

Calibrating the Culinary Judge: Reviewing the Instrument Before the Dish

A proposal by Ahmad Issam Maadarani separating discrimination, consistency and interpretive relevance

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Judges examine dishes using their memory, language and criteria as instruments. This article proposes training that examines three separate aspects: detecting a task-relevant difference, describing repeated cases consistently and connecting descriptions appropriately to criteria. The proposal is neither a competency certificate nor a medical sensory test; its usefulness requires design and evidence.

1. Experience does not replace performance review

Long kitchen experience alone cannot answer whether a judge detects a task-relevant difference and describes it intelligibly. An expert may excel in one style and be less familiar with another, or use precise language with an unsuitable comparison criterion. Competence should therefore be reviewed relative to task, product and conditions, rather

than as an absolute trait. Training locates where experience supports a decision and where additional support is needed.

2. Discrimination, consistency and relevance differ

Discrimination here means detecting a specified difference in examination samples. Consistency means comparable descriptions of a repeated case under comparable conditions. Interpretive relevance concerns the observation's relationship to the assessed requirement. A judge may repeat a judgment through an inappropriate rule: consistency without relevance. A detected difference may also receive importance absent from the brief. Do not combine these into one competence score before defining what each training task examines.

3. Training references need documentation

When ingredient amounts differ between versions, document the preparation change without assuming everyone can detect a sensory difference. A deliberately created defect requires a describable indication independent of the version's name. Use codes concealing the modification when appropriate, and keep preparation records separate from tasting reports. The reference establishes what was intentionally changed; the trainer's expectation must not make every different response an error.

4. Hypothetical case: sharpness and altered sauce texture

Consider a base sauce, a version with sharpness modified as independently as practicable, and another with altered consistency. A judge calls the third sharper because its sensation lasts longer in a particular bite. The recipe record cannot simply invalidate that experience, but the description does not prove the sharp ingredient increased. Ask the judge to separate sensation from inferred source, then review the sampled location and sequence. Training may lead to revised language or a testable hypothesis rather than replacing experience with the trainer's answer.

5. A four-stage protocol

First define task, criteria and descriptions before presentation. Second collect independent observations using coded samples and balanced order where practicable. Third disclose preparation records and compare observations with what those records can establish. Finally repeat suitable cases using independent preparations or repeated samples identified in the organiser's record, explaining the difference. Do not edit the initial report after revealing a version; add a new review so learning remains traceable.

6. What to record and what not to infer

Record the described difference, its direction where asked, repeat observations and reasoning about its relevance. Answers can be counted in a task with a specified correct response, but a percentage does not automatically predict the correctness of future judgments. A few cases cannot establish a permanent personal classification. Record session conditions, breaks and order, since changing them changes the comparison. Do not interpret poor training results as disease or sensory loss; that lies beyond professional training.

7. Training success and the compliance problem

Examine whether reports better separate observation from cause and apply the brief more consistently to cases absent from training. Repeating the trainer's words may indicate verbal compliance rather than calibration. Use new cases, permit reasoned disagreement and define review criteria beforehand. State product scope and examination conditions: success within a narrow set does not establish readiness for every type of food.

8. Conclusion: calibration is not identical preference

Judges need not enjoy the same things. They should distinguish observation from inference, apply declared criteria and understand task-specific competence boundaries. Calibration strengthens when preserving intelligible disagreement and revisiting its reference when necessary. A judging instrument gains validity through a describable, repeatable and examinable practice rather than confidence alone.

9. A concise working sheet

Field	Review question	What to record
Scope	Which product, task and conditions?	Do not generalise narrow training success to every task.
Reference	What was deliberately changed?	Separate modification records from assumed sensory effects.
Independence	Was the report written before disclosure?	Preserve the initial report beside the review.
Discrimination	What difference was described?	Separate sensation from inferred source.
Consistency	Repeated sample or independent preparation?	Specify repetition type and permitted inference.
Transfer	Did new-case performance improve?	Examine reasoning, not merely repeated trainer vocabulary.

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