



VIRGINIA
WINE + SPIRITS
ACADEMY

An Introduction to the WSET
Systematic Approach to Tasting



Purpose of a Tasting

Screening Tasting (Production)

Descriptive Tasting (Sales & Marketing)

Purpose of a Tasting

Screening Tasting (Production)

- Identifying differences between samples
 - New make or Final expressions
 - Evaluating Consistency and/or Quality

Common Terms

- Acetate Esters / Ethyl Esters (glue, banana, floral, peaches)
- Phenols (smoke, antiseptic)
- Sulphur (burnt rubber, meat, grapefruit)
- Alcohols: aldehyde, ketone, fusel, ethanol (solvent, fruity, rose)
- Fatty acids (wax, cream, walnut, rancid)

Purpose of a Tasting

Are Screening terms helpful?

- Within production – of course!
- For tasting room, marketing, or sales staff – Rarely
 - For consumers, these terms are Exclusionary



Purpose of a Tasting

Descriptive Tasting (Sales & Marketing)

- Quantitative Descriptive Analysis
 - Seeks aromas of importance from a clear subset
- Requires a common language for clarity

Common Terms

- Floral / Herbal / Fruity
- Spicy / Woody
- Earthy / Nutty



Purpose of a Tasting

Are Descriptive Terms helpful?

- Engaging, conversational
- Cross knowledge boundaries
- Allow for self-expression

Creating a Common Language

Consistent Approach

- Following the same steps for every tasting
- Calibrating alongside a known standard

Common Lexicon

- Provides widely applicable terminology for
 - Aroma/Flavour compounds
 - Textural components
 - Quality

Creating a Common Language

Senses involved in Tasting

- Sight
- Smell
 - Aromas & Flavours
- Taste
 - salty, sweet, sour, bitter, umami
- Touch
 - pain, pressure, movement, temperature = Texture

APPEARANCE	
Clarity	clear – hazy
Intensity	water-white – pale – medium – deep – opaque
Colour	colourless – lemon – gold – amber – brown pink – red – orange – yellow – green – blue – purple – brown – black
Other observations	e.g. louching
NOSE	
Condition	clean – unclean
Intensity	neutral – light – medium – pronounced
Aroma characteristics	e.g. raw material, processing, oak and maturation
PALATE	
Sweetness (sugar level)	dry – off-dry – medium – sweet
Texture	e.g. rough, smooth, watery, mouthfilling, warming
Flavour intensity	neutral – light – medium – pronounced
Flavour characteristics	e.g. raw material, processing, oak and maturation
Finish	length short – medium – long nature neutral – simple – some complexity – very complex
CONCLUSIONS	
Quality level	faulty – poor – acceptable – good – very good – outstanding

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- Appearance tells you nothing about a spirit's quality or maturity (color correction or filtration can alter)
- Louching: formation of a cloudy suspension when water is added to an aniseed spirit (separate from chill haze)

NOSE**Condition** clean – unclean**Aroma intensity** neutral – light – medium – pronounced**Aroma characteristics** e.g. raw material, processing, oak and maturation

Aroma types

- raw material (grain, fruit, sugar cane, etc.)
- processing (raw material, fermentation, distillation)
- oak & maturation (new vs old, previous contents, time + location)

AROMA AND FLAVOUR	
Raw Materials	
Corn	butterscotch, sweetcorn, popcorn, caramel, burnt sugar, toffee, menthol
Sugar cane	grass, caramel, burnt sugar, toffee, treacle, molasses
Rye	rye bread, gingerbread, peppercorn, allspice
Processing (raw material, fermentation, distillation)	
Esters	banana, apple, pear, floral, pineapple, melon, mango, pear drops, nail varnish
Oak and Maturation	
Oak	vanilla, toast, coffee, cedar, char, spice, sherry, sawdust, coconut, nuts
Age/rancio	fruit cake, candied fruits, leather, tobacco, wet leaves, mushroom, forest floor, meaty, yeast extract, wood polish

Three senses

- **taste** (salty, sweet, sour, bitter, umami)
- **smell** (retronasal olfaction)
- **touch** (pain, pressure, movement, temperature)

Two aims

- describe the flavours and their persistence
- describe the feel of the spirit in the mouth

PALATE

Sweetness (sugar level) dry – off-dry – medium – sweet

Texture e.g. rough, smooth, watery, mouth-filling, warming

Flavour intensity neutral – light – medium – pronounced

Flavour characteristics e.g. raw material, processing, oak and maturation

Finish length short – medium – long

nature neutral – simple – some complexity – very complex

CONCLUSIONS

Quality level faulty – poor – acceptable – good – very good – outstanding

Quality criteria

- **balance** (aroma and texture)
- **length and intensity**
- **complexity and purity**
- **expressiveness**

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Certification

Private Custom Courses – Onsite / Virtual
Distillery teams, Sales reps, Key customers

Online Live Instruction
Multiple Distilleries, Restaurant + Retail employees

In-Person - throughout VA/NC/MD
Industry + Consumer



info@vawsa.com

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