

How to Talk About Food and Cooking – Video

In this lesson, you can learn how to talk about food. Learn useful words and phrases to talk about food and cooking in English.

You'll see how to talk about different cuisines, talk about food you like – or dislike – and talk about cooking and eating habits.

[Read the Full Script](#)

^

1. Talking About Cuisines and Dishes

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/curry-scaled.webp>)

Marie: What kind of food do you like?

Oli: I like a bit of everything, really. I grew up in the UK, and you can get food from all over the world there. My mum's cooking is a combination of different cuisines: a bit of French, a bit of Italian, a bit of Indian, and so on.

M: What's British cuisine like? I know about fish and chips, but there must be more...

O: There is, but not that much. There are a few famous dishes like shepherd's pie or Sunday roast, but most people eat a mix of things. What about you? What food do you like?

M: I'm half Spanish, so when I was young we ate a lot of Mediterranean food at home. Now, I live in Berlin, and it's a pretty cosmopolitan place, so you can get all kinds of food, like the UK, I suppose.

O: I've never really had much Spanish food. Is it similar to Italian?

M: In some ways, yes. They both use a lot of fresh ingredients, and there's a lot of seafood, salads, and so on. Pasta isn't so common in Spanish cooking, though.

O: What are some typical Spanish dishes? I'd be interested to try some.

M: I guess paella is quite well-known. My personal favourite is a dish called albóndigas, which is meatballs in a tomato sauce. It's simple, but so tasty.

O: Sounds good!

Here's a question: do you know the difference between the words 'cuisine', 'dish' and 'meal'?

'Cuisine' means the kind of food you find in a specific country or culture. For example, you have Chinese cuisine, French cuisine, local cuisine, and so on. 'Cuisine' means something like 'cooking style'.

You can use the word 'food' or 'cooking' in the same way. So, you can say 'Chinese cuisine', 'Chinese cooking' or 'Chinese food'. The meaning is very close.

A 'dish' means something which is cooked or prepared. Usually, a dish is made from different kinds of food.

A 'meal' is food eaten at a specific time. Most people eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch and dinner. Learn more about routines with this Oxford Online English lesson on daily routines (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/talking-about-daily-routine>).

We often hear English learners make mistakes with these three words, so be careful with them!

In the dialogue, you heard how to talk about different cuisines and dishes which you like.

Look at some questions you heard.

1. What kind of food do you like?
2. What's (your country's) cuisine like?
3. What are some typical dishes in your country?

Think about how you could answer these.

When you answer these questions, try to be detailed.

For example, don't just say 'Vietnamese food is delicious.' Give some more details! Say what kind of dishes are the best, or try to explain why you like it.

For example, you could say 'Vietnamese food is delicious, because it uses fresh ingredients and it's a little bit spicy, which I like.'

OK? Pause the video and try to answer the questions now.

Could you do it? If not, go back and listen to the dialogue again.

Next, let's look at how to talk about food you like – or don't!

2. Adjectives to Describe Food

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/uncountable-food-words.webp>)

Oli: So, what do you think?

Marie: Oh no! This is terrible!

O: Really?

M: First, you haven't cooked the meat long enough. It's tough and really chewy. You need to keep cooking it until it's tender.

O: I cooked it for two hours, just like you said!

M: Yes, but you also have to check that it's done! Also, these vegetables are awful. They're mushy because you've overcooked them. They should be fresh and crunchy.

O: Right... What about the sauce?

M: It's not bad, but it's a little bland. A dish like this should be rich, spicy and a little sour. While you're cooking, don't forget to taste it, and add more spices, or more vinegar, or whatever it needs.

O: Hmm... OK... I'm a little scared to show you my dessert, now.

M: Wow! This is amazing!

O: Oh? You mean it?

M: Yes! It's a perfect tart. It's crumbly, but not dry, which is a difficult balance to get right. The fruit gives it a nice, tangy flavour. Very tasty!

O: Thank you!

To describe something you ate, you could start with the flavour. For example, you can use words like 'spicy', 'sour', 'sweet', 'bitter', or 'rich'. 'Rich (<https://forum.wordreference.com/threads/rich-food.81573/>)' can be used to describe heavier foods.

You also heard 'bland' in the dialogue. 'Bland' describes something which has little or no flavour.

Then, you could also describe the texture. In the dialogue, you heard the word 'mushy'. Do you know what this means?

'Mushy' means that something is soft, but in an unpleasant way. If you cook vegetables too long, they'll get mushy.

In the dialogue, you also heard ‘tough’, ‘chewy’, ‘tender’, ‘crunchy’ and ‘crumbly’. Can you think of foods which these words could describe?

‘Tough’ and ‘chewy’ are similar. Both describe foods which are difficult to eat because you have to chew them for a long time. Meat can be tough or chewy, especially if it’s cooked too long and it gets dry.

‘Tender’ means something like ‘soft’, but it’s mostly used to describe meat which is cooked well, so it’s soft and juicy.

Crunchy foods make a lot of noise when you’re eating them. Dry food – like potato chips, or hard cookies – can be crunchy.

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/crisps.webp>)

Crumbly food is soft and easily breaks into pieces. ‘Crumbly’ can be good or bad – for a cake, it might be a good thing, but crumbly bread might be a bad thing, because it will fall apart when you try to do anything with it.

If you like the taste of something, you can use general adjectives like ‘great’, ‘amazing’ or ‘fantastic’. You can also use ‘tasty’ or ‘delicious’.

Be careful: ‘delicious’ is a strong adjective. That means you can’t say ‘very delicious’; if you want to add emphasis, say ‘really delicious’ or ‘absolutely delicious’.

To talk about food you don’t like, use general adjectives like ‘awful’, ‘terrible’ or ‘disgusting’. Learn more with our lesson on talking about likes and dislikes in English
(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/likes-dislikes-english>).

Now, a challenge for you: think about the last thing you ate.

Could you describe it? Talk about the flavour, the texture, and whether you liked it or not. For a bonus, try to explain why you did or didn’t like it! For example: ‘The last thing I ate was a lentil soup. It was quite spicy, but a little bit mushy, because I overcooked the lentils. I didn’t like it so much, because it was a little bland. Lentils don’t have much flavour.’

Now it’s your turn. Pause the video and make your answer.

Next, let’s see how you can talk about cooking habits.

3. Talking About Cooking

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/cooking-class.webp>)

Marie: Do you cook much?

Oli: Sometimes. I cook maybe twice a week, but I'm too busy to do more than that.

M: What do you do the rest of the time?

O: For lunch, I eat in the canteen at work. In the evening, I generally get something from the supermarket, or get a takeaway. I don't like it, because I know it's more expensive and less healthy than cooking for myself, but I just don't have the time. What about you?

M: I make most of my meals. I don't cook every day, though. I normally do a lot of cooking on Sunday, and then I have food for the week. I take a packed lunch to work, and then eat leftovers in the evening.

O: That's a good system! I wish I could be so organised...

M: It helps that I have a market very close to my house. They have great fresh produce, fish, meat... everything you need. That means I don't need to spend much time shopping. Plus, I prefer eating home-cooked, fresh food. If I don't have food with me, I end up eating greasy fast food, and then I feel bloated and gross.

O: Yeah, I'm the same way... Maybe I'll start cooking more.

Think about the first question you heard in the dialogue: 'Do you cook much?' How would you answer this?

You could say something like:

I cook every day.

I don't cook much – maybe once or twice a week.

I don't cook. I've never learned how!

If you don't cook, what can you do for food? You heard some phrases in the dialogue. Do you remember any?

Look at some sentences that you heard.

*I eat in the **canteen** at work.*

*I generally get something from the supermarket, or get a **takeaway**.*

*I take a **packed lunch** to work.*

*I eat **leftovers** in the evening.*

Imagine you're an English teacher (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/about-our-online-english-teachers>), and you want to explain the meanings of the words in **bold text**. How would you do it?

A canteen is a bit like a restaurant, but it's run by a company for its staff, or by a university for its students. Canteens are usually cheap, or the food might even be free.

A takeaway means you buy or order the food from a restaurant, and then eat it somewhere else, usually at home.

A packed lunch means you take food from home and eat it at work or school.

If you cook more than you can eat, the extra food is called 'leftovers'. You can eat the leftovers on another day.

What about you? Do you cook much? If not, what do you do for food? Pause the video now, and try to make a few sentences to describe your cooking and eating habits.

Done? Great! Let's look at our last point on how to talk about food in English.

4. Describing How to Make a Dish

Marie: So, what do we do first?

Oli: First, we need to fry the aubergine and the potato. While you do that, I'll prepare the meat.

M: How are you going to do it?

O: O: It's easy: you sauté onion and garlic, then add the meat to brown it. Then you add the tomatoes and simmer it for fifteen minutes or so until the sauce thickens.

M: OK, what now?

O: Now we need to make the white sauce. You know how to make white sauce?

M: I think so, though I've never tried it. It's butter, flour and milk, right?

O: Yes, but you need to be careful. Add the milk very slowly, and stir the sauce continuously. Otherwise, it can get lumpy.

M: Should I use a low heat?

O: Yes, as low as possible.

M: So, is that it?

O: Pretty much! We just need to layer all the parts, sprinkle some grated cheese on top, and then bake it for half an hour.

M: What should I do, then?

O: Get a baking dish. Put the potatoes in the bottom, then the aubergine, then the meat. Add another layer of aubergine on top, then pour in the white sauce.

M: Is it ready?

O: Yeah, I think so. It should be lightly brown on top. Nice work – you made your first moussaka!

By the way, do you know what ‘moussaka’ is? It’s a famous Greek dish. It’s easy to find recipes online if you want to try making it.

In the dialogue, you heard several different verbs related to food preparation. Do you remember any?

Look at some pairs of words.

sauté/fry

boil/simmer

pour/sprinkle

Could you explain the difference in meaning between these words pairs? Pause the video to think about it if you need time.

‘Sauté’ and ‘fry’ both mean to cook something in hot fat – usually hot oil. ‘Sauté’ means that you cook something at high temperature for a short time. In everyday language, people mostly say ‘fry’, but if you’re reading a recipe or watching cookery shows

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_cooking_shows) on TV, you might see ‘sauté’.

‘Boil’ and ‘simmer’ both mean to heat a liquid until it bubbles; ‘simmer’ suggests you keep the heat as low as possible. ‘Boil’ means you use a higher heat.

‘Pour’ is only for liquids. ‘Sprinkle’ means to spread a small amount of something over something else. ‘Sprinkle’ is mostly used for powders or things made of small particles, like salt, herbs, grated cheese, and so on.

Now, it’s your turn. Think about a dish you know how to make. Your job is to give detailed instructions for how to make it. Imagine you’re teaching someone, and you want to describe every step of the process.

Before you do this, you can watch the dialogue again. There are many more words and phrases you can use to help you.

That’s all. Thanks for watching!