HACCP basics for a small catering team

A food-safety management system describes how a business keeps its food safe through its actual process. Front-line staff need to understand their checks, the limit or standard being checked and the response when something is wrong. Start with a familiar product and follow it from delivery through storage, preparation and service. The paperwork becomes meaningful when it reflects those steps.

UK introductory concepts; supports understanding of an existing system. Developing or validating an operation's HACCP plan requires suitable competence.

The practical principles

Connect hazards to the process

HACCP means Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point. Think through the food's journey: delivery, storage, preparation, cooking, holding and service. Biological, chemical, physical and allergen hazards may arise at different stages. Basic hygiene measures such as cleaning and supplier controls support the system. A critical control point is a step where control is essential for a significant food-safety hazard; its designation comes from the operation's analysis.

Understand the seven principles

The principles cover hazard analysis, identifying critical control points, setting critical limits, monitoring, corrective actions, verification and documentation. A critical limit is the boundary the control must meet. Monitoring checks whether it is met during operation. A corrective action explains what to do when a check fails, including what happens to the affected food. Use the actual limits and methods in the business's approved system.

Use the system honestly

Record checks when performed. Escalate failed checks and complete the prescribed action before food is released. Verification checks whether the system is being applied and remains effective; validation establishes that the chosen controls can work. Changes to recipes, equipment or processes can require review. Staff should understand their assigned checks, the equipment they use and who decides whether affected food can be served.

Work through a shift scenario

Fictional exercise: a cooked dish fails the kitchen's documented cooking check. Writing the number in a log is only part of the task. Staff must follow the corrective action, prevent release while the result is unacceptable, recheck as required and record what happened. The supervisor also considers whether the failure points to an equipment, loading or method problem.

Avoid the common failure

A generic template filled with guessed limits cannot establish a safe process. Use the business's verified system and appropriate official guidance. This introduction explains hazard analysis, monitoring and review; it does not validate specialist processes such as sous-vide or extended-life chilled foods. Tell staff who can authorise a process change.

A second situation to discuss

Fictional scenario: A cooking check fails the business's critical limit. A colleague suggests entering yesterday's successful reading to keep service moving.

Record the actual result, follow the corrective action and keep the affected food under control. Inform the responsible person and repeat the required checks after correction. The record must reflect what happened.

Use a working record

Record the specific arrangements below before the briefing. Keep the wording short enough for a colleague to use during the shift. Where a field does not apply, explain why; where information is missing, assign a person to resolve it. Store personal or sensitive details in the business's approved system.

- Product/process
- hazard
- control
- check/limit
- actual result
- corrective action
- authorisation
- review trigger

At the next handover, ask what changed, which action remains open and who now owns it. Close the record only when the agreed follow-up is complete. A recurring problem should inform the next briefing and the relevant operational procedure.

Check understanding

HACCP starts with:

Identifying hazards in the process The analysis connects hazards to the food process.

A critical limit is:

A defined boundary for a control The limit determines whether the control is acceptable.

HACCP exercise: a menu change breaks the old process diagram

A kitchen starts cooling a cooked filling for use the next day. The old process diagram shows cooking followed immediately by service. Where does the review begin?

Compare your decision

Map the actual route from cooking through cooling, storage and use. Refer the change to the people responsible for the food-safety system to assess hazards, establish controls and verify the revised method before introduction. Do not assume the existing monitoring sheet covers a new process.

Draw yesterday's route beside tomorrow's. Circle the first point where they differ and identify the person who can authorise the changed procedure.

Sources and scope

- Source: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/starting-a-food-business

- Source: https://myhaccp.food.gov.uk/help/guidance/general-requirements-be-considered-each-prerequisite

Original workplace examples and suggested record. Prepared 19 October 2026. Use the current linked guidance and the venue’s procedures for operational decisions.

Use this on shift

Resource page and fillable working record · Read the online guide · Course details