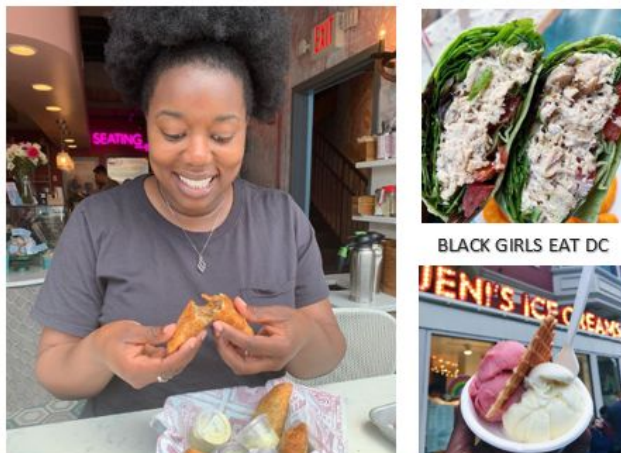# Starter Guide to Taking and Posting Great Food Pictures!

It can be exciting and overwhelming to take a photo that will be distributed to an audience. But it is a necessary chore in the business of selling your products! Don't worry, taking appetizing food photos is doable and ultimately can be easy when you get the hang of it!

==General Pointer==
The objective of each post is to entice the audience! You want them to see what you see. Naturally, our human eyes can see the three dimensional object and experience, but photos are flat so it's up to you to bring more dimension and excitement to your photo.

==Step 1: Taking the Photo==
What makes a photo great? Clear quality, good lighting, composition and a strong caption.

Good Quality: You can definitely buy a high quality photography camera if you would like. Do your research to see which one serves your needs. DSLR Canons and Nikons are very popular.

However, whether it is an Apple phone or an Android, most phones made after 2015 have the capacity to take excellent pictures. It all depends on what you're trying to accomplish.

Having a tripod for whichever device you choose to use is helpful as well; tripods stabilize the camera so you decrease the chances of blurry photos and can help you maintain a consistent angle.

Lighting: The source of light should be facing the food. Natural lighting is best, but a white vlogging/ LED light is a good second option. Whether it's the sun, a camera flash, or a ring light, the light should be *facing and accentuating* the subject, not behind it.

With natural light, the best angle changes throughout the day and the weather can also affect the best angle. Sometimes there is competing light in the space so you have to move the food around a little bit until you get there.

You know you have achieved your best angle when the colors are as close to vivid through the camera as they are in person.


Composition: The way your food is set up matters! There is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach for food because food comes in a wide variety. The way the food is presented is not always the best way to photograph it. Don't be afraid to touch the food, move it around and get it "photoready."

If the food generally lays flat or is in a bowl: aerial shots are generally best

If the food has some height: eye-level shots tend to work best
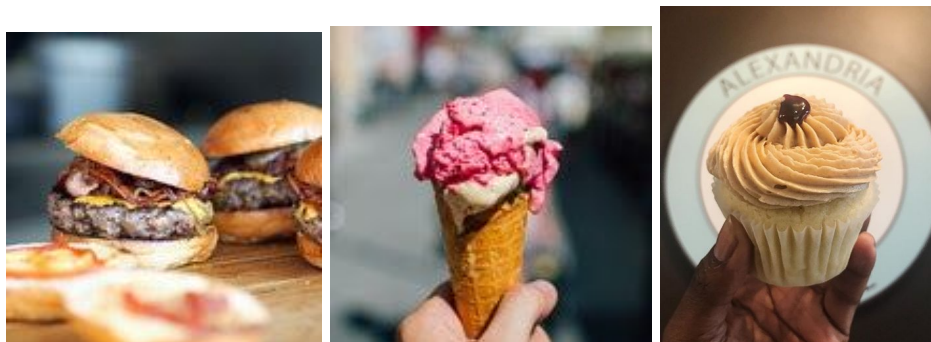
Sometimes food just is what it is and you have to try a few angles or move the food around to get the right shot:

Don't be afraid to take restaurant interior or exterior photos, behind-the-scenes photos and video, or staff photos (with staff permission).

Pay attention to the background of the photo. Is there a stray crumpled up napkin on the table? An old dish on the table? Ask yourself how else you can spruce up the photo. Is there a prop you can add to the background like a newspaper, a book, a drink?

Video: Don't shy away from video. Sometimes the best way to capture the food item is to record it being served, walk around it to show the many dimensions, or do something fun like a pour-over, or cutting into it. Make sure you apply the same lighting techniques!

Step 2: Editing the Photo

Editing comes into play because no matter the angle or lighting, it's just a camera, not the human eye so there are bound to be a few necessary tweaks.

These videos from YouTuber, Alissa Ashley are super helpful and many of these pointers apply to food:

The Secrets to Bomb Selfies Using Your Phone
How to Get QUALITY Photos with Your iPhone

FREE photo editing apps to consider:
Snapseed
VSCO
Magic Eraser
Canva
Lightroom
Prisma
Foodie

When editing, the goal is to bring vibrance and dimension to a 2-D photo!

Photo from: simplerootswellness.com.

As you edit, ask yourself: *Does the photo look like what I see/saw in front me? What changes can I make so my audience sees what I see?*

Step 3: Posting to Instagram
Posting a photo or video successfully on Instagram involves the photo or video itself, a catchy caption, and hashtags!

Captions
Captions should be easy to read, relevant to the photo and to your business, and engaging to the reader! Write them in your natural voice, as generally readers respond best to captions that are natural and conversational. Try telling a short story (This dish is named after…), asking a question (Who's craving pizza?), providing more information about your business (We're back at the farmer's market this weekend!), or making a bold statement about the product you're posting (This is the best ice cream you'll ever have, trust us!).

Hashtags
Hashtags are very important! Hashtags tell instagram what your photo or video is about, so that the instagram algorithm knows what users to show your content to. A post tagged with the #icecreamlovers tag is likely to be shown to a user that frequently comments on or engages with ice cream related content for example. The more accurate and relevant your hashtags, the more likely that your content will reach people who are interested in it, which is the ultimate goal on social media!
How do you choose a hashtag?
1. Have your own hashtag for your restaurant! That's a good way to set your brand apart.
2. Use #dmvfoodiecrew! It's a strong community in the area and a great way to get engagement.
3. Think about what neighborhood or city the business is in. Usually, there are some existing hashtags people use.
   For example:
   Bethesda hashtags include: #BethesdaRow #BethesdaMD #Bethesda
   Rockville hashtags include: WelcometoRockville #Rockville #RockvilleMD

Howard-Shaw, DC hashtags include: #shawdc #shawhoward #shawhowarddc

4. What is the food item? Usually there are some popular descriptive hashtags out there like: #pizza, #burger, or #sushi

    a. You can search hashtags in the instagram app and see how many times a hashtag has been used. This is important as the more times a tag has been used, the more competition there is for attention on that hashtag. If you have the time, try to find relevant hashtags that have been used less than 2 million times. This makes it so your post isn't as likely to be drowned out by millions of others posting using the same hashtag. For example: #pizza has been used 46 million times. #pizzalovers has been used 1.5 million times. #pizzaislove has been used 137,000 times. Both #pizzalovers and #pizzaislove are likely to perform better for pizza related content than #pizza as people are actively using them on Instagram, but there's not competition with millions of others posts using the same tag.

5. Always make sure you don't use hashtags that are unrelated. You don't want to seem spammy.

6. You can use up to 30 hashtags on a single post.

7. After doing some hashtag research, you can save groups of related hashtags in a note in your phone for easy posting or if you use a scheduling app such as Later, there's a function within the app to save frequently used hashtags.

    a. Example of a hashtag group: #pizzaislove #pizzalovers #pizzasofinstagram #dcpizza

        i. If your business sold or frequently featured pizza on Instagram, having that group saved would make it easier to add hashtags quickly to pizza-related content.

FREE social media management apps to consider:
Hootsuite
Later
Unum
Buffer
Sprout Social
Tweetdeck

Step 4: Instagram Engagement
Though not explicitly related to posting, regular engagement on Instagram is key. It's how you build a community around your brand and connect with potential customers! Some tips for engagement:

1. Always reply to people's questions, comments, and concerns. It's your brand! Make sure people feel connected to the people running the Instagram page!

2. Engage with your followers and fellow restaurants. People look through comments and go to restaurants that they have relationships with, so build camaraderie with your peers in the industry.

3. Don't do all the work yourself! Your fans and visitors are probably already taking amazing photos of your food. Don't be afraid to ask for permission to repost. Most bloggers, foodies, and regular people are more than happy to have their content reposted with credit. That's how you build community!
   a. A good way to do this is to repost customers' and fans' content to your Instagram stories (tagging them so they receive credit). This keeps your IG stories active, which is a key way to help grow your account, and engages with your customers directly!
4. Make sure to check DM's regularly!
   a. Within the Instagram inbox, a little blue "request" sign appears at the top right if you have a message from a user that you are not following on Instagram. Those messages don't appear in your regular inbox but could be from customers! Be sure to click that "request" symbol whenever it appears so that you can reply and engage.

Bonus Content: Other Social Platforms Facebook and Twitter

Do not feel the need to be on every social media platform. Have the platforms that you know you can maintain; so if that means just Facebook and Instagram, then be there and do it well. As opposed to having six platforms that are all barely engaged!
I recommend choosing two as most people tend to have at least one. But if one is all you can maintain, then be on one platform.

While the above notes about posting are generally more relevant to Instagram, Facebook is still an important social media tool for business. Some Facebook tips are below:
1. Make sure your business information is up to date on Facebook including hours, any unexpected changes, etc…
2. Post regularly, try to post a couple times a week using similar captions to those recommended for Instagram.
3. Hashtags aren't as important on Facebook, though they still do help your posts get seen. Try using 3-5 relevant hashtags on Facebook per post.
4. Reply to all comments, questions, and messages.

Every social media site has their own set of typical user patterns, trending content, algorithms, and for lack of better word--vibes. Do your research and keep up the best you can. Genuine and sincere content is king.

Final Thoughts

In the end, ask yourself honestly: *If I saw this, would I stop scrolling and double-tap?*

Good luck!