

Pizza Slice Holding Techniques

Paul Romsky

DRAFT

**Revision 0.0
23 December 2015**

1 Introduction

There are dozens of techniques that are used to hold a slice of pizza. These could apply to almost any style of pizza. However, they are more frequently used for thin crust New York-style.

Although there are many styles of pizza, they are typically categorized in two popular styles: Round (Roman) and Square (Sicilian). These terms do not define the actual origin of the pizza styles, but are widely accepted names for styles of pizza. Some of the techniques described in this document may be applied to holding Sicilian style pizza slices. However, the focus of this document is on the holding of Roman style pizza slices due to their unique characteristics.

Throughout this document, the left hand will refer to one's less dominant hand, and the right hand will refer to one's more dominant hand. Those who favor their left hand, those that have mixed hand dominance, or those who are ambidextrous may adapt the handedness as appropriate. Those with less than two typically functioning hands may not be able to perform some or all of these techniques.

Notes: No photos are provided in this document at this time. It is planned to include photos in subsequent revisions to this document.

2 Anatomy of a Pizza Slice

This section defines the terms used to identify features of a typical Roman style pizza slice. These terms may vary on opinion, but they will be used consistently in this document for clarity. These include: Bobola, Crust, Tip, Edge, Bubble, Topping, and Dripping.

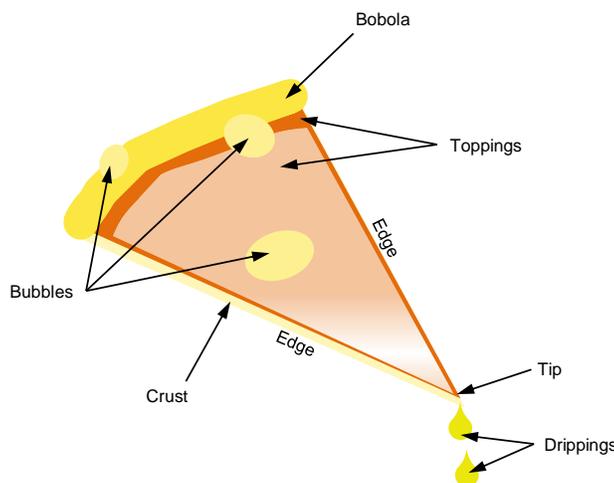


Figure 1 – Roman Pizza Slice Anatomy

2.1 Bobola

This is the outer edge of a pizza slice. It is typically the area where the pizza dough rises higher than the rest of the pizza during baking. This is usually due to the lack of toppings used on the periphery of the whole pizza (pie). The term "bobola" is newly defined in this document from the fact that it is often bubbled with air and the name has a slight Italian connotation. The bobola is often referred to as the "crust" by most audiences, however, due to the art of pizza holding, the outer edge crust is given this special name. Some bobolas are made from entirely dough, while others may have fillings such as mozzarella cheese added, these are commonly known as "stuffed crust" pizza – where the stuffing is actually in the bobola not the crust.

2.2 Crust

This comprises the entire baked dough of the pizza, except for the bobola. Crusts are primarily made in two styles: Thin and Thick. These two styles can be broken down in various sub-styles but for the most part, the differentiation between thin and thick crust is all that is needed for the discussion of pizza slice holding.

2.3 Tip

This is the part of a pizza slice that is opposite from the bobola. It is typically formed by the center of intersecting cuts made in a pizza to form individual slices. Due to a Roman style pizza pie's round shape, each slice resembles a crude triangle. Thus, the tip is the point where the two slice edges meet, but the general area about 15 millimeters (mm) from the actual tip point is known as the tip.

2.4 Edge

There are two edges (other than the bobola) to a Roman style pizza slice. The edges are formed from where the cuts were made to partition the slice from the pie. These edges have no bobola like appearance and are normally well defined and straight. Each edge leads from one respective side of the bobola to the actual tip of the slice.

2.5 Bubble

One or more bubbles may appear anywhere on a pizza slice, including the bobola and in the transition area between the bobola and topping. Bubbles are rarely formed on the bottom side of a pizza due to the weight compression of the pizza. Bubbles are created when yeast in the dough concentrates and forms gasses (mostly carbon dioxide) during the baking process, thus pushing up the baked dough through the toppings and bobola. The bubble surfaces are generally very thin and can take on a wide array of shapes and sizes.

2.6 Topping

These are items placed on the dough that are baked together to form a pizza pie. Toppings typically include a sauce (usually tomato based), cheese (traditionally mozzarella) and very often oil (such as olive oil). A cornucopia of many other toppings (meats, cheeses, vegetables, fruits, spices, and more) may be included, and in fact, any or all of the typical three ingredients may be left out in certain variations.

For general discussion, a pizza slice is assumed to contain the 3 basic topping ingredients: sauce, cheese, and oil.

2.7 Dripping

Due to the oil that may be added to the toppings and some of the toppings themselves (meats, cheeses, etc.), oil very often rises and collects on the upper surface of the toppings during the baking process. It is common to remove some of this oil from a slice by letting it drip off the slice (usually from the tip) onto a plate, napkin, or some other material. In some cases, these "drippings" are saved for later dipping or are made directly onto bobolas of other slices (to moisten the bobolas which are often drier than the rest of the pizza).

Dripping may be facilitated by tilting the tip downward and briefly touching the tip to the targeted surface. This breaks the surface tension of the oil and allows it to flow more readily.

3 Techniques

There are three primary techniques to holding a slice of pizza. These are: The Hold, The Fold, and the Cradle.

3.1 The Hold

This is the most widely used technique. It simply requires two hands to lift and hold the slice. The left hand holds the bobola (usually with fingers under the crust and the thumb above) and the right hand holds the tip (usually with all fingers and thumb splayed out fairly evenly under the crust).

At this time, any end of the slice (usually the tip) may be lowered to allow drippings from slice.

The tip is then oriented toward the mouth, and the right hand is repositioned after each bite is taken to optimally support the slice.

3.2 The Fold

This is the de facto approved method to eat a New York-style thin crust pizza slice. With your right hand pull a slice from the pie out from the center of the pie about 30 mm, then with that same hand hold the thumb and the middle finger on opposite ends (sides) of the bobola while placing the index finger on top of the middle of the bobola. Then raise and squeeze the thumb and middle finger together (using the index finger as a fulcrum) until the slice just begins to bend at the bobola. Then remove the index finger and middle finger, move the thumb just under the edge of the bobola, and place the index finger under the other edge of the bobola. Continue to squeeze the bobola edges together until the desired fold is achieved.

There are many fingering variations, but this method is the most common. The amount of folding also varies: from the open (partial) fold, to the closed (full) fold. In the open fold, the bobola is only bent slightly to make the long axis of the slice slightly more rigid. The open fold is useful when there are proportionally a large number of toppings on the slice (making a full fold messy). In the full (closed) fold, the ends of the bobola meet, and the fold progresses significantly toward the tip. Although physics may prevent the fold from propagating down to the very point of the tip, the closed fold allows the maximum amount of stiffness in the slice, thus allowing single handed holding with little mess.

Care must taken when folding the slice as not to break or crack the bobola or crust. This is normally not an issue with New York-style pizza as the crust is thin and the dough is soft and somewhat chewy (flexible) after baking. More crispy crusts and bobolas may be folded as well, but different fingering and folding techniques may be required (but the concept is similar).

At this time the tip may be lowered to allow drippings from the slice. Optionally (but not preferred) drippings may be made from the bobola end. If a napkin is held in the hand, drippings may be allowed through the fold of the bobola and onto the napkin. Again, this method of dripping is not preferred.

The tip is then oriented toward the mouth and the fold is maintained to optimally stiffen the slice as each bite is taken.

The one handed holding part (post fold) of this technique is seen in the film "Saturday Night Fever" when the character, Tony, is holding two slices (stacked) with a moderate fold as he walks and eats. Normally, only one slice is folded and held at a time, but it is not uncommon to stack two or more slices to save time and to allow more mobility while eating (very common in New York City). The slices appear to be served in wax paper. However, paper napkins are preferred as they can absorb drippings while walking.

3.3 The Cradle

This method is rarely used and usually requires two hands (but can be done with one) to lift the slice and then using only one hand to hold it. In this method, the slice is placed in the palm of the right hand with the fingers slightly curled upward and away from the mouth. The tip is oriented near the heel of the palm which is toward the mouth. One variation of this is to hold the slice under the fingers rather than in the palm; this is possible usually with only small slices of pizza.

Dripping is not normally done with this method, although dripping may be done during the lift portion of this technique.

The slice is pulled with the teeth toward the mouth as each byte is taken. After a few bytes are taken, when the slice is smaller and more manageable to handle, it may be held in one's fingers – no longer using the palm.

This technique is not recommended for very large pizza slices as such slices are usually much bigger than one's hand and the tip invariably sags onto the wrist before the first byte is taken. This may cause drippings to run down one's arm and/or clothing.

This technique (the one handed pick-up and under the fingers cradle) was clearly demonstrated in the film "Fast Times at Ridgemont High" when the character, Mr. Hand, picks up a pizza slice and takes a byte from it. In this scene the slice is picked-up, cradled, and the first byte from the tip is taken all in one swift move.

4 Etiquette

It is considered acceptable etiquette to allow the pizza server or chef see you make drippings as this is part of the eating experience for New York-style pizza. However, if you feel that you must blot oil from the pizza surface using a napkin or other absorbent material, it is poor etiquette to do this in view of the pizza chef or the wait staff.

It is frowned upon to eat New York-style pizza with cutlery (forks and knives) as pizza is considered on-the-go "street food" and should be eaten only by hand.

5 New Haven Terms

New Haven-style pizza is similar to New York-style. The shape of New Haven pizzas tend to be more oval or football shape and are slightly more charred on the bottom of the crust.

In some pizzerias, a basic plain pizza, that has only sauce, cheese, and oil as toppings, is known as "scomozza" (pronounced: ska-moatz' or ska-motz').

Some pizzerias call the pizza "apizza" (pronounced: a-peetz').

Napoletana (Neapolitan) pizza is reserved for pizza made with specific ingredients from Sicily Italy, and requires specific preparation as well as special brick ovens that are fired with coal (or more traditionally wood).

So, a pizzeria that serves New Haven Napoletana Scomozza Apizza is very hard to find, and would be most likely found only in New Haven, Connecticut.

6 Conclusion

This document does not cover all of the endless aspects of pizza slice holding, but it should provide the basics needed to handle any thin crust pizza like a seasoned professional.

End of Document