



American Culinary Federation Student Team National Championship 2027 Regional Qualifier Guidelines

Updated: August 11, 2026

Preparing for the Competition

Teams selected to compete in the 2027 Qualifier have met the requirements and have satisfied the guidelines for filing for the competition and have met the filing timeline. **A student team that wins the ACF National Championship can only return two (2) members from the winning team the following year.** The Student Teams must adhere to the following Guidelines:

Composition and Role of the Team

The team will be comprised of five (5) members designated with working stations to execute a four (4) course menu following an amuse-bouche course for (4) four. All five (5) members of the team have an equal role in the production of the menu without limitations in the Set-Up, Production, Clean-Up and Service windows. It is advisable that the team choose a captain to take lead throughout the competition. The team lead will determine which member(s) will serve as the expeditor/service coordinator who will help coordinate service to the judges. In addition, they will be responsible for applying, if required, any finishing touches or garnishes, and saucing tableside.

Requirements

- Student Teams will have fifteen (15) minutes for Set-Up, ninety (90) minutes for Production Time, twenty (20) additional minutes for Plating, and fifteen (15) minutes for Clean-Up.
- Student Teams will produce a signature amuse-bouche preceding a four (4) course menu to serve four (4).
- Three (3) plates will be for the tasting judges and the remaining one (1) dish will be for display.
- Teams should focus on the use of ingredients that are in season and available locally, if possible, to their region. An emphasis of course continuity and compatibility of ingredients throughout the menu while incorporating varied cooking techniques, including modern, is encouraged.
- The themed menu must include the following courses:
 - Amuse-Bouche – Lacto-Ovo Team's Choice (*20 gram average*)
 - Fish Course as a starter - Utilizing a species of round or flat fish per SKC-11 guidelines and at least one (1) other seafood accompaniment i.e. bivalves, crustaceans, cephalopods, utilized in any manner within the dish; team's choice.
 - Salad Course - Team's choice
 - Main Course - Utilizing any protein from the SKC Guidelines. *A minimum of two (2) cooking techniques must be applied to the main protein*; team's choice.
 - Dessert Course - Team's choice

General Guidelines

- Teams will be required to showcase cooking skills that commensurate with those expected of advanced culinary students. These would include technical skills performed at the highest levels including butchery, classical cuts and an array of cooking methods and techniques to produce a great tasting and attractively presented menu.
- The Student Team should display cohesiveness and demonstrate great teamwork.

Packets for the Judges

- Teams must provide for the four (4) course meal, six (6) sets of menu packets. The packets must be presented in packet form upon entering the kitchen at the designated competition start time. The packets should be prepared using 12pt, Times New Roman font and be stapled in the upper left-hand corner of the packet. Please do not use binders or report covers that may inhibit easy access and reference for the judges. At a minimum, each packet will include the following (in this order):
 - **A written menu**, as it would be presented to a guest or customer.
 - **A color photograph** of the dish (should be current and representative of what the judges will receive)
 - **All recipes, including ingredients, quantities and procedures.**

Ingredient Guidelines

- Teams are expected to bring in only the whole and raw materials in the amounts stated in the recipe to execute the assignment. Products should be weighed, separated, and clearly marked.
- Washed, peeled, and sectioned fruits and vegetables and cut mirepoix are allowed for the amuse-bouche and four (4) course cooking phase. Fruits and vegetables are not to be brought in shaped but may be sectioned according to the team's needs. Leeks may be split for cleaning purposes.
- Appropriate stocks for the amuse-bouche and four (4) course meal may be brought in, but neither finished sauces nor clarified broths are allowed. Additionally, stocks should be unaltered without further reduction from what is obtained after the initial straining of the liquid. Samples of each stock should be presented to the floor judge for assessment.
- Puff pastry, bric (brick) dough, and filo (phyllo) may be brought in. No other finished doughs are permitted.
- The use of pasteurized whole eggs, egg yolks, and egg whites are permitted.
- The use of commercial fruit puree for the dessert is allowed but the puree should not be altered in any way from its original packaging.
- Sponges may be brought in as sheets without any trimming or shaping.
- Cooked ice cream bases and/or sorbet bases may be brought in ready to freeze at the competition site. If teams are using a Paco jet for a frozen element, that element can be brought in pre-frozen but then another must be made in the window to demonstrate skill and components; then the pre-frozen item can be "swapped out."
- All marinated and brined items brought in advance must be demonstrated and prepared in their proper culinary production sequence before the pre-prepared items can "swapped out" for the pre-marinated or brined ones.
- Pickling of fruits and vegetables can be done prior to the competition; again, the pickling process must be demonstrated during the production window.
- Dried legumes, fruits, and vegetables (i.e. beans, dried cherries, sundried tomatoes, dried mushrooms, etc.) may be soaked prior to competition.
- Gelatins may be brought in bloomed.
- Proteins must be brought whole, and butchery skills and utilization of trim will need to be displayed.
- Utilization of usable trim and by-products in your menu is fully expected and shows one's cooking skills.

Kitchen Guidelines

- Teams must bring in all equipment, knives, small wares, and chinaware for all parts and phases of the competition.
- Teams are left to manage their kitchens as they wish with regards to what equipment to bring and must plan to manage the electrical requirements specific to the sites of the competition. Additional equipment, such as tabletop burners and deep fat fryers as example, will be at the discretion of the lead judge and based on the requirements of the host site.
- Teams are required to work within the assigned kitchen/station boundaries. Not adhering to this rule will result in point deductions.
- Teams are required to save their food and non-food waste in separate designated containers (clear third pans) and dispose of them into a designated common trash receptacle *once reviewed* by a Judge. In addition, usable food trim must be properly labeled and put away.
- Teams may use mechanical timers or app-based Bluetooth® enabled timers and thermometers on devices such as smartphones, pads, or tablets set to “airplane mode” to discourage communication with managers, coaches, and any other supporters not within the competition kitchen.
- A kitchen diagram and a list of equipment provided will be sent to each competitor by the ACF National Office once the kitchen design has been established. This will include the refrigeration and freezer space available and the number of electrical outlets.
- Please keep in mind that you will be limited to the number of outlets provided, and the use of power strips will not be allowed.
- Competitors should choose equipment that can be supported by the number of outlets and wattage provided. Time will not be adjusted for equipment malfunctions that result from the provided wattage being overrun.
- The amount of space available is limited so only bring in the appropriate amount of equipment.
- Teams are allowed to use multiple speed racks or carts while entering and exiting their kitchens, to bring all equipment and supplies needed to properly execute their menus. **During the production window ONLY ONE (1) speed rack will be allowed to remain in the kitchen area.**
- Once in the competition set-up window, **team members are not permitted to leave the kitchen for any reason until breakdown is completed.**

Timeline and Guidance

Window	Timing	Guidance
Set Up window	15 minutes	Students should move into their stations and set up for effective execution; no cooking is to occur in this window. Water may be set to heat, immersion circulators can be turned on, and products may be unwrapped for initial preparations
Production Window	90 minutes	All production leading to service of menu must be done within this window, including all technical skills, knife cuts, and fabrication
Service Window	20 minutes	Teams can begin service of their menu immediately as this window opens and must conclude the service of the four courses at its conclusion
Clean Up Window	15 minutes	Teams are to leave at the conclusion of this window with the kitchen in the same condition as it was when they entered their set-up window. All remaining food items should be displayed and labeled for judging

Clothing

Competitors must wear the following:

- White chef coat
- Black pants
- Black shoes or clogs
- Competition toque
- Full apron

Role of the Team Manager and Coaches

The manager and coach do not have a role during the competition. Once you arrive at the competition window, your work is done. There is absolutely no communication with the team either verbal, nonverbal, or through any other means. This includes during the set-up, production, service, and breakdown windows. This will result in immediate **DISQUALIFICATION** of the team. Once breakdown is concluded and the team is released from the kitchen, the manager and coaches may communicate with their team. Managers and coaches are required to be present during their team's critique.

Judging Process

- The competitors will be evaluated by a panel of distinguished chefs who will serve as kitchen judges and tasting judges.
- Critiques for individual teams will be done in private with all judges; teams are encouraged to bring in those involved with their team including support staff from the school and/or chapter, parents, guardians or caregivers of the student team members, and administration of the associated schools. No others will be permitted in the critique. This is to provide an opportunity for open and honest dialogue between the judges and competitors.
- All the judges' decisions are final.
- After the "set-up window" time is complete, competitors will not be allowed to leave the competition kitchen. All dishes and equipment will need to remain in the kitchen until after the cooking window is closed. Any infractions of this rule will result in loss of points or disqualification at the discretion of the judges. In the event a competitor requires additional product or equipment they will need to make a request to the floor judge.
- The lead judge will have the discretionary right to clear a viewing area with the intention of maintaining the integrity of the overall competition.
- Discussion, gesturing, or any other verbal or nonverbal communication to the team from its manager, coaches, or any other supporters of the team in ANY of the competition windows will result in **immediate disqualification** of that team.

Presidential Wildcard (Effective June 2026)

In order for a competitor to move forward to the ACF National Championship from any of the ACF Region Qualifiers, they must score a minimum of a 70 Bronze Medal. In the event that there is no competitor who scores a 70 Bronze Medal in any given category, the highest scoring non-winning competitor from the other regions will move forward. This applies to all Region Qualifier Competitions.