

Restaurant

The Pacing Standard

Five steps for timing a meal around the table, not the kitchen. A ten-minute wait that is announced feels shorter than five minutes nobody explains.

Who	When	You need
Servers, the head waiter and the pass	Every table with more than one course, from order to coffee	Order times in the POS, a view of every table, a direct line to the pass
Measured by Starter within 15 minutes of the order · Main within 10 min of starters cleared · Every delay announced before it happens		

1 Ask the pace

When taking the order, ask whether the table has somewhere to be. A show at nine and a slow anniversary need different kitchens. Write the pace on the ticket: 'quick', 'normal' or 'slow'.

"Are you on any timing this evening, or shall we let it run at your pace?"

Common mistake Giving every table the same rhythm. The couple with a show leave before dessert; the slow table feels pushed.

2 Fire on cue

Our target is starters within 15 minutes of the order. The main is called only once the starter plates are cleared, and reaches the table 7 to 10 minutes later, unless the guest asked for a longer pause.

"Table 12, starters cleared, fire mains. 21:06."

Common mistake Firing the main with the order to keep the kitchen ahead. It waits under the lamp while the table is still on starters.

3 Warn before

If a course will be over five minutes late, tell the table before the expected time, with a new time and a one-line reason. If the wait passes ten minutes, offer bread or a small taste from the kitchen.

"Mr Fischer, the lamb needs eight more minutes to rest. I didn't want you to wonder."

Common mistake Waiting until the guest looks round. By then the delay is a complaint, and any apology sounds like an excuse.

4 Read the table

Watch three signs between courses: cutlery closed on the plate, glasses pushed away, guests looking for staff. Two of the three mean the table is ready; lively talk and full glasses mean it is not.

"Shall I give you a few minutes before dessert, or bring the menus now?"

Common mistake Hovering to clear the moment the last fork lands. The table feels the kitchen's schedule instead of its own.

5 Close and record

Dessert reaches the table within 10 minutes of the order, coffee or tea within 5. At the end of service, note the table's total time; any course that ran over its target is read out at the next briefing.

"T12: 4 covers, 2h05. Mains 14 min after starters, table told at 21:10."

Common mistake Measuring only the kitchen's ticket times. The pass looks fast while the guest waited for the server to call the course.

The Course Clock

Our house targets for every course. Adjust them to your menu once, then hold them the same on every shift.

Course	Our target	If it runs late
Drinks	On the table within 5 minutes of the order	Tell the table and bring water meanwhile
Starter	Within 15 minutes of the order	New time given before minute 15
Main	7–10 minutes after starters are cleared	Chef gives the real time, server tells the table
Dessert	Within 10 minutes of the order	Offer coffee or tea while they wait
Coffee or tea	Within 5 minutes of the order	Head waiter brings it personally

How to use this with your team

Pin it at the pass. Each day of the week the head waiter times one course across five tables and reads the slowest figure at the next briefing, with what the team will change.

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