

COMPETITION STRUCTURE

THE BEST SOMMELIER OF THE GREAT STEPPE

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QUALIFYING ROUND

1. General Structure

This is the first stage of the competition and consists of two parts: a theoretical test and a blind tasting of two samples.

The stage is designed to assess the breadth of professional knowledge, analytical skills, and the participants' foundational tasting competence.

The results of the qualifying round are used to determine the semi-finalists.

2. Theoretical Test — Structure and Format

The theoretical test is part of the qualifying round of The Best Sommelier of the Great Steppe competition and is designed to assess the sommelier's professional knowledge and expertise.

The test is conducted online and consists of 100 multiple-choice questions, with a total duration of 60 minutes.

The test may be taken in Russian or English, with the language selected by the participant prior to the start. All participants complete the test under equal time conditions.

The theoretical test is conducted in a closed format. Questions are drawn from a centralized question bank developed and approved by the CAWU Educational Committee. The content of the question bank is confidential and not subject to publication.

The percentages indicated below reflect the distribution of topics within the overall pool of questions, not the scoring system, point allocation, or passing thresholds.

2.1. Distribution of Topics

The total question pool is considered as 100% and distributed as follows:

2.1.1. World Wine — 50%

- Viticulture and winemaking fundamentals
- Wine styles and typologies
- Key wine regions
- Iconic and benchmark producers

2.1.2. Partner Country & Competition Partners — 25%

- Wine industry of the partner country
- Wine culture and stylistics
- Grand partner: philosophy, portfolio, positioning

2.1.3. Mixology, Other Beverages & Gastronomy — 25%

- Core categories of spirits
- Beer
- Other beverages
- Classic cocktails and mixology basics
- Food pairing principles
- Sommelier's role in kitchen interaction

Regional focus:

At least 50% of gastronomy-related questions focus on Central Asian cuisine.

3. APPENDIX

Explanation of Categories and Scope

(This section is provided for clarification purposes and is intended for participants who wish to gain a deeper understanding of the range of possible topics.)

3.1. Mixology and Other Beverages — Examples

Spirits:

Gin, vodka, whisky, rum, tequila & mezcal, brandy & cognac, liqueurs, bitters

Beer:

Lagers, ales, wheat beer, IPA and hop-forward styles, stouts, porters, traditional styles

Other beverages:

Sake and rice wines, tea, coffee, traditional fermented drinks

Cocktails:

Classic cocktails, IBA “Unforgettables”, core mixology principles

SEMI-FINAL

1. Participants

8–12 participants advance based on the highest results from the qualifying round.

Selection is based on relative ranking, not a fixed passing score.

2. Structure

The semi-final is conducted in a station-based format and consists of three (3) stations. At each station, the participant performs one practical task; additional tasks may also be included.

The stations simulate real sommelier work situations, including service, beverage handling, gastronomy, and guest interaction, and are designed to assess practical skills, professional thinking, and communication.

The specific set of tasks may vary from stage to stage; however, all tasks are selected exclusively from the list provided below.

Evaluation principles and judging criteria are standardized and identical for all participants.

3. Evaluation Principles

In all practical tasks of the competition, priority is given to the logic of professional decision-making, the validity of reasoning, and the consistency of actions.

Technical accuracy is assessed within the context of the overall professional approach and its alignment with real working conditions.

All participants perform tasks under comparable conditions. The format of the tasks, evaluation criteria, and time limits are standardized and identical for all participants at each stage.

4. Practical Tasks

As part of the semi-final, participants complete practical tasks at stations that simulate various professional situations faced by a sommelier.

For each type of task, Guidelines are provided, outlining the execution format, expected sequence of actions, and key evaluation criteria. These Guidelines are publicly available and are used to ensure consistent standards.

4.1. Beverage Service

(decanting / aeration / sparkling wine service)

The task simulates a standard service situation in a restaurant environment.

Evaluation focuses on the correctness of technique, sequence of actions, process control, confidence, and professional presentation.

During the task, additional requests may be introduced to reflect real sommelier work (such as serving water, responding to guest questions, or adapting to changing service conditions).

4.2. Gastronomy & Food Pairing

The task is designed to assess the ability to pair beverages with dishes and justify the selection. Core food and beverage pairing principles are applied. Recommendations are not limited to wine — any beverage may be proposed, provided it aligns with the logic of pairing. The key focus is the participant's ability to clearly and professionally justify their choice.

4.3. Beverage Sales

The task simulates various professional sales contexts, including guest recommendations, working with a wine list, assortment selection, event sales, and product presentation as a brand representative or producer. Regardless of the

format, evaluation focuses on the logic of the proposal, adaptation to the target audience, quality of argumentation, and professional communication style.

4.4. Classic Cocktails

Knowledge of classic mixology is assessed, including ingredients, preparation methods, equipment, basic cocktail history, classic variations, and acceptable twists.

4.5. Wine List Analysis

The ability to identify errors, provide professional feedback, make logical recommendations, and understand the structure of the wine list is assessed.

4.6. Blind Tasting (Non-Wine)

The task is designed to assess the analytical approach. The key focus is on the logic and justification of conclusions, rather than the accuracy of guessing.

4.7. Full Verbal Wine Description

Evaluation focuses on the structure and sequence of the description, use of professional terminology, the connection between the wine's characteristics and its origin and style, as well as the logic of conclusions and confidence in presentation.

FINAL

Structure and Principles of the Final Stage

1. Format and Content of the Final

3 to 4 participants with the highest results from the semi-final advance to the final.

The final is conducted in the format of timed practical tasks, closely simulating real sommelier work in a restaurant environment.

The specific content of the tasks is not disclosed in advance. All final tasks:

- remain within the scope of semi-final task types;
- may combine multiple skills within a single scenario;
- simulate the full cycle of a sommelier's work under time constraints and changing conditions.

During the tasks, additional information and requests may be introduced, reflecting the dynamic nature of a real restaurant environment. The final represents an integrated model of professional sommelier activity.

2. Performance Under Pressure and Guest Interaction

In the final, significant importance is placed on the ability to work under pressure. Evaluation focuses on behavioral control, guest interaction, time management, and maintaining professional service standards. Approximately 10% of the final score is allocated to this component.

GRAND FINAL

International Stage of the Competition

Winners of the national finals represent their countries at the Grand Final of The Best Sommelier of the Great Steppe and compete for the title of Best Sommelier of the Great Steppe. **The stage is conducted in English.**