Task Analysis

Writing a task is a process that requires careful planning, testing, and analysis. One of the most popular tasks to write about is a recipe where the ingredients and directions are clearly outlined. For this task analysis assignment, I will create and test a recipe for salmon patties.

# The Process

My mom and I regularly make salmon patties inspired by my Grandma’s recipe. However, the only record of its existence comes from a vague notecard written by my mom. The ingredients amounts are not exact, and the directions are almost non-existent.

To adapt this recipe into a complete form, I observed my mom as she made the salmon patties and determined the amounts and timing along the way. I took notes and asked questions about the logical flow of her process and the purpose of each ingredient. Thanks to this observation, I can now establish the objective, audience, action, and order.

## Objective

The objective of this recipe is to make salmon patties. But how many salmon patties? And what size?

From previous experience, we always made six patties from a 5oz pouch of wild-caught, skinless, and boneless pink salmon. The task analysis observation with my mom was no different. Since many recipes only emphasize thickness, we took a ruler and measured the thickness of each patty before and after being cooked. Each patty averaged to about ½ inch thick.

## Audience

This recipe is for people interested in making salmon patties. This recipe doesn’t require advanced cooking experience or skills. If you know how to operate a stove and use measuring cups, you can easily make salmon patties. The recipe will use descriptors and terminology that is clear and understandable to all readers.

The audience will first need to know the ingredients and their amounts. Exact amounts are necessary for the reader to check if they have enough. Then they will need to know what setting to heat the stove. Finally, they will need to know the directions for how to create and cook the salmon patty mix.

## Action

After considering the objective and audience, it’s time to outline the actions. The outline revolves around what happens before, during, and after creating the salmon patty mix.

**Before creating the mix**

* Assemble the ingredients and their amounts.
  + 1 5oz pouch of wild-caught, skinless, and boneless pink salmon
  + 1 large egg
  + 1/4 tsp pepper, or more for preference
  + 1/8 tsp salt, or more for preference
  + 1/2 cup plain breadcrumbs
  + 1 tbsp salted butter
* Place a large, uncovered pan on the stove at medium-low heat.

**Creating the mix**

* In a medium bowl, add the egg. Whisk until fully beat.
* Add salmon, breadcrumbs, salt, and pepper. Mix with your hands until combined and holds together to shape into patties.
  + If it’s not holding together, add more breadcrumbs.
* Shape the mix into six ½ in thick patties and set them on a plate.
  + It may be easier to split the mix in half first, and then shape each half into three patties.

**Cooking the salmon**

* Place butter on the pan. Once the butter starts simmering, quickly add the patties.
* Cook each side for 1-2 minutes or until reddish brown, occasionally patting and moving them around to absorb the butter.
* Remove pan from heat. Cover with a lid to keep patties warm until ready to serve.

## Order

Recipes are always divided into two sections: ingredients and directions. The ingredients section comes first for the reader to check that they have everything they need before they start cooking. Because there is no order to assemble ingredients, the ingredients list will use bullet points instead of numbers.

Though the directions are already correctly ordered, I will replace the bullet points with numbers to convey a sequence. Below are the revised steps.

1. Set a large, uncovered pan on medium-low heat.
2. In a medium bowl, add the egg and whisk until fully beat.
3. Add salmon, breadcrumbs, salt, and pepper. Mix with your hands until combined and holds together to shape into patties. If it’s not holding together, add more breadcrumbs.
4. Shape the mix into six ½ in thick patties and set them on a plate. It may be easier to split the mix in half first, and then shape each half into three patties.
5. Place butter in the pan. Once the butter starts simmering, quickly add the patties.
6. Cook each side for 1-2 minutes or until reddish brown, occasionally patting and moving them around to absorb the butter.
7. Remove pan from heat. Cover with a lid to keep patties warm until ready to serve.

# Usability Testing

The first draft of my recipe was ready for testing. I gave my dad a printed copy of the recipe and asked him to follow it without my help. He enjoys cooking and has previous experience in the food industry, but he never cooks salmon patties. If he saw anything in the recipe that confused him, he would highlight it to discuss later.

Overall, my dad found the recipe easy to follow and achieved its intended purpose. However, there were a few criticisms and noteworthy observations.

## Heat

1. Because every stovetop is different, and recipes never use numbers to measure stove heat, readers will inevitably have different definitions of medium-low. While Mom defines medium-low as 3-4, Dad started at 2. The butter melted slower and would not sizzle until he turned up the heat to 4 or 5. Since the extra time spent heating the pan didn’t cause any major complications, I won’t change it in the recipe.

## Butter

Dad unintentionally deviated from the recipe when he placed the butter in the pan right after step 1. This recipe, however, wants the butter placed after creating the mix when the pan has had more exposure to the heat. He is not the only cook with this habit, as I also place butter or oil in a pan right after turning on the heat. My mom only does this for salmon patties to make the butter melt and sizzle faster. Because the order for the butter placement doesn’t change the outcome, I will move it to step 1.

## Cooking Terminology

The first thing Dad pointed out when reading the recipe was the word choice of "beating" the egg in step 2. Though often used to describe egg whites, you can also beat an egg yolk. He also suggested using words like light and smooth to describe a beaten egg. I will reword this step.

There was also a debate over the correct word choice for describing the butter in step 5. In my earliest draft, I used the word “shimmering”. When using oil in a pan, you add in the food once the oil starts shimmering. I incorrectly assumed that this would also apply to butter. My mom told me to replace shimmering with "simmering" because shimmering means glistening and is not the proper cooking term.

While we discussed Dad unintentionally placing the butter after setting the heat, he specifically used the word shimmering to describe the butter. He later clarified that the term is meant for oil and suggested "boiling" or "sizzling" as better alternatives. I plan on using the latter.

## Number of Patties

Dad only made five patties rather than six. Though his patties were 1/2 inch thick, they were longer and flatter than how we usually shape them. In step 3, I will replace the number 6 with a range like 5-7.

# Revised Recipe

In addition to the changes noted during testing, I also removed or rewrote sentences that I later deemed unhelpful or unclear. Below is the revised recipe.

## Ingredients

* 1 5oz pouch of wild-caught, skinless, and boneless pink salmon
* 1 large egg
* 1/4 tsp pepper, or more for preference
* 1/8 tsp salt, or more for preference
* 1/2 cup plain breadcrumbs
* 1 tbsp salted butter

## Directions

1. Set a large, uncovered pan on medium-low heat. Place butter in the pan.
2. In a medium bowl, beat the egg with a whisk until smooth. Add salmon, breadcrumbs, salt, and pepper. Mix with your hands until combined and holds together enough to shape into patties. If it’s not holding together, add more breadcrumbs.
3. Shape the mix into 5-7 ½ inch thick patties. Set aside or freeze until ready to cook.
4. Once the butter is melted and starts sizzling, quickly add the patties to the pan. Occasionally pat and move them around with a spatula to absorb the butter. Cook each side for 1-2 minutes or until reddish brown.
5. Remove pan from heat. Cover with a lid to keep patties warm until ready to serve.