couldn't explain in words? Show me.
- ☐ 16 What do you taste for, and when?
- ☐ 17 What do you do when it goes wrong — too salty, too thin, won't rise?
- ☐ 18 Which knife, which spoon, which bowl? Why that one?
- ☐ 19 Were you shown, or did you watch?
- ☐ 20 What did you change from the way you were taught?

III The dish itself

WHEN IT'S VAGUE, ASK

Whose hand?

- 21 Pick the dish everyone asks you for. Walk me through it as if I'm standing next to you.

- 22 When you say “a handful” — whose hand?

- 23 “Cook it until it’s done.” What does done look like? What does it smell like, sound like?

- 24 What can be left out, and what can never be left out?

- 25 What do you buy, and what would you never buy because you make it?

- 26 Does the brand matter? Would you notice if I swapped it?

- 27 How long does it really take, start to table?

- 28 What does it look like before the oven, halfway through, and when it’s ready?

- 29 Is there a version for a crowd and a version for two?

- 30 If I made this and brought it to you, what’s the first thing you’d notice was wrong?

IV The table

WHEN IT'S VAGUE, ASK

Who else was there?

- 31 Who sat where?

- 32 Was anything said before eating?

- 33 Which dish only appeared once a year, and what was the occasion?

- 34 Who was the guest everyone cooked harder for?

- 35 What was the meal after a funeral? After a wedding?

- 36 What did you cook the first time you cooked for someone you loved?

- 37 Was there a dish that caused an argument?

- 38 What did people bring when they came to your door?

- 39 What was the last meal you cooked in the old house?

- 40 What did you cook the day I was born?

V What you want kept

WHEN IT'S VAGUE, ASK

Why that one?

- ☐ 41 Which recipe are you afraid will be lost?
- ☐ 42 Whose recipe is it, really? Who did you get it from, and who did they get it from?
- ☐ 43 Is there a dish you stopped making? Why?
- ☐ 44 What did you never write down because you thought you'd always remember?
- ☐ 45 What do you want your grandchildren to be able to make without you?
- ☐ 46 What would you want written on the first page of this book?
- ☐ 47 Which dish should be on the table when you're not there to make it?
- ☐ 48 Is there a card, a notebook, a stained page? Where is it right now?
- ☐ 49 What's the one thing you'd correct in how the family makes it today?
- ☐ 50 What haven't I asked?

What they said that wasn't an answer

The aside, the name, the dish you had never heard of. Write it here before it goes.

III The dish itself

Fill this in beside them, while they cook it once. Left column: what they said. Right column: what it measured when you weighed it.

THE DISH

WHOSE RECIPE

WHO TAUGHT THEM

Ingredients

AS THEY SAY IT — "A HANDFUL"

WHAT IT MEASURED

The method, in their words

Including the step they do without noticing. Ask "and then what?" until there is nothing left.

DONE LOOKS LIKE

NEVER LEAVE OUT

FIRST THING THEY'D NOTICE
WAS WRONG