

CHOCOLATE TASTING LAB: INSTRUCTOR OVERVIEW & TALKING POINTS

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Audience: Teens (12–18)

Length: 60–75 minutes

Goal: Build confidence in describing food, introduce sensory tasting, and make chocolate more interesting than “just sweet.”

TIMELINE

1. Welcome + intro: 5 min
2. Chocolate Basics: 5 min
3. 5 Tastes activity: 10 min
4. Flavor vs Aroma: 5 min
5. Flavor Wheel: 5 min
6. How to Taste: 10 min
7. Guided Tasting: 10 min
8. Wrap up: 5 min

1. WELCOME

- Today isn't about getting the right answer—it's about noticing.
- There are no wrong answers in tasting.
- Ice breaker

2. CHOCOLATE BASICS

Keep it quick and visual:

- Chocolate starts as a fruit. Ripe pods are cut from the tree and then the pods are cut open to harvest the seeds.
- Fermentation is where flavor really begins. The seeds are fermented for several days and then dried before being shipped to factories.
- In the factory, the fermented seeds are roasted to bring out deeper flavors—like coffee.

Types:

- Dark → More cocoa, less sugar, more intense
- Milk → has added milk. It's creamier, more familiar
- White → No cocoa solids—so it tastes very different

3. THE 5 BASIC TASTES

Introduce the 5 basic tastes

- Sweet
- Salty
- Sour
- Bitter
- Umami

Activity: Give tiny samples-

- Sugar (sweet)
- Pretzel (salty)
- Lemon juice or plain yogurt (sour)
- Dandelion greens, radicchio or cacao nibs (bitter)
- Parmesan crisp (umami)

Ask:

- Which ones do you like most?
- Which taste or tastes do you think show up in chocolate?

Chocolate is interesting because it's often both sweet and a little bitter. (Expect strong reactions to bitter—this is normal and part of the learning)

4. TASTE VS. FLAVOR

Explain:

- Taste is what your tongue detects (5 tastes).
- Though your tongue only detects 5 things, your brain turns that into thousands of flavors.
- **Flavor is taste + smell combined**

If you remember one thing today: flavor is mostly smell. Your nose is doing most of the work—even when you don't realize it.

Activity:

- Have participants pinch their nose and eat a small piece of chocolate
- Then release and notice the difference

Ask:

- What changed?
- Did new flavors suddenly show up?

5. FLAVOR WHEEL

We'll be using a flavor wheel to help us describe our chocolate today. This helps you go from "I don't know, it tastes like chocolate!" to something more specific.

Explain:

- How to use the wheel: Start on the inside with the broader descriptors. Then, move away from the center for something that's more descriptive.

Prompt them:

- Instead of "it tastes like chocolate," we might say "it tastes nutty or fruity."

Encourage creativity:

- If it reminds you of something random, that counts.

6. HOW TO TASTE

We're slowing down something you normally do in 5 seconds.

Walk them through 5 steps of tasting:

- Look → Does it look smooth or chalky? Is it shiny?
- Snap → A clean snap usually means better tempering.
- Smell → Try to connect it to a memory or food. Think about other things it smells like.
- Melt → Place chocolate in your mouth and let it melt a little. Don't rush—this is where flavor develops.
- Notice → What sticks around after it's gone? How would you describe it to a friend.

7. GUIDED TASTING

Set expectations:

- We're not rushing this—take your time.
- You might not like everything—and that's fine.

Order Matters: When planning any sort of tasting, always start with the mildest and work towards the most intense.

- White (mildest)
- Milk
- Dark (strongest)

Use the 5 steps of tasting to walk through each sample. (as listed above)

Prompt Questions (use throughout):

- What do you notice first?
- Is it more sweet or bitter?
- Can you use the flavor wheel to help you describe what you're tasting?
- Does it remind you of anything?
- What changed as it melted?
- If they get stuck, offer descriptive language: does it taste more like caramel, nuts, or something fruity

Between samples:

- Encourage water and/or plain crackers

8. Group Wrap-Up

Ask:

- Did anyone like something they didn't expect?
- Which chocolate would you actually buy?
- Optional: Quick vote (raise hands for favorite)
- Optional: describe chocolate without using the word "chocolate"