

Mastering Artisan Bread

Mastering Artisan Bread – Study & Reference Notes

1. What Is “Artisan” Bread?

Characteristic	Description
Handcrafted	Shaped, scored, and baked by the baker rather than mass-produced.
Simple formula	Usually 4–5 core ingredients: flour, water, salt, and a leavening agent (yeast or starter).
Flavor & texture	Open crumb, crisp crust, nuanced taste from long fermentation and high hydration.
Traditional techniques	Autolyse, stretch and fold, cold retardation, steam baking, scoring.

2. Core Ingredients & Their Roles

Ingredient	Function	Typical Range
Flour	Provides gluten network, flavor, color.	Bread flour (10–12% protein) is standard; whole-grain or rye can be blended (up to 30%).
Water	Hydrates flour, activates enzymes, determines dough consistency.	65–85% baker's percentage (hydration). Higher hydration = more open crumb.
Salt	Controls yeast activity, strengthens gluten, enhances flavor.	1.8–2.2% of flour weight.
Leavening	Produces CO ₂ , develops flavor.	• Commercial yeast – 0.2–0.5% (instant) • Sourdough starter – 20–30% of total flour weight (hydrated 100%).
Optional additions	Flavor, texture, nutrition.	Seeds, olives, herbs, nuts (≤15% of flour weight).

3. Baker's Percentage – Quick Reference

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Ingredient	% of Flour Weight
Water	65-85% (typical 75%)
Salt	1.8-2.2%
Yeast (instant)	0.2-0.5%
Sourdough starter (100% hydration)	20-30%
Olive oil / butter	2-5% (optional)

Use the same base (flour weight) for every calculation – it makes scaling recipes trivial.

4. The Artisan Bread Workflow

Stage	Goal	Key Techniques	Approx. Time
1. Mixing / Autolyse	Hydrate flour, start gluten development	Combine flour & water (no salt/yeast). Rest 20-45 min.	0.5h
2. Adding Levain & Salt	Incorporate leavening & flavor	Fold in starter/yeast and salt; brief mix.	5-10 min
3. Bulk Fermentation	Ferment, strengthen gluten, develop flavor	3-4h at 24-27°C, with stretch and fold every 30-45 min (2-3 folds).	3-4h
4. Pre-Shape	Give dough a loose form, release excess tension	Gentle round, rest 15-30 min (bench rest).	0.5h
5. Final Shape	Tight surface tension, ready for proof	Shape into boule, batard, or bâtard; seam sealed.	5-10 min
6. Proof / Retard	Final rise, flavor development		