

PRINCIPAL EXAMINER'S REPORT



BOTSWANA
EXAMINATIONS
COUNCIL

BSSE FOOD STUDIES 2025



PAPER 1: WRITTEN PAPER

General Comments

This cohort marked the first group of candidates sitting for the Botswana Senior Secondary Education (BSSE) Food Studies examination, with a total of 1,254 participants.

Overall, the quality of responses was below average. Frequent spelling and grammatical errors were observed, even in basic subject-specific terminology. A notable number of candidates left questions unanswered, more so than in previous years. Additionally, many struggled with interpreting question requirements, indicating a need for greater emphasis on comprehension and exam technique.

Comments on Individual Items

Section A

- 1 (a) (i) Most candidates answered well, correctly identifying proteins and carbohydrates as key nutrients. A few mentioned waters. However, many incorrectly listed vitamins or minerals without specifying type, credit was not awarded for vague responses.
- (ii) Performance was weak here. While many stated proteins are needed for growth or tissue repair, few explained why toddlers need it more than the elderly. Only those who linked protein to rapid growth in early childhood earned full credit.
- (iii) **Tooth Decay**
- **Symptoms:** Most identified correct symptoms toothache, bad breath, holes in teeth. Some gave partial answers like swollen gums or rotten teeth, which were not accepted.
 - **Prevention:** Common correct responses included brushing twice daily and reducing sugary foods. A few missed to get credit by giving vague advice like “good hygiene” without specifics.
- (iv) **Obesity**
- **Symptoms:** Most candidates correctly identified excessive body weight and excessive body fat. A few mentioned swollen joints or low energy, but these were not accepted.
 - **Prevention:** Strong responses included regular exercise, reducing sugary foods, and limiting fatty foods. However, many lost marks for vague answers like “exercise” without specifying regular physical activity. “Eat less fat” was insufficient, candidates needed to distinguish saturated fats.
- (v) **Coronary Heart Disease**
- **Symptoms:** This was poorly answered. Correct responses included chest pain, fatigue, and shortness of breath. Many incorrectly wrote heart attack or stroke, which are complications, not symptoms. A significant number left this section blank.
 - **Prevention:** Common mistakes included “reduce fatty foods” without specifying saturated fats, and “drink less alcohol”, which, while healthy, is not primary prevention. Credit required specific, targeted actions like avoiding saturated fats and managing blood pressure.



(vi) Type II Diabetes

- **Symptoms:** Many struggled here. Correct answers were frequent urination and unexplained weight loss. Incorrect but common responses included fatigue, dizziness, and feeling hungry, which are non-specific and not diagnostic.
- **Prevention:** Only a few gave accurate answers: regular exercise and eating a balanced diet. Others gave general health advice like quit smoking or drink less alcohol, which were not sufficient. Some repeated current dietary guidelines without linking them to diabetes prevention.

(b) (i) Most candidates answered well. The expected responses were reducing sodium intake and follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan were given by many. However, several provided general advice like eat less fat, sugar, and salt, or referenced current dietary guidelines without specificity, which limited credit.

(ii) This was poorly attempted. Many gave incorrect or irrelevant responses such as eat more fibre, have medical check-ups, or take insulin injections which is treatment, not dietary guidance. Correct answers focused on managing blood glucose: choose complex carbohydrates (digested slowly) and avoid sugary foods (to prevent spikes in blood sugar). Few candidates provided these precise, context-specific explanations.

(c) This question was left unanswered by most candidates. Few identified the correct nutrients as protein and calcium and only a small number provided valid justifications for their increased need, such as supporting growth or bone development. Many who responded incorrectly cited carbohydrates, vitamins, or minerals without relevance to the context, and failed to explain their choices. Overall, this item revealed gaps in both knowledge and reasoning.

2 (a) (i) Most candidates performed well, giving clear safety practices: wipe spills, avoid running in the kitchen, don't overload sockets, and store knives safely. A few lost marks by listing hygiene rules (e.g., handwashing) or incorrect ones like don't touch appliances with wet hands, which, while sensible, was not the focus here.

(ii) This was poorly attempted. Correct hygiene practices included keeping pets out of the kitchen, emptying bins regularly, and cleaning surfaces and equipment before and after use. Many gave general or safety-related answers like cover food or wear a hairnet, which were not accepted. Only candidates with correct hygiene rules earned credit for reasoning. Responses like "to avoid diseases" or "prevent bad smell" were too vague. Credit required specific links, e.g., "to prevent bacterial contamination" or "avoid cross-contamination".

(b) (i) This question was poorly answered, with many leaving it blank. Correct responses identified traditional kitchen hazards like thatched roofs (harbour dirt), mud walls (hide pests), floor storage (leads to contamination), and open fires (soot exposure). However, some gave correct features but failed to explain the risk, and others listed irrelevant details like no windows without linking to food safety.



(ii) **Uses:** Most candidates stated appliance functions without proper discussion, e.g., writing “pureeing baby food” instead of “used for pureeing, such as preparing baby food”. Many strayed off-topic, mentioning unrelated devices like microwaves or air fryers.

Care: Few gave accurate care steps. Only some noted drying with a clean cloth to prevent rust. Many wrote “clean with soapy water” which is correct but not specific to maintenance and failed to explain their points.

Storage: Most attempted this part. Correct answers included storing in a cool, dry place or in cupboards/boxes to avoid dust. However, candidates often listed rather than discussed the reasons, limiting credit. Need to emphasise **explanation over listing** in responses.

3 (a) (i) Vegetables

- **Storage:** Well, answered correct responses included refrigerate, cool dry place, and cool dark place.
- **Explanation:** Strong link to preventing spoilage and extending shelf life. Some lost credit for vague reasons like “to prevent wilting” or “cool place” which don’t explain why storage matters.

(ii) Cereals

- **Storage:** Most gave accurate advice: cool dry place, airtight containers. Incorrect answers included “store in container” (too general) or “refrigerate” (not typical for dry cereals).
- **Explanation:** Good responses highlighted preventing weevils, mould, sprouting, and longer storage. Most explanations were valid when linked to correct storage.

(iii) Milk

- **Storage:** Widely understood refrigerate after opening, keep sealed, away from strong odours. Credit not given for “store in container” without specifying sealed, or “cool dry place” which is incorrect for liquid milk.
- **Explanation:** Correctly tied to preventing spoilage, odour absorption, and extending shelf life. Explanations were generally sound when storage was accurate. Key takeaway: Candidates understand storage basics but must **be specific** and **clearly link** advice to purpose.

(b) (i) Most candidates answered correctly, identifying boiling, stewing, and simmering as moist-heat cooking methods. However, some incorrectly listed frying, braising, poaching, or pressure cooking which were not accepted, likely due to misunderstanding the method category.

(ii) This was poorly answered. Few recognised that checking the expiry date or buying fresh cheese must be justified e.g., “to ensure safety” or “prevent foodborne illness”. Without a reason, even correct actions received no credit. Most missed the need to explain why the step matters.

(iii) Performance was weak. Many gave superficial differences e.g., “butter from animals, margarine from plants” (correct but incomplete), or physical traits like colour or use in baking. Few addressed key nutritional or compositional differences, such as fat content, cholesterol,



or processing. Explanations lacked depth and precision. Need to stress **justification** and **accuracy** not just recall.

- 4 (a) Overall, performance was fair, with stronger responses in parts (i) and (iii), but gaps in conceptual understanding in (ii).

(i) **On- and Off-Premises Catering**

Question well answered. Most correctly defined on-premises as food prepared and served at the same location, and off-premises as food prepared elsewhere and transported. Definitions were clear and accurate.

(ii) **Direct vs. Indirect Costs**

Poorly attempted. While some gave correct examples e.g., ingredients, labour (direct); transport, electricity, water (indirect) few provided the correct definitions. The key distinction that **direct costs are traceable to a specific product/activity**, while **indirect costs support overall operations** was mostly missing. Credit requires both clarity and precision.

(iii) **Role of Sugar in Baking**

It was well handled. Most correctly identified sugar's role in adding sweetness, flavour, and taste. A few gave incorrect or incomplete answers like "activates yeast" or "browns the product" — which, while related, are secondary effects and not the primary purpose asked. Emphasis should be on **clear definitions** and **purpose-based reasoning** in future teaching.

- (b) (i) Most candidates gave correct placement: knives on the right, forks on the left. However, some included irrelevant details like vase placement or table type, which were not required. A few confused general decors with formal setting rules.

(ii) **Table Settings**

- **Basic:** Question well answered, most described it as a simple setup for casual meals with minimal utensils. Incorrect responses focused on home use or listed tools without explaining the concept.
- **Formal:** Fairly done. Correct answers highlighted special events, multiple courses, and structured arrangement. Some missed credit by being too vague or listing items without context. Overall, candidates understand the basics but need to focus on **clear, complete definitions** not just examples.

- (c) (i) Most candidates correctly identified edible and non-edible waste as the two types of food waste. However, some gave general waste categories like organic/inorganic or wet/dry, which were not accepted the focus was specifically on **food waste classification**.

- (ii) This was poorly answered. While a few mentioned air, water, and land pollution as impacts of food waste, most failed to **explain** how food waste causes these for example, methane from landfills (air), contaminated runoff (water), or soil degradation (land). Many gave general environmental issues like disease spread or littering, which are not specific to food waste. Need to stress **focused, detailed discussion** not just listing.



- 5 (a) The question was not well answered by most candidates. Majority of the candidates attempted it but was not credited well.
- (i) It was well answered by majority of the candidates and common correct answers were sugar, colourants, sweeteners and salt. Common incorrect answers were yeast, vinegar, tartaric acid, Turmeric
 - (ii) Most of the candidates did not attend to the question well. Few common correct answers were to increase shelf life to save money, to make food available even when out of season. Common incorrect answers were to kill microorganisms, to prevent spoilage, for future use. Most candidates did not explain their answers. None of the candidates got this question correct. Common incorrect answers were removal of air and was not justified.
- (b) (i) Most candidates correctly identified wood, edible leaves, and leather as traditional packaging materials. However, some gave overly specific or incorrect examples like banana leaves, plastic, or wood box the latter being a product, not a material.
- (ii) This was poorly discussed. While a few listed valid factors durability, attractiveness, eco-friendliness most failed to **explain** them. Many gave irrelevant or off-topic answers like size, transport, or food type, which are not packaging material considerations. Even correct factors needed elaboration to earn full credit. Emphasis should be on **clarity, relevance, and explanation** not just listing.
- (c) Question well attempted overall. Most correctly named sun drying and oven drying as preservation methods. However, deep frying, roasting, and air frying though involve heat were incorrect, as they are cooking methods, not drying techniques. Descriptions lacked detail: only sun drying was well explained e.g., sunlight removes moisture. For oven drying, few described how controlled heat evaporates water to preserve food. Most missed the key link between heat and moisture removal. Need to strengthen **conceptual understanding** and **clear description** in responses.



PAPER 2: PRACTICAL PAPER

General Comments

Candidates generally demonstrated strong hygiene, safety, and organisation, evident in clean workspaces, proper attire, and well-structured shopping lists. Many worked confidently and completed tasks on time, with thoughtful end-of-task evaluations. However, common issues included **overplanning**, **poor dish selection** (e.g. non-desserts like milkshakes), and **weak sequencing**, especially failing to prioritise long-cook items. Technical errors such as boiling instead of simmering, lumpy custards, incorrect knife use, and premature cleaning revealed gaps in precision and understanding. Some lacked alignment between plan and practice, used copied steps, or confused key terms.

Centres should focus on **realistic meal planning**, **correct technique drilling**, **timed practice runs**, and **clear differentiation between cooking methods and manipulation skills** to build accuracy, efficiency, and exam readiness.

Comments on Individual Items

Choice of Dishes

Main Dish

Most candidates selected appropriate main dishes such as liver pilaf, grilled chicken, beef stew, and pounded meat (seswaa) which were commonly correct. However, two-in-one dishes like samp and beans, macaroni cheese, and samp with cheese were not accepted, as they combine main and side elements.

A key issue was answering order: responses had to match the sequence in the question. Some candidates swapped answers without labelling, resulting in lost marks. Emphasise following instructions precisely and clearly labelling each part.

Ingredients

Candidates who chose correct main dishes generally listed accurate ingredients and earned credit. However, **no marks were awarded** for ingredients if the dish itself was incorrect or unsuitable. **Note:** accuracy in dish selection is essential to progress to this section.

Serving Equipment

Most candidates with correct main dishes also identified appropriate serving ware (e.g., serving plates, platters), showing good practical understanding.

Dessert

Only a few selected suitable desserts. Correct choices included fruit salad, banana custard, fruit fool, Peach Melba, and apple crumble. **Incorrect options** like milkshakes, chocolate cream, and custard sauce often drinks or sauces were not accepted as standalone desserts.

Dessert Ingredients & Serving Equipment

Those who chose valid desserts mostly listed correct ingredients and matching serving dishes (e.g., dessert bowls, glasses). Again, errors in dessert choice led to automatic loss of marks in both sections.



NOTE: Correct dish selection is the foundation, if this is wrong, related marks are lost. Teach students to double-check suitability and follow question order carefully

Overplanning

Some candidates included extra or unnecessary dishes beyond what was required, leading to confusion and misalignment with marking criteria. Others combined a correct main dish with an **incorrect dessert** or mismatched sides, which affected their overall score. Overplanning can obscure correct choices and suggest a lack of focus. Emphasise **answering exactly what is asked**, in the right order, without adding unrequested items. Precision beats quantity.

PLAN OF WORK

Sequence

Most candidates struggled with the correct order of steps especially coordinating preparation and cooking times between main dish and dessert. Logical flow (e.g., starting dishes that require longer cooking first) was often missing.

Time Breakdown

Many allocated excessive times, indicating poor time estimation. While over-planned dishes had more time, this didn't reflect realistic meal prep. Focus on **realistic, efficient scheduling** to align timing with actual cooking needs, not guesswork.

Evaluation

Most candidates correctly placed evaluation at the end and provided relevant feedback (e.g., taste, texture), earning full marks. Clear, timely evaluation was well understood.

Methods

Many copied steps without personalisation or detail, a key reason for lost marks. Methods must be **original, specific, and practical**. Encourage students to write in their own words with clear, logical steps.

Cleaning

Most described clean-up tasks accurately and timed them well. However, some placed final clean-up **before serving**, a sequencing error. Remind learners: **cleaning ends after serving**, not before.

SHOPPING LIST

Most performed well, listed ingredients under correct headings (e.g., pantry, fresh). Only a few missed **total quantities** or omitted items. Overall, this section was strong, but attention to completeness is still needed.

GENERAL APPROACH

Most candidates appeared confident and worked steadily. However, a few showed signs of panic or hesitation, which affected their planning and clarity. Building exam confidence through timed practice can help reduce anxiety.



APPRECIATION OF TIME

Well-planned candidates managed time effectively and finished early. Even some over-planned responses were completed on time suggesting effort, but also inefficiency. Emphasise **smart planning over volume**: quality, realistic steps beat excessive detail.

MANIPULATION

Main Dish

Most candidates used chunky cuts and failed to trim fat or sear meat properly. Stews were boiled instead of simmered, affecting texture. Many used vegetable knives for meat, chef's knives were more suitable. While most drained fried foods well, several used equipment not listed in their plans, showing poor alignment between preparation and planning.

Dessert

Most candidates prepared Banana custard and struggled with smooth blending; lumpy custard was common. Many chilled the dessert correctly, but some did not. Few mixed bananas into the custard; most placed them on top, causing discoloration. Proper technique is needed to avoid browning and ensure consistency.

Other candidates prepared fruit salad with syrup of incorrect consistency. Apple cores were not removed, and fruits were cut into overly large chunks. Despite these issues, other dessert dishes were executed well overall.

FOOD HYGIENE

Most candidates over-handled food during preparation. Some stirred with dripping hands without wiping first, and others left food uncovered in cupboards. However, most covered food on worktops and changed wash water regularly, using warm, soapy water for cleaning, earning credit for proper hygiene practices.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

Most candidates wore clean uniforms, aprons, and headgear, with short, clean nails. A few had long or polished nails, which is not ideal for food safety.

SAFETY, HEALTH & ENVIRONMENT

A few handled hot pans without oven gloves, posing a risk. Most used knives safely and wiped spills promptly, showing good hazard control.

ECONOMICAL USE OF FOOD

Most used resources well, but some peeled vegetables too thickly, collected unlisted items, or discarded usable scraps indicating waste.

EVALUATION

Many used incorrect terms confusing cooking methods with manipulation skills. Clearer understanding of terminology is needed.



PAPER 3: COURSEWORK PAPER

Moderation General Report

This paper consisted of three tasks: table setting, food preservation, and baking. Candidates were required to fully understand each task, with complete evidence submitted, videos for baking and preservation processes, and pictures for table setting. In some centres, not all candidates were represented in the evidence, and reports were submitted to explain the gaps. Additionally, delays in submitting evidence were noted, despite the requirement to submit it alongside marks to the chief invigilator.

General Comments

Most centres were well prepared, with preservation items displayed and justified. Rooms were generally clean and organised. However, some centres were not fully ready, marksheets were with senior teachers, displays incomplete, and evidence still stored on individual teachers' phones. Not all centres submitted full evidence as required for each of the three tasks.

Candidates completed the tasks overall, though gaps in understanding were evident. Work was often not labelled with candidate numbers, making identification difficult. Videos needed to show full processes, including packaging, labelling, serving, and presentation. Despite these issues, candidates demonstrated a range of skills across tasks, supporting fair and open assessment.

Observations

A critical issue this year was the **lack of video evidence** many centres submitted no videos, or incomplete ones, making it impossible to verify hygiene, technique, or safety practices. Without video, **preservation and baking tasks could only be assessed on sensory traits**, missing key process marks. Some candidates' work was **unlabelled**, and certain submissions had **no evidence at all**. To ensure fairness and accuracy, **full, unedited videos** must show all steps: prep, hygiene, cooking, packaging, and labelling.

Recommendations

- Centres must **standardise evidence collection**, use **candidate-numbered labels**, store files centrally (not on personal devices), and conduct internal checks before submission.
- **No video = no marks for process or safety.**

Comments on Individual Items

TASKS:

Table Setting

Candidates were expected to set a table based on a specified meal and number of guests, requiring clear prior guidance. Most followed table setting principles correctly, though some lacked a charger or table mat. Cutlery and crockery placement was generally accurate, with only a few omissions or mismatches for the number of courses.

Napkin folding was mostly creative and well-placed; however, those using pre-folded serviettes missed full marks as the skill was not demonstrated. Full marks were awarded only when all elements were correct, any missing or incorrect item resulted in partial credit. Most submitted pictures, while a few included videos.



Baking

Most candidates performed well, but many submissions lacked complete video evidence of the process. Hygiene, safety, and tool use could not be assessed where key steps or presentation were missing. Full marks were only given for full-process videos.

Submissions with only pictures or final products did not demonstrate task execution, so no marks were awarded for unverified aspects.

Food Preservation

Most candidates completed the task well, producing a variety of preserved items with clear justifications. Video evidence was available in many centres, but some lacked any evidence, making it difficult to verify candidate work.

Without video, marks could only be awarded for observable aspects: taste, texture, colour, packaging, labelling, and presentation. Critical process-related areas such as hygiene, tool use, preparation techniques, and safety, could not be assessed without evidence. In cases with no proof of process, authenticity of the work remained uncertain.

Conclusion

Overall, candidates demonstrated practical skills in table setting, baking, and food preservation. In food preservation a range of methods were used with clear reasoning. Table settings followed proper etiquette, and baking outcomes were generally strong. However, inconsistent and incomplete evidence, particularly videos for baking and preservation processes form limited full assessment. While many followed procedures well, gaps in documentation, preparation, and submission affected reliability and fairness in marking.