

Comprehension 4

A Professional Taste-Tester – The Dream Job?

Do you like delicious food? Would you like to eat delicious food all day, every day, and get paid for it? It is hard to imagine someone saying no. All the food we buy from the shops has been taste-tested hundreds of times before it is considered ready to be put on the shelves. All food companies employ professional taste-testers to make sure the flavour, the texture and the presentation of the food is up to scratch. Taste-testers are also employed to think up new kinds of food that they think will do well on the market. So, what is it like to be employed to taste?

Kirsten Hoskissen is a ‘taste development manager’ at Jordans and Ryvita, a company that makes breakfast cereals and muesli. Every day, she applies her taste buds to hundreds of different types of muesli. The range of tastes is very limited and her job is far from exciting. The commercial world of breakfast cereals is extremely competitive, and Kirsten is tasked with developing innovative recipes, so that the company stay ahead of their competition. In 2008, she came up with the idea of ‘quick and creamy’ porridge – it was a great success.

One of the main drawbacks of the job for Kirsten is that sometimes you are asked to taste things that you dislike. For instance, she absolutely loathes bananas. Jordans and Ryvita use bananas in some of their cereals, and Kirsten is expected to analyse their flavours. At moments like these, Kirsten warns, one has to remain professional and not let your personal feelings get in the way. You have to put your ‘consumer hat’ on. Kirsten is also, it turns out, a vegetarian. This causes problems when large, commercial food distributors like Sainsbury’s ask her to check their pies and quiches which contain meat. Here, Kirsten draws the line – she does not eat meat and never will. Instead, she brings a colleague along with her to eat the pies, and asks them for feedback.

But, if Kirsten’s taste-testing does not sound all that exciting, wait until you hear about Melissa’s! Melissa Thompson is a taste-tester for the up-market chocolate company, ‘Green and Blacks’. ‘Chocolate,’ she tells us, ‘is one of the most complex foods on the planet. There are over 400 different kinds. Each kind has its own unique texture, intensity and sweetness. It’s my job to make each different kind of chocolate taste as good as it can. I love it!’

Melissa gets through around 100 grams of chocolate each day. She says that being a good chocolate taster is not just about liking chocolate, but about loving food in general. She claims that a chocolate taster has to have a sensitivity for the delicate flavours of the cocoa, a good memory for flavours and a vibrant imagination. She has just revealed a new recipe she’s been working on for 3 years – some of the ingredients include lemon peel, curry powder and mint. Her taste buds are so good that the recipe could be sold to a chocolate company, she says, for over \$750,000.

Answer ALL the questions in complete sentences. (16%)

1. What is the main difference between Melissa and Kirsten’s experience of being a professional taste-tester?

2. Why do you think Melissa enjoys being a taste-tester more than Kirsten?

3. How does Kirsten avoid doing the parts of the job that she dislikes?

4. Why does Melissa think she is particularly suited to the job of being a taste-tester?
Give two things.

5. What is the main purpose of Kirsten’s responsibility to create new products and flavours?

6. What does Melissa consider to be her main role as a taste-tester?

