Food: a recipe for disaster

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
UPPER-INTERMEDIATE | B2

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each precise term with its definition.

1 palatable ____	**a** acceptable to taste, though not necessarily excellent
2 congeal ____	**b** to thicken or solidify, especially fat or sauce as it cools
3 overpowering ____	**c** so strong in flavour that it dominates everything else
4 lacklustre ____	**d** dull, uninspired and lacking impact
5 salvageable ____	**e** still able to be rescued or improved
6 unappetising ____	**f** unpleasant to look at or eat
7 heavy-handed ____	**g** using too much of an ingredient, without restraint
8 insipid ____	**h** lacking flavour or character; bland
9 char ____	**i** to burn the surface of food, often deliberately
10 curdle ____	**j** to separate into solid and liquid parts, usually as a mistake in dairy or sauces

2 Choose the word with the most suitable connotation.

1 For food that's acceptable, though not excellent: palatable / exquisite.

2 For a sauce that has thickened unpleasantly as it cooled: congealed / silky.

3 For a flavour so strong it dominates the dish: overpowering / subtle.

4 For a dull, uninspired dish: lacklustre / vibrant.

5 For a dish that can still be fixed: salvageable / beyond repair.

6 For food that looks unpleasant: unappetising / inviting.

7 For using far too much of a seasoning: heavy-handed / restrained.

8 For food that is bland and lacking character: insipid / robust.

3 Complete the cooking collocations with one word.

1 _____ handed with the salt (= using far too much)

2 an _____ flavour (= dominating everything else)

3 a _____ mess (= a dish that can still be fixed)

4 the sauce began to _____ (= thicken or solidify unpleasantly)

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5 the cream began to _____ (= separate into solid and liquid)

6 a slightly _____ crust (= deliberately burnt on the surface)

7 a _____ dish (= dull and unimpressive)

8 barely _____ (= only just acceptable to taste)

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4 Complete the case notes with words and phrases from the box.

char | congealed | curdled | heavy-handed | insipid | lacklustre | overpowering | palatable | salvageable | unappetising

Case A: The sauce had 1 _____ by the time it reached the table, forming an unpleasant skin across the top.
Case B: The chef admitted being too 2 _____ with the chilli, resulting in an 3 _____ heat that overwhelmed the other flavours.
Case C: Critics found the soup 4 _____ and unmemorable, lacking any real character.
Case D: The cream 5 _____ after being added too quickly to the hot pan, leaving a grainy, 6 _____ texture.
Case E: Despite the mistakes, the dish remained 7 _____, and a squeeze of lemon made it genuinely 8 _____ by the end.
Case F: The chef deliberately let the vegetables 9 _____ slightly for extra flavour, though one reviewer felt it was closer to 10 _____, plain burnt.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

The science of a ruined sauce

Many classic kitchen disasters, such as a curdled sauce or a congealed gravy, stem from predictable chemical reactions rather than bad luck. Curdling typically occurs when fat and liquid separate under sudden heat or acidity, a problem often preventable by adding ingredients gradually and controlling temperature carefully. Congealing, by contrast, happens as fat solidifies while a sauce cools, and can sometimes be reversed by gently reheating with a small amount of added liquid. Understanding the chemistry behind these failures, culinary educators argue, empowers home cooks to rescue an apparently ruined dish rather than abandoning it, since many seemingly hopeless situations are, in fact, salvageable with the right technique.

1 What do many classic kitchen disasters stem from? _____
2 When does curdling typically occur? _____
3 How can curdling often be prevented? _____
4 What happens during congealing? _____
5 How can congealing sometimes be reversed? _____
6 What does understanding this chemistry empower home cooks to do? _____

6 Rewrite each sentence using the word in capitals. Do not change the meaning.

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1 The sauce had thickened unpleasantly as it cooled. CONGEALED _____

2 The chilli was far too strong and dominated everything. OVERPOWERING _____

3 The dish was dull and lacked any character. LACKLUSTRE _____

4 The meal could still be saved with a few adjustments. SALVAGEABLE _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 120-150 word account of a kitchen disaster and its underlying cause, distinguishing what went technically wrong from how it was (or could have been) fixed.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Control connotation carefully. [ ] Avoid unsupported assumptions.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Precise terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Connotation

1 palatable 2 congealed 3 overpowering 4 lacklustre 5 salvageable 6 unappetising 7 heavy-handed 8 insipid

3 Collocations

1 heavy 2 overpowering 3 salvageable 4 congeal 5 curdle 6 charred 7 lacklustre 8 palatable

4 Case notes

1 congealed 2 heavy-handed 3 overpowering 4 insipid/lacklustre 5 curdled 6 unappetising
7 salvageable 8 palatable 9 char 10 char

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 Predictable chemical reactions rather than bad luck.
2 When fat and liquid separate under sudden heat or acidity.
3 By adding ingredients gradually and controlling temperature carefully.
4 Fat solidifies as a sauce cools.
5 By gently reheating with a small amount of added liquid.
6 Rescue an apparently ruined dish rather than abandoning it.

6 Rewriting - possible answers

1 The sauce had congealed. 2 The chilli was overpowering.
3 The dish was lacklustre. 4 The meal was salvageable.

Over to you

Answers will vary. Check lexical precision, appropriate connotation and separation of fact from inference.