

# Improve acceptance of new dishes through Sensory Testing

## Why Sensory Testing matters

Sensory testing is a simple method used to understand how pupils experience a school meal. In SF4C, it has helped schools and municipalities assess children's acceptance of healthier and more sustainable dishes. Because children often react strongly to the appearance, smell, taste, and texture of food, sensory testing provides valuable insight into what influences their willingness to try – and finish – a meal.

This understanding is essential when introducing recipes that may differ from what pupils usually eat, especially when menus shift toward more plant-based and less salty dishes. All dishes selected for testing within SF4C follow three common principles: they are vegetarian, based on unrefined ingredients, and prepared with reduced salt.



## What Sensory Testing measures

During the test, children evaluate the dish acceptance and overall perception immediately after eating it, focusing on its appearance, odour, taste, texture and overall ease of eating. They also report how the dish made them feel.

A second part, completed in the classroom, explores pupils' everyday food habits and influences at home and in their social environment. Together, these two parts paint a broader picture of what shapes acceptance of new school meals.

## Why Sensory Testing is valuable

### Improve acceptance of new recipes

Based on direct feedback from pupils on what they enjoy.

### Reduce food waste

By identifying which meals are more likely to be eaten – and why.

### Support healthier food environments

By linking children's preferences with sustainable and nutritional menu changes.

### Strengthen menu planning and procurement decisions

Using real evidence from the school population.

### Engage children in a positive way

Giving them a say increases ownership and often increases willingness to try new foods.

### Build long-term healthy eating habits

By gently introducing children to new tastes, textures, and ingredients over time.



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## How the Sensory Test is conducted

The test takes place in two steps. First, pupils eat the selected dish in the school canteen and immediately fill in a short questionnaire about their sensory experience. This part takes around ten minutes and is designed to capture their direct impressions. Later the same day, or the next, pupils complete the second part of the questionnaire in the classroom. This section, which takes about thirty minutes, focuses on their broader food preferences and habits. Teachers guide pupils through both steps, ensuring that questionnaires are completed correctly and consistently.

## What schools and municipalities need to prepare

To run the sensory test smoothly, schools need to:

- Select a dish that follows the three principles (vegetarian, unrefined ingredients, reduced salt).
- Ensure the dish can be prepared and served on a specific test day
- Provide teachers with clear instructions
- Collect parental consent (paper or digital) at least 10 days before the test
- Prepare paper or digital questionnaires
- Plan for two administration moments (canteen + classroom)
- Organise teachers or school staff to guide pupils during the test

These steps ensure consistency and help create a relaxed, positive testing environment.

## How Results Can Be Used

The outcomes of the sensory test help schools and municipalities understand which aspects of a dish work well and which may need adjustment. Findings can guide recipe development, support decisions on menu changes, and contribute to reducing food waste by identifying meals that are more likely to be eaten. Sensory testing also offers a structured way to involve children in decisions about school meals, giving them a voice and increasing their openness to new foods. Schools can use this approach beyond the SF4C context whenever they wish to evaluate the acceptance of a new or adapted dish.

## Want to make a deep dive into sensory testing?

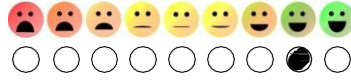
**[Learn more about the scientific research behind the method here](#)**



# SENSORY TEST SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The sensory test was realised by the **University of Gastronomic Sciences of Pollenzo** as part of the **School Food 4 Change** project. The action "Collecting data on the impact of school menus on consumers' perception" (Task 2.4.3) is part of the Work Package 2 "Definition, mapping and impact assessment" coordinated by the University of Alcalá and the Stockholm Environment Institute.

Complete the questionnaire clearly and neatly, using only a black or blue pen.  
Where required, write in CAPITAL BLOCK letters, one character per box.  
Darken the boxes as shown in the example.



H E L L O

## YOU

### AGE:

- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15

### GENDER:

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to declare

### HOW OFTEN DO YOU EAT LUNCH AT THE SCHOOL CANTEEN FROM MONDAY TO FRIDAY?

- 0 (Never)
- 1-2 times a week
- 3-4 times a week
- Every day (Always)

**PART 1 – LIKING/ACCEPTANCE**

**HOW MUCH DO YOU LIKE OVERALL THE DISH?**

Dislike extremely	Dislike very much	Dislike moderately	Dislike slightly	Neither like nor dislike	Like slightly	Like moderately	Like very much	Like extremely
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU FINISHED TO EAT THE SELECTED DISH?**  
(CHOOSE AS MANY EMOJI AS YOU WANT!)

FULL OF ENERGY	SAD	ENTHUSIASTIC	IRRITATED	NEUTRAL INDIFFERENT	HAPPY	DISGUSTED	PLEASED	ANGRY
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**HOW MUCH FOOD DID YOU LEAVE ON YOUR PLATE?**

1 - Nothing	2 - Very little	3 - A little	4 - Half	5 - A lot	6 - Everything
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**STOP!**

You have finished the first part.  
The second part will be completed in class.

**PART 2 – FOOD HABITS AND FOOD NEOPHOBIA**

**IN GENERAL (AT HOME AND SCHOOL), HOW OFTEN DO YOU EAT THE PRODUCTS BELOW?**  
(PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH FOOD)

	LESS THAN ONCE A MONTH/NEVER	1-3 TIMES A MONTH	1-3 TIMES A WEEK	4-6 TIMES A WEEK	ONCE A DAY	MULTIPLE TIMES A DAY
PASTA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
RICE	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
VEGETABLES	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
POTATOES	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LEGUMES (PEAS, BEANS, LENTILS...)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FRUITS	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
MEAT	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FISH	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**INDICATE HOW TRUE IS EACH STATEMENT FOR YOU:**

**ALMOST EVERY DAY I EAT NEW AND UNUSUAL FOODS**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**I DON'T TRUST NEW FOODS**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**IF A FOOD IS NEW, I DON'T TRY IT**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**I LIKE TO TRY WEIRD TASTES AND FOODS WHICH ARE UNUSUAL AND COME FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**WHEN I AM AT A FRIEND'S PARTY, I LIKE TO TRY NEW FOODS**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**I AM AFRAID TO EAT FOOD I HAVE NEVER HAD BEFORE**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**I AM VERY FUSSY WHEN IT'S A MATTER OF FOOD**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**I REALLY EAT EVERYTHING!**



Very false  
for me



False for  
me



So so



True for  
me



Very true  
for me

**USUALLY, HOW MUCH FOOD REMAINS ON YOUR PLATE AFTER LUNCH AT SCHOOL?**



1 - Nothing



2 - Very little



3 - A little



4 - Half



5 - A lot



6 - Everything



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ANSWERS!

**THANKS FOR  
THE FOOD!**



**It's time for  
a new menu**