

Tasting Tips & Advice

TIME TIME TIME: 10 mn maximum per wine.

Notes have to be written out in full, not as “bullet points”. No abbreviations

No "*light to medium*" but *medium minus* for example. Do not say “*medium to medium plus*”, choose one only.

Write “*Medium acidity*”, not “*Acidity: medium*”. OK for either “*medium plus*” or “*medium +*”

Avoid "fairly" or "slightly"

SWEETNESS

If you are just hesitating between dry and sweet, then it is off-dry. If more, then it is medium sweet or more.

ALCOHOL: “High alcohol” would be what you might say for a 14% Shiraz or 15% Châteauneuf du Pape. Remember that “Medium alcohol” would be what you might say for a 12% Bordeaux.

AROMAS & FLAVOURS

You need to mention at least **5 aromas on the nose** and **4 flavours on the palate**.

Aromas for nose have to be written again for palate (no "*same as for nose*" or “*same as above*”)

Use clusters/categories and then precise examples: citrus (lemon, lime), oak (vanilla, toast), spice (nutmeg, cinnamon) = 6 aromas. For the full list of clusters [see SAT sheet](#).

CONCLUSIONS

There are 13 marks for conclusions. You cannot afford to throw them away

If you are asked country AND region, give TWO answers. **If NOT asked, don't answer**

Avoid contradictions (ex: *long length*, and then "*short finish*", or "*exceptional wine*" and "*low quality vin de pays range*"

Readiness for drinking > Check:

- Structure: acidity + tannins + alcohol
- Fruit: stage (1ary/2dary/3ary). If already mostly 3ary, the wine has probably gone where it should be

Then 3 answers possible

- Drink now, no potential for further ageing
- Drink now, but has potential for further ageing, will improve
- Too young

Impossible to have a wine “passed/too old” at the exam

Assessment of quality:

"BLICE" Balance Length Intensity Complexity Elegance

Give details and explain. Start with I, then C, then B then L.

If 1/5=ACCEPTABLE

If 2/5=GOOD

If 3 or 4/5=VERY GOOD

If 4 or 5/5 OUTSTANDING

MARKERS: These are the distinctive characteristics of a wine / grape that make it unmistakable with any other

Pinotage: Paint, burnt rubber, smoke

Riesling: Kerosene, petrol notes

Torrontes: Rose notes, but different from **Gewürztraminer** because Torrontes has some “soapy” notes

Amarone: High alcohol and concentration

Cherry notes > classic for Italian reds

Strawberry notes > classic for Spanish Tempranillo-based reds

Sangiovese: tea leaves notes

Syrah: Black pepper, violet

Grenache: High alcohol, low tannins

Cabernet Sauvignon: Blackcurrant, cedar

New world Cabernet Sauvignon: Menthol / Eucalyptus

Cabernet Franc: Bell pepper

Sauvignon Blanc: Gooseberry, asparagus

Muscat: Grape

Beaujolais (Carbonic Maceration Gamay): Banana, Bubble gum

Malbec: Cocoa, “black” colour

Merlot: Plum

Pinot Noir: Mushroom, forest floor, light colour

Nebbiolo: Tar, roses

Chenin blanc: Chamomille, quince

Marsanne: Marzipan

Pinot Gris: Pear

“BANKERS”: These are the wines that cannot be mistaken with any other, and help you find the common link between the wines (if there is any)

Amarone > if same country = ITALY, if same region = Veneto

Pinotage > if same country = South Africa

Riesling > if same country = Germany, if same region = Alsace

Torrontes > if same country = Argentina

Tavel: Dark rosé with high structure > if same region = Rhône

Hunter Valley Semillon > if same country = Australia, if same grape > Sémillon (in this case often also includes a sweet version such as Sauternes in the flight)

CLASSIC GRAPES

If you have to find the common grape between 3 wines, it will be one of the following international grapes:

WHITES: Sauvignon Blanc (often New Zealand and Loire in the flight), Riesling (always either a German or Alsatian sweet version in the flight), Chenin blanc (often a dry South African and a sweet version from the Loire in the flight), Pinot Gris (often an Italian Pino Grigio version as well as a sweet Alsatian style in the flight), Chardonnay (always a Burgundy in the flight), Sémillon (usually a Hunter Valley Semillon as “banker” to help you find and a botrytized version)

REDS: Cabernet Sauvignon (often a Bordeaux and Napa in the flight), Pinot Noir (always a Burgundy in the flight), Grenache (often a Rhône in the flight), Syrah (in this case there is almost always a Rhône Syrah and a Barossa Shiraz in the flight), Merlot (always a Bordeaux in the flight)
It is always useful to process by elimination (starting with colour. If dark > cannot be Pinot Noir)

CLASSIC COUNTRIES

If you have to find the common country between 3 wines, it will be one of the following:

Australia, Spain (in this case there is almost always a Rioja), Italy, South Africa (always a Pinotage as “banker”), New Zealand, USA (often Zinfandel to help you find), Argentina (always a Torrontes as “banker”, then a Malbec)

CLASSIC REGIONS

If you have to find the common region between 3 wines, it will be one of the following:

Loire (always a sweet white in the flight), Alsace, Piemonte, Marlborough, Veneto, Rhône

Examples of a good tasting notes (Matthew Stubbs MW)

PREMIUM OREGON PINOT NOIR

APPEARANCE

The wine is medium ruby.

NOSE

The nose is clean with medium + intensity and aromas of well defined red fruits (raspberry, strawberry, cherry), flower (violets), spice (pepper, clove, vanilla), toast and a hint of game, truffle and tobacco.

PALATE

The wine is dry with medium + acidity, medium tannin which are ripe and very fine, high alcohol, medium + flavour intensity with characters of very ripe red fruits (strawberry, raspberry), oak, vanilla, toast, forest floor. The finish is long.

DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY (11 MARKS)

A very good wine that shows a high level of fruit intensity and concentration, complexity from the multi layered flavours, earthiness and oak, and a long finish. It shows great balance between all elements of fruit, acidity and tannins, clear varietal definition of Pinot Noir. It shows great elegance and has the ability to age.

READINESS FOR DRINKING (4 MARKS)

Drink now, has potential for ageing due to the great depth of fruit, fine structure of medium tannins and medium + acidity. It is just showing signs of evolution but clearly has enough primary fruit to improve.

PREMIUM NAPA CHARDONNAY

APPEARANCE

The wine is medium lemon.

NOSE

The nose is clean with medium + intensity and aromas of tropical fruit (pineapple, banana), stone fruit (peach, apricot), citrus (lemon). It has aromas of fine toast and vanilla (oak) together with hazelnut, butter and cream.

PALATE

The palate is dry with medium + acidity, high alcohol, full body, medium + intensity with flavours of pineapple, peach, lemon, lime, vanilla, toast, butter, biscuit. It has a creamy texture and a long finish.

DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY (11 MARKS)

This is an outstanding wine that shows real depth and concentration of diverse fruit, complexity from the layers of butter, cream and very fine toast and a very long finish. It shows great balance and harmony between the fruit and medium + acidity, clear varietal definition with tropical fruit and winemaking techniques (malolactic fermentation/lees contact/bâtonnage). It has the structure to improve with age.

READINESS FOR DRINKING (4 MARKS)

Drink now, has potential for ageing due to the high level of fruit intensity, fine backbone of acidity and the fact that it is still only really showing primary fruit characters.

WHITE ZINFANDEL

APPEARANCE

The wine is medium orange.

NOSE

The nose is clean with medium + intensity and aromas of flowers (rose, violet), red fruits (strawberry, raspberry, cherry), black fruit (plum), citrus (lemon, orange peel) and noticeable boiled sweets and pear drops notes.

PALATE

The palate is medium sweet with low acidity, low alcohol, medium - body, medium + flavour intensity with characters of simple red fruit (strawberry, cherry), black fruit (plum), citrus (lemon) and boiled sweets. It has a slightly creamy texture and a short finish.

DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF QUALITY (11 MARKS)

This is a good quality wine that is very simple and straightforward in nature with generic red fruit and pear drop characters. It does not have any real complexity but shows good balance between the residual sugar, low alcohol and low acidity. It does have clear varietal definition but this is a wine designed to be drunk young as it does not have the structure for ageing and has a short finish.

READINESS FOR DRINKING (4 MARKS)

Drink now, not suitable for ageing due to the moderate concentration, very simple and generic fruit aromas, low level of acidity and alcohol. The fruit will also quickly fade.