

# Lesson 8: Mastering Your Grocery Store

From the smells to the lights to where the produce is located, to what items are on the end caps – the entire layout of the grocery store is designed so you spend money. Learn to outsmart the store in this lesson as Tiffany walks you through how to methodically and intentionally shop the grocery store and take advantage of hidden opportunities to save, avoid marketing traps, shop faster and spend less money at checkout.

## Shopping for Meat

### **What to Look For: The Clearance Section + Marked Down Items**

Depending on how your store is set-up, all the discount meat could be grouped together OR like items will be near like items. My local Kroger does both: marked down chicken is in the chicken section and marked down seafood is with the regular seafood. However everything else (including beef and pork) is grouped together in one section at the end of the meat case.

If you can't find any marked down meat – or even if you can – ask the butcher if they ever mark down meats. If they say yes, ask them when. Knowing when you'll find the best deal on meat is worth moving around your meal planning and shopping schedule.

What day of the week does the butcher mark down meat? What time of day does it usually happen?

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Where can you find marked down meat in your go-to grocery store?

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Does the butcher process (i.e. slice/chop/cut meat) for free, or is there a charge? If there's a charge, how much is it per pound? Or is it a flat fee?

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## **Pay Attention To: Price per Pound + Quantity per Package**

Just because an item is listed in the circular, doesn't make it a good deal. In fact, it might not even be on sale! Stores often list items in the circular with their regular price, so when you are shopping for meat, always pay attention to the price per pound when you're in the store.

Also pay attention to the number of pieces in each package. Some recipes call for pieces of meat (i.e. 4 chicken thighs or 1 chuck roast) and by choosing the package that has just what you need for the recipes (and also choosing the best price per pound), you can save a few dollars.

What type of meat do you plan most often in your meal plans?

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For this item, what brand/package gives you the best price per unit? What brand/package gives you the second best price per unit?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

## **What to Avoid: Fillers**

Some brands will add a water-based solution to the meat, sometimes up to 15% of the package weight. This solution not only adds unnecessary additives and preservatives, but it also increases your cost per pound of the actual meat. Do your best to choose meats without fillers.

What brands add fillers to their products?

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What brands DO NOT add fillers to their products?

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### **What to Buy: Items on Your Shopping List + Marked Down Meat You Will Use in the Future**

As you look through the marked down meat, see if there's anything you can substitute for what you have on your meal plan. For example, if you had "chicken tacos" on the meal plan but find a pork shoulder roast on clearance, buy the roast and serve "pork tacos" instead.

Put all the meat you need for the week in your shopping cart. If the budget allows, add marked down meat that you can freeze and use in future meals.

What new-to-you brands are worth researching into the quality of their meat?

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## Shopping for Produce

### **What to Look For: Unadvertised Sales + Good Deals**

Not all produce prices are in the weekly circular, so take a moment to walk around the produce section and note the prices of:

- Items you buy most often
- Items on your current shopping list
- Items similar to those on your list that can be substituted (i.e. sweet potatoes for white potatoes, broccoli instead of cauliflower, etc.)

What did you notice about how the produce section is laid out in the store? Did you find the same item in different places? Is organic near the front? Share your observations, and the way the layout made you feel.

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### **What to Look For: Different Varieties of the Same Item**

In apple season, you'll notice several different varieties of apples on display. You'll also notice different prices for each. For most recipes, the type of apple you use doesn't matter, so choose the variety that's most affordable. This concept can be applied to the majority of produce, including but not limited to: potatoes, summer squash, winter squash, pears, greens, etc.

The only time you should not simply choose the most affordable produce is when a recipe specifically calls for a certain type of produce. But, truth be told, even then you can often use a different variety if necessary.

Were there different varieties of one particular item? What was the difference in price range between them?

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Something else to look for is how produce is packaged. Sometimes produce is re-packed so that ugly pieces are at the bottom. Be sure to check the bottom of a package – like grapes, strawberries and blueberries – to ensure you're not getting moldy or near rotting produce.

## **Pay Attention To: The Cost of Organic vs. Conventional**

Sometimes the cost of organic produce isn't much higher than the cost of conventional produce. Often it's the same or even less! Do a side-by-side price comparison of organic versus conventional for the items on your shopping list and see what the difference is. You might be able to afford organic after all!

What did you notice about the price difference between organic and conventional?

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## **What to Avoid: Overpriced Pre-cut and/or Pre-bagged Produce**

Packages of pre-cut and/or pre-bagged produce are often overpriced because you are paying for convenience - someone else has already done the prep work. This means YOU can get paid by doing the work yourself, and your paycheck comes in the form of saving at checkout.

As an example, pre-cut pineapple and butternut squash tend to be more expensive than if you bought them individually.

What did you notice about the price difference between pre-cut/pre-bagged produce versus the whole item?

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## What to Buy: Items on Your Shopping List + Good Deals

As you shop for produce, see if you can substitute produce on your meal plan with good deals found in the store. I personally often plan breakfast items that can be easily changed depending on the fruit – like muffins. If there's a good deal on strawberries, we'll make strawberry muffins. If there's no deal that week, I might make banana muffins (because bananas are always affordable) or pull frozen fruit from the freezer.

Make sure you have all the produce you need for the week in your shopping cart, and if the budget allows, add additional produce you know you can freeze and use later, based on the good deals you found.

Can you tell what items are in season based on the prices in the stores? How so?

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## Shopping for Frozen Foods

### What to Look For: Items You Typically Buy Fresh

Compare each item in your cart against its frozen counterpart and see which is cheaper. For items not in season, frozen is sometimes the better price.

Were any items in the frozen section the same price or less than what you found in the produce section? If so, which items?

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# Shopping for Pantry Staples

## **Pay Attention To: Per Unit Pricing**

Looking at the price per ounce (or other unit pricing) ensures you're getting the best deal possible among shelves filled with different brands and different sizes. And don't assume bigger is cheaper. Sometimes the smallest bottles are the best deal.

Did you find any packages that were smaller, yet had the better per unit pricing? If so, which items? Did you find any other surprises when looking at per unit pricing for the items on your list?

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## **What to Avoid: End Caps + Eye Level Items**

Manufacturers pay for premium shelf space - the end caps and eye-level shelves - and this price is passed on to you as the consumer. Walk down the aisle to verify whether items on an end cap are truly a good deal, and while you're there, look up and down to see if there's another brand or package size that's a better deal.

Did you find any items on the end cap that are also found in an aisle? Which location had the better price? Did you find a comparable item for this item in the aisle itself? If so, how much would you save by choosing the comparable item over the featured item?

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## What to Buy: One-ingredient Pantry Staples

Instead of buying salsa and condiments and stocking your pantry with various sauces, buy the ingredients to make these things. You will save money, it will taste better, and the quality of food you're eating will improve.

What pantry staples have you been buying that you could make yourself and save?

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## Shopping for Dairy

### Pay Attention To: The Selection at the Deli vs. The Selection in the Dairy Case

Sometimes the same types of cheese are displayed in two different places, with two different prices. Check both places when you're buying cheese, and note which spot has the best deal for what is on your list.

Did you find any dairy items in two different locations? If so, which items? Which location had the better price?

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## **What to Avoid: Paying for Convenience**

Just like produce, you often pay for the convenience by having someone else slice or shred cheese. Always compare the prices of brick cheese versus sliced/shredded and consider doing the work yourself.

What dairy items have you been buying prepared that actually cost less if you buy them whole and prepare them yourself?

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## **What to Buy: Marked Down Items You Use Often**

The most commonly used dairy items - milk, cheese and butter – can be frozen. When you find it marked down, bring it home and freeze it to save the money over buying it at full price.

## Reflection

Are the changes you identified in Lesson 2 working? Why or why not?

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Have you noticed any new habits that need to change? If so, what are they?

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Where have you seen improvement in terms of your grocery shopping methods?

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# Homework

## 1. Review your receipts.

Get in the habit of reviewing your receipts before you leave the store. Verify you were charged accurately for your items and that you bought everything you needed.

This is also your last-ditch effort to return any items you bought on impulse. There is NO shame in returning items you don't need!

If you found something on your receipt that wasn't on your shopping list, ask yourself why you bought it. Was it a "treat" for yourself? A "just in case" item? Was it an emotional impulse buy? Determine the source of the purchase so that in the future, you know your trigger and can prevent it from happening again.

## 2. Practice avoidance.

As you go through the grocery store this week or next week, pay attention to the aisles you typically don't go down and determine why you don't walk down them. Then in future trips, confidently walk past those aisles knowing your reason for avoiding them.

For example, I don't go down the aisle with paper and household goods because I know I can get a much better deal at a big box store like Walmart. When I'm shopping, I don't even bother walking down this aisle and I'm confident I'm not missing out on a good deal or missing anything on my shopping list.