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## How to Bake X Cake

### Notes on the Recipe

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**ABSTRACT:** What kind of reduction does a recipe perform? This short piece considers the recipe as a purpose-oriented list. Based on a recipe for baking cakes of different flavours by following a similar procedure, it reflects on experience, time, chance, generalization, and secrecy.

**KEYWORDS:** Recipe; Method; History; Failure; Experience

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## Notes on the Recipe

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### INGREDIENTS:

- 4 eggs
- 2 cups of wheat flour
- ½ cup of sunflower oil (You could use other oil. The original recipe said 1 cup but ½ cup will usually do. Add a little more in case the dough needs it.)
- 1 cup of sugar (There were 2 cups in the original recipe. According to your preferences regarding sweetness, something between ½ cup and 2 cups should do.)
- 1 full tablespoon of baking powder
- X
- Optional spice

X stands for a liquid or liquefiable ingredient, such as: the juice of 1 large carrot or 2 small ones; 2 smashed medium bananas; the juice of 1 large orange or 2 small ones; the juice of 2 lemons; the juice of 2 apples.

Optional spice: With carrot, add seeds of cardamom to the dough. With banana and apple, add slices of banana or apple plus cinnamon

on top of the cake before baking it. With orange and lemon, add an orange or lemon plus sugar hot sauce on top of the baked cake while still warm.

#### METHOD OF PREPARATION:

Mix the wet ingredients. Add the dry ingredients. Mix vigorously. Baking powder should be the last ingredient to be gently added to the mixture.

Bake the cake for about 30 minutes (I like it slightly burned). Your oven should be set to 180°C. (Mind the fact that the real temperature of ovens is frequently not what it says.)

#### THE RECIPE: A LIST WITH A METHOD AND A HISTORY

Recipes are the product of history, but their form can elide this information. This recipe draws from another recipe that was given to me by my daughter's kindergarten teacher so that I could learn how to bake a cake for the celebration of her sixth birthday. I wanted to buy her a cake since I could not bake one, but she resolutely told me that 'all moms can bake cakes.' This is how the experimentation started.

A recipe usually gives you the rules of success but does not address how to avoid failure. This will be the work of experience. For instance, a cake recipe does not say that it can be disastrous to open the oven while baking — it took me a number of ruined cakes to realize this. I have often asked myself why recipes are not more pedagogical and have come to no precise conclusion on this matter. It might be the case that previous cooking experience is just assumed. Or maybe the recipe form implicitly allows the cook to keep their secrets so that the original remains not fully reproducible.

As a purpose-oriented list, a recipe is an attempt to reduce experience to a method and technique aimed at achieving the same, or at least very similar, results. Order can be important and is related to temporality: the results of the recipe depend on the order in which ingredients are added and actions are performed. A recipe is a powerful tool if one starts off to accomplish something without any previous experience. Yet, to the extent that its form cannot contain all the setbacks of chance, its various instantiations will inevitably be somewhat different.

One can approach a recipe from a controlling perspective, in which one tries to reduce the setbacks of chance in order to approximate as closely as possible an imagined outcome. Or else one can approach it from a more experimental stance, in which one takes instructions and ingredients as guidelines and incorporates the variations provided by chance as possible contributions to the end result. I am prone to the latter as long as there are enough ingredients and time to start again before the meal is to be served in case the experiment miserably fails.

The extent to which these notes apply to other recipes or lists shall remain indeterminate.