
Chapter 1

The Systematic Approach to Tasting Wine



The Format of the SAT

Please refer to your accompanying Tasting Card throughout these chapter notes.

Preparing for Tasting

Preparing for tasting

- Ideal tasting environment:
 - Good light (natural)
 - Odour free
 - Space for glasses (ideally ISO glasses)
 - Spittoon
 - To prepare yourself:
 - Clean palate
 - Well hydrated (dehydration affects nasal receptors)
 - Somewhere to record your notes
 - Glassware:
 - Ideally ISO
 - Rounded bowl and inward slopping walls
 - Recommended 5cl sample size
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Appearance

Clarity: Clear - Hazy

- **Clear**
 - Majority of wines
- **Hazy**
 - Often indicates fault
 - *Will not appear in your tasting test purposefully*

Intensity: Pale - Medium - Deep

- How much colour a wine has
- Hold at 45° angle, look from above to see how far colour extends from core (deepest part) to rim (shallowest depth).
- White wines
 - **Pale** - All whites appear colourless (pale)

- **Deep** - If pigment reaches rim
- Red wines
 - **Pale** - Lightly pigmented from rim to core
 - **Deep** - Intensely pigmented from rim to core and impossible to see stem

Colour:

White: Lemon-Green - Lemon - Gold - Amber - Brown

Rose: Pink - Salmon - Orange

Red: Purple - Ruby - Garnet - Tawny - Brown

- Colour balance; not related to level of flavour intensity
- To judge;
 - White & rose - colour consistent throughout all of wine from rim to bowl
 - Red - colour can change closer to bowl, so best to assess colour near rim
- White wines
 - **Lemon** - Most common colour
 - **Lemon-Green** - Hint of green
 - **Gold** - Hint of brown or orange
 - **Amber/Brown** - Noticeable levels of browning (either very old or oxidised)
- Red wines
 - **Ruby** - Most common colour
 - **Purple** - Noticeable blue or purple
 - **Garnet** - Noticeable orange or brown, but still more red overall
 - **Tawny** - Noticeable browning; and more brown than red.
 - **Brown** - No redness at all (either very old or oxidised)
- Rose wines
 - **Pink** - Pure pink colour; may have hint of purple
 - **Salmon** - Hint of orange
 - **Orange** - Orange is dominant colour

Other observations: e.g. legs/tears, deposit, pétillance, bubbles

- **Legs/tears** - In all wines; wines with higher sugar/alcohol = more prominent legs due to viscous
- **Deposit** - Unfined/unfiltered wines
- **Pétillance** - Can be fault, or preferred in unoaked, white wines as adds freshness/texture.
- **Bubbles** - Appearance of bubbles not necessarily linked to quality of wine

Nose

Condition: Clean - Unclean (faulty?)

- Note: Not a skill tested in WSET 3
- **TCA (Trichloroanisole)**
 - Main name for 'cork taint'
 - Damp cardboard smell and muted fruit flavours/less freshness
- **Reduction**
 - 'Stinky' smell - boiled cabbage, blocked drains and rotten eggs
 - Low levels, not *unpleasant* - adding character and complexity
- **Sulfur dioxide**
 - In all wines; highest levels in sweet wines

- High levels - smells like extinguished matches. Low levels - masks wine fruit.
- Insufficient sulfur dioxide can lead to oxidation.
- **Oxidation**
 - Opposite of reduction
 - Unwanted exposure to oxygen, causing deep, browner colour and notes of toffee, honey and caramel.
 - No freshness/fruit in wine
- **Out of condition**
 - Too old/stored poorly
 - Dull and stale taste
- **Volatile Acidity (VA)**
 - High levels = vinegar/nail polish aromas
- **Brettanomyces ('Brett')**
 - Type of yeast causing wine plastic or animal aromas (ie, plasters, vinyl, meat, leather)
 - Not always considered a fault as can add complexity

Intensity: Light - Medium(-) - Medium - Medium(+) - Pronounced

- **Pronounced** - Aromas immediately apparent even without sniffing when nose in glass
- **Light** - Even after sniffing, aromas hard to detect/very faint
- **Medium** - Three categories in between

Aroma characteristics: eg, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary

- **Primary**
 - *These are the aromas that exist after fermentation*
 - Either from grapes or from fermentation process
 - **Simple wine** - limited number of primary aromas, often within same descriptive cluster
 - **Complex wine** - more primary aromas within a range of clusters
- **Secondary**
 - *These aromas are created by post-fermentation winemaking*
 - Oaked wines are most obvious (ie, vanilla and toast) or MLF (ie, cream and butter) or lees contact (ie, biscuit)
- **Tertiary**
 - *These aromas have their origin in the ageing processes*
 - Oxidative exposure (ie, coffee, toffee and caramel) or no oxygen exposure due to long period in bottle (ie, petrol, honey and mushroom)
 - Changes primary fruits to dried or cooked character over time,

Development: Youthful - Developing - Fully developed - Tired/past its best

- **Youthful** - Dominated by primary or secondary aromas - with slight unbalanced secondary characteristics due to lack of time to integrate.
- **Developing** - Mainly primary and secondary characters with some tertiary detected.
- **Fully developed** - If predominant aromas are tertiary. Secondary characteristics usually fully integrated and harder to distinguish from tertiary.
- **Tired/past its best** - After fully developed when attractive aromas fade and unpleasant aromas start to develop.

Palate

Sweetness: Dry - Off-Dry - Medium-Dry - Medium-Sweet - Sweet - Luscious

- **Dry** - No sugar, or undetectable amounts of sugar in the wine
- **Off-Dry** - A tiny amount of detectable sugar
- **Medium-Dry/Medium-Sweet** - Distinct presence of sugar, but generally not sweet enough to pair with desserts
- **Sweet** - Presence of sugar is prominent feature, applies to most dessert wines (ie, Sauternes)
- **Luscious** - Very few in this category - wines are more viscous and sticky sweet (ie, PX Sherries)

Acidity: Low - Medium(-) - Medium - Medium(+) - High

- Main acids; Tartaric and malic (from grape juice) or lactic (after MLF)
- To detect acidity levels, check how much saliva accrues at back and sides of the mouth. More saliva = higher acidity.
- **Low** - generally, wines are broad, round and soft
- **High** - significant mouthwatering, often from wines made in cool climates
- To remember;
 - Sweet wines often balance and mask high acidity in wine, use how much your mouth waters as a guide
 - High alcohol wines creates mouth burning effect similar to acidity, use how much your mouth waters as a guide

Tannin: Low - Medium(-) - Medium - Medium(+) - High

- Tannins bind saliva and cause mouth to feel dry and rough - add to wine texture
- Coats area of the gums and causes urge to lick the teeth - higher tannin presence, more of an urge to lick this area clean
- *Should be **assessed for all red wines in tasting*** - but does not need to be commented on for whites
- Unripe tannins - aggressively astringent
- Ripe tannins - good textural richness

Alcohol: Low - Medium - High

Fortified wines: Low - Medium - High

- Adds to texture and body of wine
- **Low** - Wine seems slightly watery
- **High** - Burning sensation after spitting/swallowing (don't confuse with high acidity which is more mouth-watering)

ABV levels	ABV levels (fortified)
<i>Low: below 11% abv</i>	<i>Low: 15% - 16.4% abv</i>
<i>Medium: 11-13.9% abv</i>	<i>Medium: 16.5% - 18.4% abv</i>
<i>High: 14% abv and above</i>	<i>High: 18.5% abv and above</i>

Body: Light - Medium(-) - Medium - Medium(+) - Full

- The textural impression created by wine and based on balance of structural components
- Generally influenced by alcohol, leading to fuller body
- In general;

- **Full** body - High alcohol, ripe tannins, intense flavours
- **Lighter** body - Low in alcohol, high acidity and delicate flavours

Mousse: Delicate - Creamy - Aggressive

- Only relevant in sparkling wines
- **Creamy** - Lively on palate without being too frothy
- **Aggressive** - Very lively, explosion on palate and lost after immediate blast of sensation
- **Delicate** - Usually from wines with extensive ageing/lower than typical pressure - very soft/fine bubbles

Flavour intensity: Light - Medium(-) - Medium - Medium(+) - Pronounced

- Should be the same as intensity detected on the nose

Flavour characteristics: eg, Primary, Secondary, Tertiary

- Should be the same (generally) as flavours on the nose
- Earthy, spicy and toasty characteristics tend to be more prominent on the palate; fruity and floral characteristics are more prominent on the nose.

Finish: Short - Medium(-) - Medium - Medium (+) - Long

- The collection of sensations after you have swallowed the wine
- **Short** - Pleasant flavours disappear within a few seconds after swallowing
- **Long** - Pleasant flavours last for a minute or more

Conclusions

WSET 3 only requires evaluation of quality and readiness for drinking - no reasons need to be provided.

Quality level: Faulty - Poor - Acceptable - Good - Very good - Outstanding

- There are four key criteria when assessing quality level;
 - **Balance** - Like scales, each component needs to be well balanced, ie, balancing fruit and sugar with acidity and tannin.
 - **Intensity** - Can be referred to as 'concentration'; although intensity does not always correlate to quality. Thin, weak wines are often not high quality.
 - **Length** - Generally, longer finish is indication of quality.
 - **Complexity** - Complexity is desirable in wines, in general.
- **Outstanding** - Positive in all four criteria
- **Very good** - Will show three of the criteria
- **Good** - Will show two of the criteria
- **Acceptable** - Will show one criteria
- **Poor** - Will not have any criteria

Readiness for drinking: Too young - Can drink now, but has ageing potential - Drink now; not suitable for further ageing - Too old

- **Too young** - Can also apply to red wines that have been opened before they had a chance for tannins to integrate. For example, it's almost being wasted being drunk before reaching ageing potential.
- **Can drink now, but has ageing potential** - If it's drinking well now but can be even better in a few years.

- **Drink now; not suitable for further ageing** - Not all wine is suitable for ageing, ie, wines with primary aromas with light acid/tannins. Can also apply to wines that are close to end of drinkable life and any further development would be negative.
 - **Too old** - If wine should have been fruity with light acid/tannins but lost freshness. And/or wines that are predominantly negative qualities.
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Multiple Choice Practice Questions

1) In which type of climate would you most likely find wines with high acidity and lower alcohol?

- a) Cool climate
- b) Moderate climate
- c) Warm climate
- d) Maritime climate

2) What must a wine have for its finish to be considered long?

- a) High level of residual sugar
- b) A high tannin level
- c) Pleasant flavours that last a minute or more
- d) Pleasant flavours that last less than a minute

3) What is considered high abv in a fortified wine?

- a) 14% abv or above
- b) 16.8% abv or above
- c) 18.5% abv or above
- d) 19.5% abv or above

4) What is considered medium abv in a standard wine?

- a) Below 11% abv
- b) 11% - 13.9% abv
- c) 11% - 14.9% abv
- d) 15% abv or above

5) Which of the following is NOT a criteria when assessing the quality of a wine?

- a) Balance
- b) Length
- c) Complexity
- d) Colour

Answers

1. a) Cool climate

2. c) Pleasant flavours that last a minute or more

3. c) 18.5% abv or above

4. b) 11% - 13.9% abv

5. d) Colour