

## The IncrEDIBLE Discourse Show Planning Guide

## Introduction

Hello chefs, today we talk meat temperatures, how to apply it in your home kitchen, and how consistency in temperature is the currency of the professional one. I am Mark Grigsby, your chef and guide through this experience, and this.. Is the IncrEDIBLE Discourse.

Before we get started.. Last episode I got a comment about the theme music for the show and how it wastes all of 20 seconds of the listeners time. And I want that person to know that I thought about your comment and I'm going to acknowledge it.. But I'm not going to change it. I feel like it adds personality to the show and makes it unique. Besides.. It's quite easy to skip it.. It's literally 20 seconds after the intro. C'mon now.. Don't deprive yourself of some really good knowledge, because we don't want to scroll 30 seconds.. I mean shit.. You scroll for hours on instagram and learn nothing. We all do.

Also before we get into it, I want to take a second and to congratulate the Florida Panthers for such an amazing and successful season by winning the Stanley Cup for the second year in a row. It was the 19th time in pro hockey history of a repeat. I just put up a blog post on the website last week about my time with the Panthers doing the guest chef thing. I did it 3 times between the 2018 and 2019 seasons. It was an incredible time and a great story. If you haven't read it yet, you should. Very inspirational. Little ol me was the chef for the Florida Panthers for a little bit. Check it out on our blog section of theincrediblediscourse.com.

Speaking of the website, we have been putting up some great resources as best as we can. My wife has been doing her best to get the information on there as soon as she can. There should be a few new ones on there soon. Check out the ones we already have if you haven't already. They give you a more in depth understanding of our conversations on the pod. Plus you can download a hard copy that you can have on hand as a reference.

Trying to tell you, this shit right here is better than culinary school. If you're trying to be a better cook home or pro.. The shit that we're talking about here is about as good as it gets... AND it's free. I should start a mentoring service for cooks and chefs trying to up their game... Give me your culinary school tuition.. I'll make you a star!

So let's get down to business shall we. Today we're talking about meat temperatures. This is such an important topic. I'm sure we've all had our moments of eating overcooked meat and feeling like we're about to choke... or when we've cut into a piece of chicken that's still clucking.

And today all that shit stops.. Cause I'm going to teach you what to do so you get an absolute stunning piece every single time.

So let's talk about why this matters. This is an excellent starting point. Doesn't make sense to explain to you how to do it, without understanding the why behind it.

When you cook meat, you're not just applying heat—you're transforming structure, unlocking flavor, and safeguarding your plate from potential hazards. That's why temperature isn't just a number—it's the science behind great cooking.

Safety is probably the single most important "why" when we talk about meat temperatures. Every type of meat has a minimum safe internal temperature to kill harmful pathogens like Salmonella, E. coli, and Listeria. Chicken, for example, needs to hit 165°F to destroy these bacteria instantly. Ground beef needs to reach 160°F because the surface bacteria gets mixed throughout during grinding. Undercooked meat can lead to foodborne illness, especially for children, pregnant women, and immunocompromised individuals. This is the non-negotiable side of meat temps. If you have ever been infected with any of these illnesses, you already know they ain't pretty and they're difficult to get through. Salmonella can cause severe gastrointestinal illness. In young children, the elderly, and immunocompromised people, it can lead to sepsis or organ failure if it spreads beyond the intestines. E. coli (especially O157:H7) is infamous for causing hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS)—a potentially deadly complication that can lead to kidney failure. Listeria monocytogenes is extremely dangerous for pregnant women (causing miscarriage or stillbirth), the elderly, and those with weakened immune systems. It can lead to meningitis and death if it spreads to the bloodstream or brain.

Now I told you that to kinda scare you a little bit. Not to keep you from eating meat, but to express the importance of meat temperatures. In a home scenario you're talking about loved ones being very sick and having to deal with hospitals, doctors and medicines. In the professional setting you're talking about serious lawsuits and repercussions by not being careful when cooking meat.

Now we get to the juicy part.. Literally. Temperature changes the physical structure of muscle proteins. So at a lower temperature proteins are still soft and juicy. Think rare steak—tender and pink. At medium temps proteins begin to firm up. Juices redistribute, and textures become more toothsome. With high temps like well done, most moisture has escaped. This is why overcooked chicken or pork gets dry and stringy—it's literally been squeezed dry on a molecular level. Understanding these thresholds helps you avoid that dreaded dry chicken breast or rubbery steak. Temperature *is* texture control.

Flavor is probably the most obvious reason why you should control your meat temperature. When proteins cook, they undergo the **Maillard reaction**—the browning process that creates complex, umami-rich flavors. I believe we have used that vocabulary quite a bit throughout the course of the show. Again we're using it... that's how important this particular term is. Anyway, the twist here is: the internal temperature dictates how long you can *hold* a piece of meat on a hot surface to develop that crust **without overcooking the inside**. That's why a steak seared to 130°F is juicy *and* flavorful. You can't just crank the heat and hope for the best—you have to know when to stop.

Now.. Let's get something straight: the **USDA** sets food safety standards, not culinary quality standards. Their job is to make sure that what you eat won't kill you. Chefs, on the other hand, are in the business of making sure what you eat doesn't taste like a shoe. According to the **United States Department of Agriculture**, chicken needs to be cooked to **165°F** because at that temp, **Salmonella is killed instantly**. Same with ground beef at **160°F**—the higher temp accounts for bacteria mixed throughout the meat.

And they're not wrong. Those are solid numbers that guarantee safety. But here's what they don't always account for... Professional cooks lean on something called **carryover cooking**—the phenomenon where food continues to rise in temperature after being removed from heat. Pulling a chicken breast at **155°F** and resting it properly (under foil or tented) will carry it to **165°F internally** in a few minutes. A steak pulled at **125°F** will hit **130–135°F** while resting, landing right in that medium-rare sweet spot. So while it never hit the USDA's 165°F *on the stove*, it absolutely did while resting—safely and deliciously. That's the nuance here. And this matters because If you follow USDA temps to the number without resting time, your meat can end up **overcooked and dry** or If you follow chef temps without understanding carryover, you risk **undercooking** and making someone sick. **Balance is key.** In a restaurant kitchen, you train your cooks to pull early and trust the rest. At home, if you're not confident about carryover, it's okay to aim for the higher side—just don't overdo it.

Here's a rookie mistake even experienced home cooks make: you sear a steak, get that beautiful, caramelized crust, and assume—"Yep, looks done."

But browning and doneness are not the same thing. Not even close. That rich, golden color and delicious crust on your meat? Again, That's the Maillard reaction, the chemical process between amino acids and sugars that happens when food hits high heat. It's all about flavor and appearance, and it happens on the surface. Now, You could technically get a beautiful sear on the outside while the inside is still ice cold or raw. That's especially true with thick cuts like: ribeye steaks, pork chops, chicken thighs or even burgers. This is where the thermometer becomes your best friend. The internal temp tells you the actual doneness—the temperature of the core of the protein. That's the number that matters when we talk about safety and texture. You want that center to hit your target doneness while also building that beautiful crust. That's the dance. Now here's how you control both browning and doneness. Reverse sear for thick cuts. Cook low and slow until you're close to target temp, then sear to build the crust or Sear first and finish in oven. This is great for chops or bone-in proteins. Get the crust early, then gently finish cooking through. And Use a thermometer early and often: Don't trust your

eyes—trust the science. Ever pulled a burger that looked done—browned on both sides—but bit in to find it raw in the center? That's the danger of relying on visual cues alone. The outside could be 400°F while the inside is sitting at 90°F.

So let's go back and talk about carryover cooking.

Alright, so you've nailed the sear. The internal temp hits your target. You're ready to serve, right? **Wrong.** 

If you slice that protein right away, all your hard work leaks out onto the board in seconds.

Carryover cooking is the **continued rise in internal temperature** after you remove meat from the heat source.

Here's the science: heat doesn't just vanish when you kill the flame. It keeps moving from the hotter exterior into the cooler center. So: A steak pulled at **125°F** can climb to **130–135°F** in a few minutes or a roast pulled at **140°F** could hit **150°F** while it rests. And this isn't optional—this happens **every time** you cook a thick cut of meat. Deny it, and you're either overcooking or under-resting your food.

So.. what happens when you don't rest your meat?

When you cook meat, the juices move toward the surface. If you cut it immediately, you're slicing open a pressurized balloon. The juice runs out, and your perfectly cooked steak ends up dry and bland.

But if you **let it rest**—even just **5–10 minutes**—those juices **redistribute** evenly. You cut it, and boom: every bite is moist, flavorful, and balanced.

Here are a few pro tips:

- Tent with foil, don't wrap it. You want to retain warmth without steaming the crust.
- Rest thinner cuts like chicken breasts for 5 minutes and
- Rest big roasts or steaks for **10–15 minutes**, depending on thickness.

Resting meat is like letting bread cool after baking. Cut it too soon, and everything falls apart. Give it time, and the structure sets.

So now that our minds are on meat.. It's time for...

Food. For. Thought.

Or what I like to call...

Pro tips from a chef's lips.

So my goal here with my home cooks today is to empower you to ditch all the guesswork and teach you how to get a perfect temperature every time you cook some meat.

Let me tell you about the single most important tool in my kitchen that *isn't* a knife: A cheap, digital instant-read thermometer. I paid \$15 for it. Changed my life. And amazon has them for less than \$10 right now.

You can have all the cookbooks, the marbling, the dry rubs—but if you're *guessing* whether your chicken is done or your steak is medium rare, you're flying blind. And if you have a piece of meat "with all that marbling", chances are it wasn't cheap and now you're pretty much waving dollar bills around in a fire.

Home cooks are notorious for doing two things:

Cutting into meat to "check" doneness—letting all the juices pour out in the process and playing the "just one more minute" game until it's overcooked beyond repair. Sound familiar? It's not your fault. You weren't taught better. But that changes today.

A thermometer gives you **real-time**, **internal temperature** readings—no guesswork, no slicing, no stress. It tells you exactly when to pull your protein to **rest and finish cooking safely**. It builds **confidence**, which leads to consistency—which is how you actually start *mastering* cooking.

And You don't need a fancy \$100 Thermapen. Start small: Look for a digital readout that updates quickly. It should be waterproof or at least splash resistant and having an auto shut-off is a bonus. Slide it into the **thickest part of the protein**—not touching bone—and boom. Instant clarity. Before I used a thermometer, chicken night meant dry breast and prayers it wasn't raw inside. Now? I pull it at 155°F, let it rest, and it hits that magic 165°F with juice and flavor intact.

No more guesswork. No more raw centers. No more overdone dinners.

Let's talk benchmarks—because if you're serious about cooking proteins right, you need to know your numbers. And I'm not talking about guessing when it "looks done." I mean **actual**, **repeatable temperatures** that take the stress and the guesswork off your plate. These aren't random—they're based on years of trial, error, and professional experience. Think of them like GPS coordinates for flavor and texture.

For chicken breast, your target is between **160 and 165°F**. Now, yeah—165°F is the USDA safe zone. That's the temperature that kills Salmonella on contact. But here's the thing—by the time you hit that number on the pan, you're usually drying that bird out. What I recommend? Pull it at around **155 to 158°F** and let it rest. It'll coast right up to 165°F while staying juicy and tender. You're still safe—and the texture? Night and day difference.

Now pork loin—this one changed everything for home cooks when the USDA updated their guidelines. No more hammering pork to 180°F. The safe temp is **145°F with a 3-minute rest**. That gives you **slightly pink, super tender, full-flavored pork**, not that gray, leathery stuff we

all grew up with. I personally pull mine at about **140°F**, tent it, and let it finish on its own. Slice it after the rest and watch people rethink everything they thought they knew about pork.

And then there's steak—the one we all argue about. Rare is **120°F**, medium rare is **125°F**, medium is **135°F**, and so on. You pull a ribeye at **125°F**, let it rest five minutes, and boom—you've got medium rare perfection. Forget color, forget cutting into it to "check." Use a thermometer and learn to trust the process. You'll start getting steakhouse-level results at home every time.

These numbers are your roadmap. Memorize them, live by them, and your proteins will start tasting like you actually meant it.

Now let's talk about **how to actually temp your meat**—because just owning a thermometer doesn't mean you're using it right. And if you've ever stuck one into the wrong spot and thought your steak was done—only to slice into a cold center—you know exactly what I mean.

Here's the deal: you always want to place the thermometer into the **thickest part** of the meat, away from any bones or pockets of fat. Why? Because those areas heat up faster and can give you a false read. The center is what matters. That's your true internal temp. And don't jab it in like you're hunting something—insert it slowly, and watch the numbers. When they stop rising, that's your read.

Now I know some of y'all love the old-school **touch test**—pressing the meat and comparing it to the feel of your hand. Look, I respect the technique, and in a fast-paced kitchen, it can get you in the ballpark. But for home cooks? **Don't rely on it.** Touch is subjective. Your calloused hand isn't calibrated, and you're not cooking by feel—you're cooking by fact. So yeah, touch test might be okay once you've got experience, but it should **never replace a thermometer**.

Let's talk about **gear**. There are a couple different types of thermometers worth knowing about. First is your classic **instant-read digital thermometer**—fast, cheap, reliable. You use it when you're getting close to your target temp and want a quick check. Then there's the **oven probe thermometer**, which you insert before cooking and monitor as the meat heats. Some even have alarms that go off when your set temp is reached—perfect for big roasts or turkey, where opening the oven every five minutes is a terrible idea. Remember my story about when I first started cooking my thanksgiving turkeys? Thermometer changed the game, for real.

Finally—calibrate your thermometer. It's easy. Boil water—should read 212°F. Ice water—should read 32°F. If it doesn't? You either need to adjust it, replace the battery, or get a new one. An inaccurate thermometer is worse than no thermometer at all, because it gives you false confidence.

Look—temping meat is a skill, but it's also science. Once you learn how to use the right tool the right way, you'll stop stressing about dry chicken or undercooked pork. You'll start nailing it—every single time.

Alright, so let's bring it home. If you're a home cook listening to this, the biggest takeaway is this: **stop guessing.** Internal temperature is not a flex, it's a foundation. It's the one thing separating overcooked regret from juicy, flavorful success.

You don't need fancy tools, and you don't need years on the line. You just need a thermometer, a few key numbers, and the discipline to let your meat rest instead of panic-slicing into it while it's screaming hot. Do that—and your kitchen game levels up, fast.

Because when you know the temperature, you **own** the result. You control the outcome. You stop reacting, and start cooking with intention.

Now—if you're working in a professional kitchen, you already know the stakes are different. It's not just about getting it right once. It's about getting it right **100 times** a night, with 3 minutes on the ticket and a full board behind you. So let's shift gears and talk about **meat temperature** from the perspective of professional cooks and chefs—where consistency is currency, and the margin for error is razor thin.

In a professional kitchen that thermometer isn't just a tool—it's **policy**. It's what separates the folks who cook for fun from the ones who do it under fire. Mid-service, you don't have time for guessing games. You've got twelve steaks on the grill, seven more fired, and a ticket with the words "mid-rare or remake" on it. This is where precision **has to** become muscle memory. Let's talk about what meat temps really mean when the clock's ticking, the expo's barking, and the stakes are higher than your food cost.

Alright—let's talk **mid-service**. Because this is where everything changes. When the kitchen's humming, orders are flying, and you're juggling twelve things at once, temping proteins isn't just a nice-to-have—it's the difference between **trust and chaos**.

You've got steaks on the grill, chops resting, salmon in the pan, and the sauté guy just yelled "Walking in 3 shrimp!" You're not pulling out a manual or Googling temps—you've got to know your tools, trust your timing, and temp **with intention**.

You don't have time to second-guess yourself mid-service. You've got a 10-minute window—tops—on most entrées. If you're pulling a steak and checking it after it's been sitting under the pass for five minutes, you're already late. You need to be **temping just before the rest**, building that carryover into your cook time. Temp it **before** it goes to rest—not after it's been plated.

A properly run kitchen times everything backward. You know how long the steak takes, how much rest time you need, and you time your fire so it lands on the plate hot, rested, and right where it should be—every single time.

Fast-read digital thermometers are standard now—and if they're not in your kitchen, fix that. You should be able to temp a steak in under two seconds without stopping your flow. It should live in your apron pocket or on your station—not buried in a drawer you don't have time to open.

Infrared guns are cute for checking grill temps, but they don't read internal protein temp. And don't even talk to me about analog dial thermometers during a rush—you're not temping a roast from the '80s. You're trying to run a clean, tight, modern service.

The pressure is constant—expo's calling, tickets stacking, you're four minutes behind and table 10 is on their second round of drinks. And you know what makes it worse? Guessing. When you send that plate out without temping and it comes back—"This is undercooked." Now you're behind, food cost just spiked, and trust in your line just dropped.

But when you temp with confidence—quick insert, clean read, back on the plate—you're bulletproof. You've got **proof** of doneness. You've got control. You're not hoping the steak is medium rare—you **know** it is.

And in a real kitchen, **knowing is everything**.

Let's keep going—because if you're on the line, you already know the food doesn't stop cooking just because it hit the plate. And if you're not building **carryover** into your timing, you're gonna overcook your proteins **without even touching the heat**.

In a professional kitchen, you're not just cooking to temp—you're cooking to *future temp*. That means pulling a steak at 122°F if you want it to land at 128–130°F. If you wait for the thermometer to say 130°F in the pan, guess what? By the time it rests on the pass, that thing's pushing medium.

Same with pork chops, roasted chickens, fish—anything with mass. You have to build carryover into your timing like it's part of the recipe. Because it is. And if your cooks don't understand that? You've got dry proteins and re-fires waiting to happen.

Here's the truth: one cook's "medium rare" is another cook's "barely cooked" unless you train them to **standardize**. That means every cook on your line knows the target **internal temps** for each doneness and can hit them **on command**.

It's about **discipline and repetition**. I don't care if it's a new grill cook or a 20-year vet—if they're not checking temps consistently and hitting the same numbers as the rest of the team, your dining room's getting ten different versions of the same steak. That's not "chef-y." That's sloppy.

Make your team **call out temps** on the fly. Have them compare readings. Teach them to calibrate their thermometers at the start of every shift. It's not overkill—it's called being a professional.

Now let's talk about the **pass**. You nailed the steak, temped it perfect, rested it just right—and then expo's backed up, the runner disappeared, and it sits. Now what?

You need systems for holding proteins without overcooking:

- Resting racks keep air circulation and preserve the crust.
- Warming drawers or low-temp holding ovens are good—but only if they're monitored.
- Never slap a finished protein under a heat lamp for 10 minutes and expect it to land right. You just murdered that dish.

The best kitchens **plate to order**, not to hold. But when you have to hold? You do it smart. You hold warm, not hot. You rest covered, not sweating in foil. You *monitor*, not forget.

Because remember—you're not just cooking food. You're managing heat.

Let's get into the real tightrope walk: **customer expectations** versus **actual doneness**—especially when it comes to steak.

You can temp that steak at 125°F, rest it beautifully, slice into it, and see textbook medium rare—and still get it sent back. Why? Because "it looks too red." Or "this isn't how I get it at home."

The reality is, diners don't all understand what rare or medium rare **actually** looks like. They've been trained by overcooked chain restaurant steaks and gray meat passed off as medium. So in the kitchen, you have a decision to make: **do you cook to the number, or to the expectation?** 

The answer? You do both—**smartly**. That means:

- Communicating with front-of-house. What's this guest's version of "medium"?
- Knowing when to temp tighter, or take a safer route on a VIP order.
- Building in cushion—if they want "medium," you might go 138–140°F instead of textbook 135°F just to hit their visual expectation.

But it's not about lowering standards. It's about **meeting the moment** without sacrificing execution.

Now, if you're in a kitchen that uses **sous vide** or **CVAP** or any kind of **low-temp holding system**, you already know this is where **exact temps** become religion.

You want that short rib to land at 138°F? Set it. Seal it. Cook it. No guesswork. You're talking **uniformity** from edge to edge—no overcooked outer ring, no raw center. That's the magic of sous vide: it gives you control down to the degree, with built-in holding flexibility that keeps you ready for pickup without compromising quality.

But it also means **you better know your numbers**. If you're holding chicken at 145°F for an hour, you better know that time-temp relationship backwards. And if you're finishing sous vide steak with a torch or pan sear, you need to hit that crust **fast** without pushing the interior into the next doneness zone.

Precision cooking means you're not just using temperature—you're commanding it.

Cooking for a 200-cover wedding is a different animal than banging out steak after steak on a Saturday night. But one thing doesn't change: **temperature control is king.** 

In à la carte, it's about agility and muscle memory. Every steak needs to be cooked, temped, and plated in real time. That means your grill cook better be sharp, fast, and consistent—or you're in the weeds.

In **banquet**, it's about strategy. You're talking hundreds of proteins, cooked in advance, held with precision, and finished hot for service. This is where sous vide, combi ovens, and exact holding techniques shine. You might cook beef tenderloin to 122°F, chill it down, and finish slices to order with hot jus or a quick sear. Every move is **pre-calculated**.

But if you don't nail your temps at scale? It's carnage. You'll have dry chicken, cold steaks, and a dining room full of disappointment. Doesn't matter if it's plated or buffet—mass volume demands temp discipline.

So how do you pull this off? How do you serve **200 perfectly cooked proteins** at the exact same time without losing your mind—or the juice?

You plan like a general and execute like a machine. Banquet cooking is about **systems**, not instincts. It's not flashy. It's not sexy. But it's what separates the professionals from the ones who fold under volume.

Start with your endpoint in mind. If you want that beef tenderloin served medium rare, that means **final temp around 130°F**. So your initial cook should land **5–8 degrees under**—let's say around **122–125°F**.

Whether you're using:

- Sous vide for ultra-precision,
- Combi oven with probe control,
- Or good old-fashioned low-temp oven roasting,

...you're building in a cushion for **reheat + rest + hold**. You're not guessing. You're **targeting**.

Once that protein hits your base temp, you stop the cooking process immediately. That means:

- Resting on racks, not trays—airflow matters.
- Blast chilling or shallow pan chilling in ice baths, depending on your setup.
- Proteins should be chilled evenly and safely to below 40°F if holding more than 4 hours.

Skip this step—or do it sloppy—and you're inviting bacterial growth, overcooked texture, and food safety violations. Ain't nobody got time for that.

Now, This is your make-or-break moment. You don't just throw that meat into a hot box and pray. You **finish with intention**.

Here are a couple of options you have:

- Flash reheat in a combi oven with low fan speed and controlled humidity.
- **Gentle oven reheat** at 250–275°F until internal temp reaches serving zone.
- Sear or torch finish on site for crust and color, especially for plated dinners.

If you're slicing it, **Slice cold** for clean cuts and reheat **individually in jus, stock, or glaze** right before plating. That liquid should be hot but not boiling—**170–180°F** max. Any hotter and you'll overshoot the temp you worked so hard to build.

And here's another tip: Don't reheat everything at once. You work in **waves** based on service timing:

- First wave hits hot box 20–30 minutes before plate-up.
- Second wave queues up while the first is hitting tables.
- Final wave stays cold until you're in the clear—ready to go if something crashes.

If you're running 200 plates, you better be thinking in **batches of 50 or less**, rotated and held with discipline. That's how you keep control when the volume gets wild.

No matter how many times you've done it—**temp every single batch**. Don't assume. Don't guess. Don't "eyeball it." Every batch. Every time.

**Today's final thought leads us to this:** Whether you're cooking dinner for four or firing proteins for 400, meat temperature isn't optional—it's **non-negotiable**. It's not just about nailing doneness. It's about safety. It's about consistency. And more than anything? It's about **respecting the product**. When you know the temp, you control the outcome. When you don't, you're just hoping it turns out okay—and hope's not a strategy in the kitchen.

So, invest in a thermometer, learn the numbers, trust the carryover, and *stop cutting to check*. Your plate—and your guests—will thank you.

If you got value out of this episode, drop a follow, a rating, or a comment on whatever platform you're on. **Follow us on X** and share your finished dish using the hashtag **#theIncrEDIBLEDiscourse**. I want to see those perfect medium rares and pan sauces, people.

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And if you want to support the show, click on those **affiliate links** while you're there. Every little bit helps us keep the burners on, and the content hot.

Don't forget: **post your creations on X and tag us**. Whether it's a perfectly cooked steak or that one pork chop you saved with a last-second thermometer read—I want to see it.

Until next time—cook with intention, temp with precision, and never serve dry chicken again. I am Mark Grigsby, and this has been another amazing episode of The IncrEDIBLE Discourse.