

My ex mother-in-law used to say, “I don’t cook because I like to cook, I cook because I like to eat well.” She probably wouldn’t think much of the cooking game *Order Up!* You do a lot of cooking, but you never eat a bite.



My own attitude towards cooking is similar, and I can’t say I was too excited when *Order Up!* appeared in my mailbox. But *Order Up!*, developed by Zoo Games, spices its casual cooking gameplay with a sprightly wit that makes the game far more entertaining than I expected.

### **Appetizer: Learning to Cook**

You begin your culinary adventures working in a greasy fast food restaurant that functions as the game’s tutorial. You are taught how to chop onions and fry burgers while a bored trainer complements you with comments like, “I can see you’ll be here a long time. A long, *long* time.”

*Order Up!* is primarily concerned with cooking as quickly and accurately as possible. Throw a hamburger on the skillet and wait for an indicator to show it is thoroughly cooked on one side. A flip of the Wii remote turns the burger over so you can wait for the other side to cook.

Since cooking one item at a time takes too long, you’ll be handling several items at once. Toss on the burger then go chop an onion by thrusting the Wii remote down like a knife. Flip the burger and put the fries in the fryer. Shred some lettuce, take the fries out, get the hamburger off the stove and ring the bell that lets your waitperson know it’s time to serve the food.

After receiving your first paycheck, which after deductions comes out as a negative amount, you decide to open your own diner with the help of an unusually friendly bank (“No job? No credit? No friends? No pulse? No problem!”).

### **A Tasty Beverage: Become a Famous Chef**



Chop that squid!

Your goal is to turn your restaurant into a four star establishment. Quirky customers walk in, say something odd (“I used to have teeth but they were holding me back”) and order a meal. You have a ticket indicating what needs to be done for each meal ordered. You will boil, bake, fry, slice and dice your way to success. Each item you prepare receives a grade determined by the quality of the finished product. Overcook your fries and they’ll be rated poor. Overcook them too much and your kitchen will burst into flames that you may or may not be able to put out with a fire extinguisher.

You’ll also get a “poor” if you chop an onion too slowly, although realistically a slowly chopped onion tastes pretty much the same as a quickly chopped one.

Some actions are more difficult than others. Shredding lettuce is a simple matter of dragging your remote to the right a few times. Chopping a carrot is trickier, as you must time your strokes with a pulsing indicator.

I had the most trouble with cutting filets. In theory you can saw off slices by moving the remote forward and back, but it simply never worked for me. I would saw and the knife would slice partially through and then stop moving while I desperately worked the remote while swearing at the game.

### **The Entree: Make Some Money Money**

Fortunately you can hire a couple of chef’s assistants to take care of the actions you can’t manage or don’t enjoy. Assistants usually have only one area of expertise. One will get a score of “perfect” when chopping onions but only a “good” for boiling pasta. By choosing the right assistant for the right task and doing the rest yourself you can create perfect dishes.

Your customers all have individual preferences you must cater to with the use of spices. This is simply a matter of adding salt or garlic or basil to any dish that customer has ordered; putting steak sauce on a customer’s onion will satisfy him as much as putting it on his steak. While everything else is well represented in the tutorial, the game does a surprisingly poor job of explaining spices, so you might want to break down and read the manual.

The game constantly introduces new dishes, including some chef specials that can only be purchased on the black market. I don’t know why you would purchase a recipe for a barbecue burger from a shifty character in a black market; I guess the designers just thought it was funny.

Your customers will tip your waitperson according to how happy they are with the meal. You keep all the tips for yourself, but oddly no employee ever files a grievance against you.

Once you have purchased all the chef's special recipes and got a rave review from the local critic you can buy a new restaurant. Besides the initial diner, you will run Mexican, Italian and haute cuisine establishments, all with their own set of recipes.

## Desert: Empty Calories



A master chef should certainly be able to put together a pizza.

Unlike most games, *Order Up!* does not get progressively harder, and after turning the first two restaurants into four-star establishments on the normal difficulty mode I got bored and started over on hard, which requires the player to pay closer attention to avoid burning an item.

But on hard, it's still an easy game.

At times it seems like the designers were planning a more difficult game than they made. You are told that you should serve the disgruntled customers first, but customers came in one table at a time so that was never an issue. You can hire a clown to keep customers from getting restless and walking out, but I never hired the clown and never had a restless customer. Games are supposed to ramp up the difficulty as they progress, but *Order Up!* is as easy at the end as at the beginning.

While I'm not big on management games, *Order Up!* could probably have benefited from some strategic elements. I would have liked to be able to hire additional staff to work at the restaurants I had finished with, and it would have made sense if customers whose meals you had botched held a grudge and had to be somehow won over. But outside of a few tiring mini-games involving washing dishes or shaking awake a napping assistant, *Order Up!* pretty much sticks to just cooking stuff.

The game's amusing dialogue, sprightly music and colorful design (I loved the cactus-shaped chairs of the Mexican restaurant) keep *Order Up!* engaging, but ultimately it is more of a light snack than a full meal.