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Author Q&A



What inspired you to write this book?

As a registered dietitian and chef for over two decades, I wrote *The Complete Recipe Writing Guide* to pay it forward—to help others learn how to translate the act of cooking into words. I wish I'd had a book like this early in my career, a single resource that sets nutrition and editorial standards on developing, writing, and publishing recipes. I wanted to share the best of what I've learned over the years.

Who do you envision benefiting from your book, and how?

There is something for everyone in this book:

- Food professionals (e.g., food writers, editors, chefs, dietitians, cooking teachers) looking to sharpen their recipe writing skills.
- Food content creators (e.g., food influencers, and cookbook authors) looking to incorporate the highest standards for creating and sharing recipes.
- Healthcare professionals who need a resource to translate nutrition recommendations into recipes for their patients or clients.
- Anyone who wants to learn how to translate their kitchen creations into easy-to-follow, readable, reproducible recipes for print, digital, or video.

Why do we need this book today?

There is a growing global interest in food writing and recipe sharing that has resulted in an overload of information and overwhelming number of recipes. Often this information is not completely accurate, and the recipes frequently don't work, leaving cooks frustrated and confused.

To keep up with this growth in food writing, *The Complete Recipe Writing Guide* gives food professionals and content creators one place to look up and find an accurate, peer-reviewed answer to all their recipe writing questions. The book also provides a clear set of guidelines for nutrition-focused recipe writing, editorial standards, industry best practices, and more. It is a book that professionals can confidently turn to as a trusted reference again and again.

Why an entire book on recipe writing?

When you see a recipe, it seems straightforward and effortless, but people don't realize how much work happens behind the scenes to create successful recipe content: ideation, research, recipe development, testing, writing, nutrition analysis, food styling, photography, and video. When I was the Test Kitchen Director at the *Chicago Tribune*, I utilized these skills and worked on these tasks on a daily basis, as I still do today as a culinary and nutrition consultant.

This book draws back the curtain to unveil the mechanics of successful recipe content. It serves as an exhaustive guide, spanning over 400 pages, filled with tools, best practices, and advice from experts in the field, along with my own experiences. It empowers the reader to learn the art of recipe writing—all while maintaining a focus on health and wellness.

Why should healthcare professionals use this book?

About half of all adults in the United States—117 million individuals—have one or more preventable chronic diet-related health conditions (heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and poor bone health), over 32 million have food allergies, and another 2 million people in the United States have celiac disease. *The Complete Recipe Writing Guide* not only incorporates my years of experience working with these individuals as a clinical dietitian and chef but the collective expertise of many professionals. Each chapter went through a thorough peer-review process, ensuring the highest level of accuracy and quality. It instructs readers, in six information-packed chapters, how to convert the evidence-based nutrition guidelines for these conditions into delicious, accurate, and well-written recipes. I believe that recipes can be a prescription for healthier eating.

What did you learn while writing the book?

I learned just how much knowledge industry professionals carry around in their heads! The process of writing this book confirmed for me that when it comes to food, there is always more to learn.

What are the top edits you catch when reading others' published recipes?

Besides breaking the cardinal rule of not listing ingredients in the order they are used, I often see the following:

- Recipe yield and serving size amounts do not add up. Or the serving size does not match the expectation of what a person will actually eat or serve. This also makes the nutrition information, when included, seem deceptive.
- Lack of ingredient specificity and clarity. For example—breadcrumbs: dried or fresh? Butter: salted or unsalted? Type of canned tomatoes: whole peeled, diced, crushed—drained or not? 1 cup celery, chopped (that's confusing!). How do you measure a celery stalk in a cup?
- Unclear, confusing, or overcomplicated recipe instructions. For example, when a 20-minute dinner recipe has an overnight marinade buried in step 2 and it's not indicated in the prep time; or the three paragraph-long explanation of how to make a pie crust could have been explained concisely in one; or the directions do not explain how to use the "divided" ingredients listed; or there are inconsistent use of words in the same recipe (e.g., confectioners' sugar/powdered sugar; beat the eggs/whisk the eggs). I could go on and on.

Food media today seems more about entertaining than educating. How do you feel about this?

I like being entertained, but in general, I think it skews too much on aspirational content and unachievable eating styles—ultimately making people feel like they've failed. This creates guilt—even if it's packaged as enjoyment.

I do love food documentaries and movies that focus on history, food, and culture. But more so, I love to experience it—by watching, working with others, asking questions, and then documenting what we (or they) create. Sometimes I think my title should be "recipe documentarian" or "recipe researcher." All recipes have a story, and I love researching and learning about that story.

How has your work in food and recipe writing changed or evolved over the course of your career?

The focus of food and recipe content has changed over the years—while videos and beautiful food images are still important, the focus is now on the personality of the people creating the content. As a food professional, I believe we need to put the focus back on the content and accuracy of food, nutrition, and recipe information.

Some people believe we need to get away from recipes. What role do you think recipes should serve?

Recipes are meant to be inspirational, but they are also an educational tool for learning how to cook and to eat healthier.

And for me, recipes are a lot more interesting and complex than one might think. Recipes are often not just about cooking but comfort. And from a historical point of view, recipes can provide a window into society—documenting cultural transformations; the availability of ingredients and kitchen technologies; people's food and cooking knowledge; and their food preferences, habits, and ideas about health and nutrition. Recipes tell a story.

What advice would you give to young content creators, social media influencers, dietitians, and other aspiring food professionals?

As Pablo Picasso said, “Learn the rules like a pro, so you can break them like an artist.” My advice feels the same—you need to know the rules to break them. So, learn from others—their advice, guidelines, and rules, and then break them with abandon to create your own recipe style—but make sure the recipes work!

What advice do you give parents about healthy eating and getting dinner on the table each night?

When possible, cook and eat together. As the mother of three children, two of whom have celiac disease, this was not always easy, but my husband and I made it a priority and did it as much as possible. Today, our three kids appreciate how much this contributed to their own development and positive relationship with food. And practically speaking, they can all cook.

With respect to diet, there are no magic bullets for optimum health. Don't waste time, energy and money on diets that don't work. Instead, focus on flavor and enjoyment, and keep it simple when you can. And when you eat foods or meals that are high in fat, sugar, and sodium—enjoy smaller portions of them. It's important to remember, what's healthy for you, might not be healthy for me.

Jack Bishop from America's Test Kitchen wrote that you've “*produced the definitive master work for every aspiring and seasoned food writer, recipe developer, and cookbook editor,*” and Kirkus Reviews has called your book “*A polished, insightful how-to book for cooks at all levels.*” How do you feel about the positive praise you've received about the book?

I am very flattered and humbled to read the reviews and hear the feedback on my book, especially from colleagues in the food and healthcare fields. But it is also affirming to know that there are so many people out there who are looking for a resource like this. I have felt for many years that there was a void in the area of recipe development and writing—especially as it relates to creating health and wellness-focused content—so it is gratifying to see the positive feedback.

For more information, please consult RaeanneSarazen.com or email raeanne@raeannesarazen.com.