A universe of possibilities opens when you plan to make bread, and every decision you make along the way can lead you to a different outcome. You can make choices depending on your available time, your preferred flours and flavors and textures, a partiality for rustic or refined appearances, or any number of other variables. The decision trees detailed on the following pages illustrate some of the questions that you can ask when you are determining the outcome of your baked loaf.

### I have time

A baker with the luxury of time may choose to spend 12-18 hours creating a poolish or biga to add flavor and improve the bread’s gluten network. If you maintain a levain, you can customize it with varying degrees of sourness. You can use this selection of preferments as a jumping-off point for creating your dough.

**8-hour poolish, 0.23–0.33% yeast**
- Use 60%–70% in a dough; if dough is high hydration, use 20%–30%.

**12-hour poolish, 0.1%–0.2% yeast and 100% hydration**

**18-hour poolish, 0.03% yeast**

**Do not use levain (use a commercial yeast-based preferment)**

**Use only 10% levain that is 8 hours old, and add 0.5% yeast. Proof at room temperature or 27°C/80°F (65% RH)**

**Use 60%–100% bread flour; 0%–40% other flour**

**Commercial yeast preferment**

**Levain**

### How sour do you want the dough?

In the United States, extreme levels of acidity are often prized in sourdoughs (the opposite is true of sourdoughs in France). Increase the age of the levain, as well as the dough’s time spent proofing, and you will increase the dough’s sourness.

- **Not sour at all**
  - Do not use levain (use a commercial yeast-based preferment)
  - Use only 10% levain that is 8 hours old, and add 0.5% yeast. Proof at room temperature or 27°C/80°F (65% RH)

- **Mildly sour**
  - Cold-proof 8 hours
  - Use 15% levain that is 10 hours old

- **Moderately sour**
  - Use 30% levain that is 10-12 hours old
  - Cold-proof 10-12 hours at 4°C/39°F

- **Very sour**
  - Use 60%–70% in a dough; if dough is high hydration, use 20%–30%.

- **Very sour**
  - Use 8-hour levain 100% hydration (see page 3-55)
  - Add 40%–45% to dough

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*Day 1*

*Day 365*