

# Texacer's Guide to Reviewing Whisky



\*pretentious picture, check

## Prologue:

Hello all, Texacer here with some whisky reviewing help *if you want it*.

I've been asked on occasion if I could share how I review (tasting/nosing/scoring) Whisky . I am always happy to help so I've created this guide to help people get a push in the right direction.

I invite you to pick a whisky and delve into it while reading this guide. This isn't the gold standard; these are just my thoughts on the topic. I am not a professional in the industry, I'm just a guy who decided to review Whisky on Reddit one day and learned from others along the way. I'm not a Whisky expert but I do feel I'm a qualified whisky reviewer now.

A lot of Whisky tasting is subjective, so keep that in mind. Try not to skim through this guide if you want the most out of it. If it feels disjointed in parts, that's because I have been constantly updating it over the last 10 years.

also I aint sorry about my forthcoming grammar or punctuation

cheers.

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Jargon: Nosing is smelling. Whisky=all whisky,whiskey,bourbon etc. Tasting is tasting.

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## My background:

I am an "Adult". Supposedly.

I've grown up in the last couple years without realizing it. You may know what I'm talking about if you're around the same age (30's). I have a house, wife, two kids, 2 cats and a full time job in Television. I'm still very immature. So you college guys/gals don't worry, you'll never "grow up" too.

Honestly, who does?

But I guess I'm old now and my taste buds have adapted over time to where they have matured as well.

When you're a kid you hate gross foods like onions, asparagus or oysters, etc. That changes.

There's a very short list of foods that I can't stand.

I will try anything at least once. I love sushi and curry and headcheese, and many other exotic foods, but it's been over time that I have come to like them.

Scientists say your [palate](#) changes every 7 years. I don't know what scientist I'm talking about, don't ask.

I live in a city with 1000+ bars. A bar on almost every corner. I realized this was atypical when I went on a trip and there wasn't one every few steps. I'm saying: we drink here!

I used to drink beer.. Stouts mainly. They were another thing I had to get used to.

Tex, man, where are you going with this? this->

At first Stouts were really bitter and off-putting. But over time I was able to pull out these sweetnesses and different flavors and really enjoy them. Maybe you can relate? I don't know anyone who just starts at Stouts and not something like Miller Light. You work up to them.

Same with whisky.

I had had Scotch before a couple of times as well but I just wasn't into them. Pretty sure it was because I had tried only cheap whiskies though (eg Dewars White label, Johnnie Walker Red Label or stuff like Jack Daniels, whatever they have at bars of course).

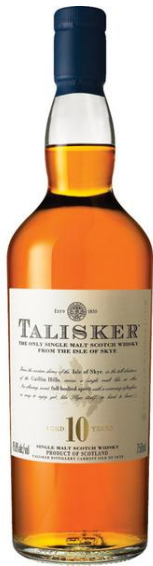


In 2010 during Lent I gave up **alcohol**.

I'm not religious but I felt rewarded giving something up. A personal reward/challenge.

The first couple weeks I stuck to it.

Week three, I was reading a reddit post about booze. I learned what Scotch really was and what were some good brands. So I bought a bottle of Talisker 10.



Was I supposed to wait out the next 8 weeks until I could try it? NAW. I told myself it's not cheating if I just have a very very very little amount just to try it and not get a buzz.

This is the key.

So that's what I did, I opened the bottle and poured a very tiny thimble amount into a shot glass.

I smelled the smoke and tasted it very lightly. Wow, that little bit packed a punch.

Immediately hooked. My first REAL whisky. I continued this through Lent where I would just have some drops of it.

This simple technique got me to really analyze it. It was wonderful tasting and I couldn't wait to have more, but was good to start slow. Instead of how we all start out drinking whisky: Shots.

Drink tiny amounts; pick it apart. Most people who are put-off by Whisky start their path by doing quick shots of it. That is not the point of it.

**It's such a complex drink, you can't rush into it and you shouldn't.**

Slow down and take your time. Rushing will ruin what you want to get out of it. Like Sex...

So after learning I enjoyed Whisky, I found [/r/Scotch](#). yadda yadda yadda, if you really want to know my history on Scotch it find the link at the end. Its not important so I decided to move my Scotchit history out of the guide to eliminate bloat. Besides, my ego is big enough and I don't want it clouding this guide anymore.

TL;DR: I am totally amazing and cool, did you see the handsome pic up top?

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## **Reviewing:**

I have had 500+ different Whiskies in the last decade. I have a family, so I can't go out and sample at bars all the time.

I told myself I wanted to make a Whisky pyramid --get a bunch of different whiskies as a base and narrow it down to the brands you'll love the rest of your life. At least that's what I've tried to do... there's always new releases now...

I'm not a rich man, but I am able to set aside money. Computer work I get paid in bottles from friends. Rummage sales, getting scotch gifts, trade, barter, beg and know people---

([/r/scotchswap](#), tell them Texacer sent you. 2020 note, RIP scotchswap :\*( )

Having access to various Whiskies is a big key to being able to review. How else would you get better at reviewing than actually having the thing in which you are reviewing? duh.

There are a ton of different whiskies out there. Pick where you want to start first between Scotch and Bourbon and then check out the recommendation guides if you need help choosing.

- [recommendations for beginners](#) - Scotch
- [recommendations for beginners](#) - Bourbon

If you already have your whisky, read on. I guess I can't stop you if you don't have whisky...

### **I feel that nosing, and tasting are learned skills.**

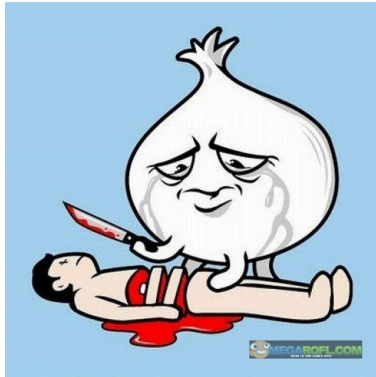
Last decade I built up my [palate](#) and sense of smell as a hobby. I have fun with it. I enjoy writing my little reviews and have gotten better at it over time(I think).

Some people comment that they can't get the reads that I do. No one starts off where I'm at right now though. Its learned. I didn't start off knowing how to type on a keyboard, so don't fret if you aren't good at tasting Whisky right away, you'll get better. And don't forget to just enjoy yourself on the way as well. Also don't force it if you don't like it; no one HAS to like whisky.

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When I now sit down and do a review I have some key factors that need to be in place. Here are the meat and potatoes:

## No onions, no iron.



During the day if you have something that lingers in your mouth a long time like onions or garlic, it will affect how you taste. Burn your tongue? Dont try to review.

Salsa with its acidic-ness will ruin your buds for tasting as well.

Water with too much iron in it destroys Whisky.

If you like ice or water in your Whisky that's fine, but make sure it's clean water, the minerals can affect the tastes.

Same goes for nosing, don't sit next to flowers or farts. They inhabit your olfactory sensors and kill your sense of smell. Some Whisky is smokey, don't have a cigarette when trying to review it, they will cancel each other out.

If you have ruined your [palate](#), you can try and neutralize it. Coffee can help undo onion and also pairs well with smoky whisky. If you want to cleanse the coffee taste after that, suck on a little lemon. Then down a bunch of water while washing out your mouth with it at the same time. Wait a bit after this and you shouldn't have a problem anymore. Don't brush your teeth and expect that your whisky won't taste like Toms of Maine. You don't use Toms of Maine? pff.

## Glassware

I didn't really care about my glassware starting out. I used a tumbler I got as a wedding present. Now I have graduated to a Wine Nosing glass or Copita as seen here-->

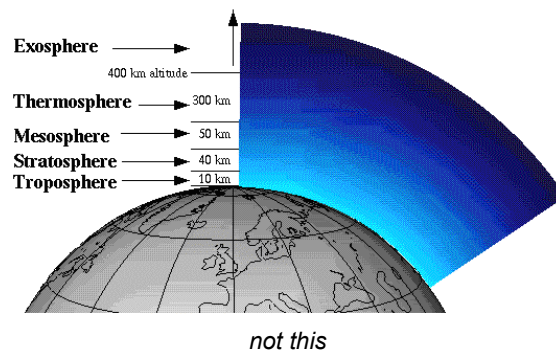
I got about 36 of them that line my bar. Thick stemmed and skinny. I like the stem because I can hold onto the base and not warm the whisky from room temperature to 98.6F. And because they have the smaller opening than the base it keeps the aromas in better. You can swirl and aerate it like wine if you'd like- not too much though, be gentle.

[Glencairns](#) are fine too but to me are awkward to hold, especially if your kid wants to jump on you like a ninja. Tumblers look cool but you're doing yourself a disservice if you're trying to review or enjoy the whisky to it's fullest potential.



Why? Because Tumblers don't concentrate the nose. Goblets or Brandy glasses work well too. Also, and this should go without saying, it should be a clean glass. If you want an accurate review the glass shouldn't have been used to drink anything else beforehand.

## Atmosphere



This is where I tell you I sit in a Bothy with [Ralfy](#) every time I review. I wish. I sit down in my Mancave after work when all is quiet and I have my relaxing time. I take my time, savor, nose many times. I surf the interwebs and comment on whiskynetwork posts. Relaxing state is best. Preferably indoors so wind and street smells don't get in the way. Outdoors is great when you aren't reviewing though and just enjoying life. Basically, relax and take your time in a calm setting. I have reviewed at bars but it isn't always preferred if you want to be accurate and concentrate. Dark dank quiet bars are the best... but you can't always trust their bottles.

### -Vocab

How do you describe a color to a blind person? It's just as hard as trying to tell you what to taste accurately. Hemingway was the best at it. What do oysters taste like?

"As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their cold liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans." E.H.

I bet you can just taste those words. I would not have been able to tell you that myself before hearing it. That is why I've read reviews from people who were better at describing than me. I watch all the [Ralfy.com](#) reviews. I build my vocabulary. I build words like Floral, and savory and musky. **I like to get as many correct adjectives in the shortest amount of time to paint a picture.** They have to be relatable words and the tone should be pleasant if you like the drink. If you like it, don't describe something as tasting like Dirt, say Earthy. Take people to something they know but which is good and fun if that's the intention of the review. If you hate what you're tasting, go ahead and describe it as piss.

Remember what homemade bread smells like? “oh yeah I love that smell.” It's good to have something to pull from in memory. Use that and feed off that. I don't own peat but if you say its has a warm earthy decomposing grain smell to it, people will understand. (as an aside, I used to work in a garden center so I know exactly what peat smells like and its wonderfully warm, full and earthy).

Scientists say 80% of memory recognition is linked to senses of taste and smell. Although 75% of statistics are made up. 45% of people know that. Ok I don't really know the correct number and I'm too lazy to look it up right now but its mostly true. SCIENCE!



### **-Preparing**

Okay, so you're ready. You sit down, you're relaxed, your palate is clean. Your nose isn't stuffed up. (dont review when you're sick) You can start Nosing and Tasting. It's key to pick one Whisky and just stick with that. Don't be drinking a rich Islay all day and then try to review a Macallan. Won't work, your taste buds become immune to flavors after a while and you can misread something.

Some people like ice, some like water, I only drink neat. Neat means only whisky in a glass. “Straight up” means shook with ice and poured, and “on the rocks” means with ice. I don't like to water down my whisky personally.



*look at the mess you're making! Don't splash!*

Even Amrut Cask Strength at 126 proof I don't add water. I love intense rich flavor. I have

trained my senses to enjoy it. The only thing I've noticed when reviewing a whisky *and* adding water is... "hey this tastes like the watered down version of what I was enjoying." This is me again, some people swear a few drops open up the nose and make the flavors come alive.

If you're just starting out and want to use water or ice that's fine, but you should gradually use less over time to find your sweet spot (if not neat). Alcohol at higher strengths can be like numbing solutions. Use water to counter those effects until you build up a tolerance.

Some people like their whisky chilled. Freezing it causes damage and compression to the whisky molecules. Ice waters it down too much. Whiskey Stones don't seem to do anything. In the end, experiment. Do what you like, but again, I still highly recommend sipping tiny neat amounts very slowly and you'll build up tolerance and your mouth will learn.

However you want to take it right now, pour it in your glass and continue.

### **-Nosing**

Use your rounded glass, hold it sideways without spilling and rotate the whisky around the inner of the glass, coating it. Don't swirl. You want the whisky to open up a little, but not let the alcohol get in the way too much. Look at the color in the light, it means nothing but it can be pretty. Be gentle. Stick your nose right in it and whiff a bit. Not too much, your nose is getting used to the alcohol and compensating. Nose many times to get it trained to smell real smells and not just alcohol. Get your nose right in and out over and over. Short breaths long breaths. You can also try putting your nose in and breathing in through your mouth only. That will slow down the intake of smells and get them to sit in your nose a bit longer.

Then just let your brain go, write down what you think you smell. Go with the learned vocabulary and pull from your experiences. This smells like the ocean or a campfire or a rose or citrus. Things everyone can relate to. Dab some on your palm and rubbing your hands together and smell your hands. You can also review as much as you can in one sitting, drink the whisky, and leave the glass to dry out. The remnants/alcohol from the whisky will dry out and leave only some smells to linger. I've fallen asleep in my recliner after drinking some Port Charlotte, and then woke up thinking the house was on fire from the smoky remains of the whisky.





*"I CAN'T TALK RIGHT NOW I'M SMELLING STUFF"*

Go slow, don't rush it, practice. You might also want something else in the room to counter smell. If your nose gets too trained to what you are smelling, smell something else for a bit. NOT something super powerful like spices or a cigar. This is going to sound weird and never mention it to anyone else, but I smell myself. Open your shirt collar and smell yourself. I wear Old Spice because I'm fucking manly and that will cleanse my "nose palate". I smell good, let's never speak of this again.

#### **-Tasting (editors note, stopped here)**

I taste in a couple different ways. It should be noted, when you're starting out tasting for the first time, you will taste "alcohol" mostly. This isn't a good note to write down. Of course it is alcohol. You're trying to get under the alcohol to the actual flavors. To do this, just like I said earlier, do tiny amounts until you build up your tasting skills. Very small amounts because you're trying to dissect it, not to get a buzz off of it. When you can start tasting more things, this is how I taste now:

First I take a nice mouthful (not a lot but decent amount) and "chew it." Move it around your whole mouth, coat it and then swallow. Breathe in your mouth and let it sting a tad. Write down what you initially taste no matter what it is, write it fast before it fades. Whatever pops in your head, you can always erase later. Secondly I take a half amount of the first and swish it around like mouth wash. Use the air/scotch mixture and let it aerate. Thirdly I take a small amount and make a vacuum in my mouth. Push all the air out of your mouth and keep the whisky on the front of your tongue tightly. In the vacuum of your mouth push your tongue forward and backwards very fast and you'll see what happens. The flavor intensifies dramatically. You're getting the whisky past your saliva and onto your buds, increasing the surface area and intensity of the whisky on your tongue. Ever drank a Coca-Cola really fast and it burns? yeah but it's a good burn right?

It may overpower your senses but you are trying to learn so that's good. Go try it right now,

I'll wait(because I'm not really here). Ok get back here I'm almost done. Write whatever your brain says. Be expressive and concise. Go with your gut. Then slow it back down and sip the rest of the dram, taking notes on the way and altering as you go on.



*"this tastes like a fucking pear!"*

The "finish" is just when you swallow. How does it feel? How long does it last? What sensations are you noticing? I have had Ardbeg that explodes on the finish into a fireball of spice. And others like Auchentoshan that just fizzle in a lame manner. It's a complex drink, and the beginning can be completely different from the ending(finish).

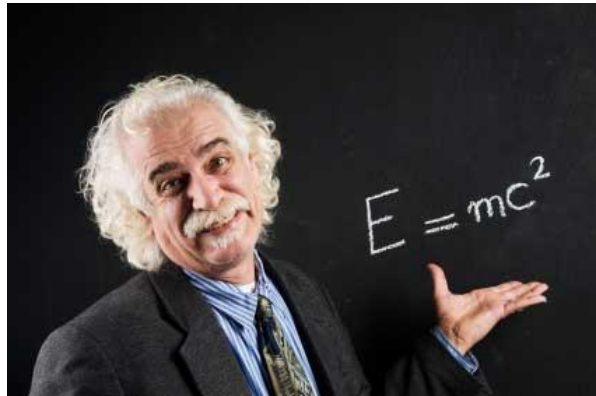
There is no real wrong answer for what you personally taste. What I taste can be drastically different than someone else. BUT there are some big picture items that everyone should taste. What are the overall flavors of Laphroaig?--smoke and peat and brine. however you can go deeper once you concentrate under those flavors. I get a lot of vanilla and toffee out of Laphroaig...

...but what does Laphroaig *taste* like? Laphroaig, it taste like Laphroaig. there is no toffee actually in it, but that's the label I put to the flavors I'm tasting, because it helps describe to someone else who hasn't tasted it, what it tastes like. You could make the argument though, that the Vanillin in the wood, has been roasted... so it is almost as if Toffee is in it. I'm confusing myself now, I think you understand what I'm saying though.

You might like Macallan because it has a sherry sweetness to it, or Highland Park because it has a malty peat taste to it. If you're having problems being able to dissect it, read reviews from others while you're tasting and see if you can taste the same things. But don't force their descriptions onto what you're drinking just because they say it tastes a certain way; use them as a guide and see for yourself. You'll say "yep, I can taste that" or "nope, I don't think that's there." It's good to practice and build.

## -Formating

When doing a review for r/scotch some of you might notice the standard format that has been adopted. I like to put a nice sized full color photo as a link. I don't do this to just get some link karma, I do it so our front page doesn't look so lame and it stands out better, grabs more attention. I like the thumbnails to keep it lively. Then I like to post my review in a comment. Its just the way I like to do it, and the cleanest most aesthetic way. (also I believe if anyone spends the time and trouble to review something for us, they deserve some Internet points) If Reddit allowed for Pictures with Context text, I would happily do that. Usually I'll put a little story and details, then bullet points of what I tasted/smelled/saw. Then another small paragraph as a wrap up and then a score.



*"ehhh?"*

Make it your own and put your feelings down. Try and keep the bullet points as concise as possible and you can expand in paragraph form. Why concise? For your audience. Sometimes if you get long winded in the descriptions, it can get a bit muddled. Keep it fun, maybe state some history, add your own anecdotes like I do. But people don't always like to read long reviews (says the guy writing a long guide) so less is sometimes more. Below is an example of a review I have done for Glenfiddich 15:

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Hello Scotchit, Texacer here with another quick review. **Glenfiddich 15**. I had a bottle of this when I was first starting out with Scotch, before I started reviews, so I figured I'd be a give it another shot now.

- Color: Reddish Brown like the packaging
- Nose: Light sweet spice, nutmeg sugar
- Taste: malty coca-cola, brown sugar maple, dried cherries and cinnamon
- Finish: tangy smooth, medium

for not having it for a year it's pretty much how I remember it. 18 is still my favorite of the Glenfiddich's I've had so far, including Snow Phoenix. Haven't had the 21 yet... maybe it will cross my path. only 80 proof, it could use a little bump. an interesting note about this whisky is the Solera. it is

matured in American bourbon, Portuguese sherry and virgin oak. The whisky was then married in a Solera vat. The Solera vat is always half full of Glenfiddich 15. Kind of cool, here is the photo:  
<http://i.imgur.com/A6GrN.jpg>

86/100

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[More formatting help here](#)

### **-Scoring**

I don't like forcing my opinion of a Scotch on someone. Everyone should make their own decisions about what they like. Just because I score something at a 70/100 doesn't mean that I'm right. That is my personal opinion. You may give it a 90/100 or a 50/100. its a personal score. I don't get very scientific with it either because Subjectivity isn't science. Basically I take into account an overall quality and enjoyment of Taste/Nose and Balance and Complexity.

What is Balance? How harmoniously the flavors/smells work together. Sometimes the balance can be thrown off by one flavor or smell being overpowering. When something is really well balanced the complexity in the flavor is really easy to read. It isn't a struggle to get notes.

Complexity? how many different flavors and smells can you get out of one whisky? If you get only a couple: simple complexity. If you get dozens, High complexity. It can be either a straight line simple, or a spiderweb of mixed notes. Both simple and high complexity can be good or bad, depending on your preferences.

The assigned number is pretty much a School grade for me. 90-100 is an A, 80-90 is a B and so on down. My highest rated right now is Laphroaig Quartercask for its extreme complexity, good balance, and great enjoyability - 98/100. A+; A low score from me is Bowmore Legend at 40/100 for it's awful taste, unbalanced simplicity and overall low quality.

Other Scoring Examples:

Aberlour Nonchillfiltered: Supremely Balanced, Great nose/taste quality. very complex: 97/100

Johnnie Walker Blue Label: weak nose, too light on flavor, ok balance, but very simplistic:  
60/100

Scores are important. They are subjective yes, but it can also be helpful. It serves as a TL;DR sometimes. Also, if you find a reviewer you enjoy reading and agree with most of the time, you may find it helpful to see these grades of whiskies you haven't had yet.

## **Reasons for reviewing**

Why I review? For me it's about helping people. Things that I like, I want others to try and things that I don't like I want others to avoid. If you have faith in my reviewing ability then it's helpful to you. Also, when I began reviewing on Scotchit, I was the only one. I'm happy to see how it has led to thousands of new reviews. I have gotten people to get off their asses and do the same. It makes me proud and I will continue for as long as I can. I don't do it for money, I just enjoy helping people and getting them involved in this "hobby".

Why should you review? It helps you. Sitting down and dissecting a whisky gives you more reward. Casually drinking some is great but you miss a lot. I compare it to watching a movie in a theater vs watching a movie at home with other things going on that distract you.

You'll get more out of it, the more concentration you put into it.

## **Conclusion**

If there is ONE tip that I want you to take away from reading this it is: SLOW DOWN. We as a society scarf our food down way too fast and we hardly ever stop and take the time to dissect what we are eating. When was the last time you were eating a pizza and thought "ooh I can taste the oregano in the sauce" -Now that I've become a Scotch taster I've noticed I pick out flavors in food better, that's pretty cool.

The reason I love scotch so much is because it has an amazing complexity to it. Every single one is different and it's like tasting concentrated flavors that evolve in your mouth just like the everlasting gobstopper in Willy Wonka. That's the comparison I use to try and explain to people who don't appreciate fine whisky, what they are missing. People automatically assume I'm a crazy snob because I like Scotch. But really, that's their fucking loss and my gain because -more for me suckers! enjoy your stupid jager and flavorless vodka. (yeah I like those sometimes too but rarely drink them)



*"oh you like Whisky? tell me again about this Jack Daniels and coke recipe"*

Alright, near the end here. Please ask questions on r/scotch anytime if you have them. I really enjoy our community and appreciate all your posts and feedback no matter what your level of whisky knowledge is. We're all in this together. Don't be a stranger either, I love talking to anyone about Scotch. I'm just a regular guy like you on a free internet website. I'm highly approachable and hardly ever super serious. Also I love being lavished with praise all the time from how amazing I am and shit. I'm very humble too. But seriously, if you enjoyed reading this and/or it helps you out please let me know because I enjoy helping people get into this hobby and I really want to know if I am helping or if I come off as sounding full of shit. Ok I'll stop wasting your time now.

Bottom line: have fun, take your time and drink it slowly. Enjoy this amazing alcohol we all love and do it in a responsible manner.

Cheers.

[Texacer.](#)

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bonus

["Recap of Scotchit and Texacer".](#)

[Whisky Terminology 101 by Professor Texacer](#)

[A study in Johnnie Walker Blue](#)

[Modified Tasting Chart](#)

[All of my Reviews](#)

[Texacer's Tip 1](#)

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