

PRACTICAL EXAM: TWO PERSPECTIVES

Practical exam success is a delicate blending of knowledge, skill, preparation and practice. Recent practical exam candidate Adam Godlove, CEC®, and Approved Certification Evaluator (ACE) Michael Garbin, CEC®, AAC, HGT, offer valuable insight on how to have a successful practical exam experience.

GODLOVE



As a practical exam candidate, I took a proactive approach, seeking direction from those who could best advise me. I also took the time to sit down and go over all the practical exam guidelines to find out what to cook, time allowed and methods to be shown.

After you know what is needed, start working on your menu. It may change several times, so only perform what is in the guidelines. Create dishes and use cooking methods you are familiar with, and remember to keep it simple and stick with the fundamentals.

Completing several dry runs is key. I practiced six times, each time tailoring my timeline and menu accordingly. The evaluators can see how much you practiced just by watching your set-up and organization. Practicing repeatedly creates a memory of your actions, which dramatically helps performance on exam day when tension is high.

Incorporating safety and sanitation practices into your dry runs is important to your success. Don't take for granted that you'll remember to wash or wipe, unless you put it into practice. Candidates may make great food, but sanitation mistakes (cross-contamination, not washing hands, failing to keep the station clean, etc.) will cost them a passing grade. Constantly remember to wash hands as needed, and don't let ready-to-eat food come into contact with raw food.

In preparation for my exam, I attached a paper towel dispenser to my speed cart for easy access. In addition to the menu provided to the evaluators, I had a spreadsheet detailing ingredients, a minute-by-minute timeline with tasks to perform (which included changing gloves), a list of tools and pictures of finished dishes (taken from practices).

I truly believe the time and effort I invested attributed to my success. Through all this, I learned you need to allow for mistakes, but don't dwell on them. Stay focused on the prize, certification. ■

ADAM GODLOVE, CEC®, FOOD SERVICE DIRECTOR, CULINART INC., SAIC, SAN DIEGO

GARBIN



An ACE will assess a candidate's culinary skill as it relates to the testing level. The evaluator comes into the practical exam under the impression that the candidate is well-prepared to showcase skills and knowledge. Throughout the exam, evaluators

observe the candidate's execution of culinary fundamentals, procedures and sanitation practices, and continuously make notes on the candidate's performance in accordance with assessment criteria.

Each competency has a point value that adds to objectivity and enables evaluators to score the candidate's performance. Points are calculated and an overall score is given. A passing score must be 75% or better.

An ACE also serves as an advisor to candidates. However, because of integrity standards, an ACE may not evaluate a candidate that he or she directly supervises or advises. Nonetheless, I encourage you to ask questions in preparation for your exam. I am often contacted by the ACF national office to help candidates and answer their questions.

A successful practical exam is achieved through proper planning, preparation and practice—on this the candidate and I agree wholeheartedly. ■

MICHAEL GARBIN, CEC®, AAC, HGT, EXECUTIVE CHEF, UNION LEAGUE CLUB OF CHICAGO, CHICAGO

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESS:

- Review the Practical Exam Candidate Manual for general guidelines, processes and the skills that will be evaluated.
- Ask a certified chef for advice and to watch one of your practices and offer suggestions.
- Conduct a self-assessment of your strengths and weaknesses. It is important to practice "correct" techniques.
- Prepare a checklist containing every tool, item, ingredient and task.
- Develop a timeline. Break down tasks and calculate the minutes necessary to successfully complete each one.
- Practice your complete routine until it becomes second nature.