

How to read a cookware test report

A supplier sends you a PDF with a laboratory logo and a green tick. Before it goes into your compliance file, walk these eight fields. Most unusable reports fail on one of them within thirty seconds.

SGS / INTERTEK STYLE TEST REPORT		Format varies by laboratory — the fields do not
Report no.	Unique, and searchable in the lab's own database	
Date of issue	Should be within the last 12 months	
Applicant	Who commissioned the test — your supplier, a trader, or your own company	
Sample description	Material, size and finish of the actual item tested	
Test method	The standard applied, e.g. FDA 21 CFR, LFGB §30/31, or an internal method	
Test condition	Temperature, duration and food simulant used	
Result	Pass / fail with measured values, not a summary word	
Accreditation & signatory	Accreditation mark on the report, plus an authorised signature	

Field by field: what to look for

Field	Good	Walk away when
Report no.	Found by you in the lab's online verification tool, or confirmed by email from the lab's own domain	Number cannot be found anywhere; verification is only possible by asking the supplier
Date	Within 12 months of the date you place the order	Two to three years old, presented as "still valid"
Applicant	Named company matches the entity you are contracting with	Applicant is a third party you have never heard of and cannot be explained
Sample	Names the material, the wall construction and the surface finish of the item you are buying	Says "cookware sample" or "stainless steel item" with no construction detail
Method	A recognised standard you can look up, appropriate to the market	"In-house method" with no published protocol; a method that belongs to a different market than the one you sell in
Condition	Realistic cooking or storage conditions for the product	Conditions so mild the test cannot fail, e.g. one hour at room temperature
Result	Measured values against stated limits, with the margin shown	A bare "PASS" with no numbers, or values suspiciously at the limit
Accreditation	Accreditation mark printed on the report, subject to an independent body	No accreditation mark, no signatory name, no lab address

The three traps that matter most

1. The report describes a different product. This is the most common failure and the hardest to spot, because every other field looks correct. The report is genuine, the lab is genuine, the number verifies — but the sample tested was a 28 cm pan and you are importing a 24 cm wok with a different coating. Compare the sample description against the PO line by line, not against the product family name.

2. The report is current but the batch is not. A report proves what was tested, not what is being shipped. This is why buyers specifying 304 stainless request the mill certificate from the steel producer on every production run, and why an XRF test on one unit from the actual container is worth more than any file in the drawer. It takes minutes and costs under \$150.

3. Certificates standing in for reports. A certificate says a system exists; a report says a specific unit passed a specific test. When a supplier offers an ISO 9001 certificate in answer to a food-contact question, they have not answered it. Ask again for the test report.

One habit that removes most of the risk. Ask for the report number before you ask for the PDF. Look it up yourself first. If it verifies, the rest of the document is worth reading. If it does not, you have saved an afternoon and learned something about the supplier in the process.

What to write into the order

- Reports for every product line on the PO, dated within 12 months of shipment, naming the exact material and finish.
- Mill certificate from the steel producer for every stainless item where 304 or 18-8 is specified.
- A pre-shipment inspection by a named third party for orders above your agreed threshold.
- A clause stating that an unverifiable report, or a failed XRF test, is grounds for refund or replacement at the supplier's cost.
- Written notification if any material, coating or sub-supplier changes after the report is issued.

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General industry information for procurement teams. Not legal advice. The sample report layout above is illustrative; actual reports are issued by accredited third-party laboratories.