



# **How to Taste Wine**



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## Introduction

Many of us know we like wine, but are hard-pressed to confidently describe the wines we like. Wine tasting skills can be learned, and in this case, learning is fun and delicious!

As you pay attention to what you are tasting, you will gain a vocabulary to describe what you like in a wine and what you don't like. Ordering wine from a wine list will become positive experience—no longer daunting and left for others to do.

Wine tasting can be enjoyed by anyone—from beginner to professional. There is no “right answer”, since your own senses determine what is pleasing to you.

Wherever you are on the journey, there are new wines to taste, new things to learn, and so much pleasure to experience.

This guide can be printed and distributed to anyone attending your wine event. It is also complemented by the 3-minute video “Wine Tasting” that you can play from the TastingMaster Tutorial section. This would be a great way to kick off a wine tasting event.

## The “S-Word” Guide to Wine Tasting

Follow this straightforward guide to wine tasting—it's easy to remember!

### 1. Set the Stage

Ideally, when we are tasting wine, the setting should be as free of distractions as possible so we can better rely on our senses (sight, smell, and taste). However, unless you are in a professional setting, there will be distractions such as cooking smells and perfume. Try to eliminate as many distractions as you can and be aware of the surroundings while you are tasting wine.

Less obvious distractions are the effects of food we have recently eaten and comments of other people. Try to form your own opinions first if possible. Again, be aware of the surroundings and your “space”.

The order in which you taste wines can skew your judgments. Wine changes after it has been opened, so it's possible that your opinion of a wine will change if you return to it. Return to wines you've tasted to re-evaluate and validate your comments and scores.





## 2. Serve

Glasses should be clean and dry. A recommended amount of wine to taste is about 2 ounces (about a third of a wine glass).

This gives the wine air space for its aroma to expand.

You should hold the glass by the stem, so as not to heat the wine with your hand.



## 3. See

By looking at the wine, you can learn about its condition and age.

Hold the glass up against a white background or at least so light can shine through the glass. Tilt it about 45 degrees.

What should you look for?

**Clarity** = it should look clear and vibrant—not cloudy, murky, or dull.

**Color** = Look at the **color** in the middle of the bowl of the glass and at the rim. Describe the color:

For red, is it ruby, cherry, garnet, maroon, or brownish? (e.g., a Pinot Noir will be more ruby in color, while a Cabernet Sauvignon will be violet)

For white, is it light-green, pale-yellow, buttercup, golden, amber, or straw-like?

**Intensity** = Is it pale or deep? The intensity of the color of the wine indicates its age. Red wines lose color as they age, while white wines gain color as they age.

For example, an older red will be clearer and have brownish tints. A very old white will have a bronze-gold or amber color. Color intensity also varies with the type of the grape.

## 4. Swirl

Rest the base of the glass on a hard surface, hold the stem, and rotate the wrist to swirl it. This releases more of the wine's **aroma**.

When the glass is held still, the liquid lingers along the sides as it returns to the bowl of the glass, forming "**legs**" or "**tears**". People once attributed legs to "better wines". But today it more widely thought that legs merely reflect the amount of alcohol, and therefore, the sweetness in the wine. Legs are a product of the simple fact that alcohol (ethanol) in wine, evaporates more quickly than water, so the more legs, the more alcohol.





## 5. Sniff

Take a good sniff before you taste! You want to isolate the aromas from the physical properties of the wine, such as acidity, alcohol, and tannins. Besides, most of what we think of as taste is actually smell (some say over 70% of what we taste stems from what we smell). The smell of a wine is known as the “**nose**”.

Take a quick whiff to gain a first impression. Then stick your nose down into the glass and take a deep inhale through your nose. You are trying to fully absorb the aromas. The molecules must travel to your brain so you can associate names to smells. What comes to mind--a flower, fruit, spice, herb, nut, or other substance? Gently swirl the wine and let the aromas mix and mingle and sniff again.

What should you look for?

It may be difficult at first to describe what you smell, but you will quickly learn to identify such smells:

**Fruity** (blackberries, plums, lemon, raspberries)

**Floral** (perfumes like rose or lily)

**Herbal** (mint, tarragon, rosemary, or grass)

**Earthy** (mushrooms or dry leaves)

**Spicy** (clove, cinnamon, pepper, spices)

**Nutty** (oak, hazelnut, almond, pistachio)

More....

The idea is to *think* about what you smell. You will begin to describe the wine's character.

Here are a few definitions:

**Aroma** = smells associated with the grape variety

**Bouquet** = more complex smells that stem from aging in the bottle

**Nose** = can refer to either aroma or bouquet

Try to determine if what you smell is faint or pronounced (known as “intensity”).

If you smell something musty or off-odor, there may be an issue with quality. It is at this stage that you might discover that a wine is “**corked**”. This condition means that the wine that has contaminated with TCA (2,4,6-Trichloroanisole). A corked wine has a characteristic odor, described as resembling a moldy newspaper, wet dog, or damp basement. In almost all cases of corked wine the wine's native aromas are reduced significantly; a very tainted wine is completely undrinkable (though harmless). Although TCA contamination usually comes from corks, it can





also come from barrels, other cooperage or even from wood within the cellar including walls or beams. The wine industry estimates that as many as 3% to 7% of all wines have TCA contamination at levels that can be detected by consumers. Because most people are not trained to recognize the smell and taste of TCA, only a very small fraction of these bad bottles are ever returned to stores or sent back at a restaurant. If you get a corked wine, you should return it to the store from which it was purchased or refuse it at the restaurant.

## 6. Sip

Take a small sip of wine and then take in a little air, making a sort of “slurping action”. This aerates the wine a bit more, which releases more of the aromas. Swish the wine around so that it touches every part of your mouth for up to 15 seconds. This is known as “**chewing**” the wine!

What should you look for?

Your initial impression of the wine is important. Concentrate on these qualities:

**Body** = How does it feel in your mouth? Is it *light, medium, or heavy*? What is the texture like-- *rough* like wool or *smooth* like silk?

**Flavor** = Is it sweet or acidic? Is it spicy or fruity? Is it tasteless? How intense are the flavors?

*DO YOU LIKE THE WINE?*

## 7. Savor — Swallow or Spit!

**Savor** = To appreciate fully; enjoy or relish. We can’t say enough about this important step!



Swallow or spit and immediately exhale through your nose. How long do the aroma and taste linger? This is called “**finish**”. The better the wine, the longer the finish.

After you have swallowed or spit out the wine, see if you can find more aromas than you had found by smelling with your nose, and note these aromas. Compare the aromas you found with your mouth with those you found with your nose, and





see if they are similar. If the aromas are basically the same, this is a sign of a well-made wine. If they are different, there may be an issue with the quality of the wine.

If you plan to taste a number of wines, your judgment will remain clearer if you spit rather than swallow. Discard the remainder of the wine into a spittoon.

More....

Here's more to consider as you reflect about the wine you just tasted:

**Body** = This has to do with the volume and weight of the wine. Think of milk, where cream is full-bodied; regular milk is medium bodied; and skim-milk is light-bodied.

**Sweetness / Sugar** = If a wine is sweet, you'll immediately notice it on the tip of your tongue. During fermentation the sugars are converted into alcohol. Fermentation can be stopped while the wine is somewhat sweet, or it might continue until there's no apparent sugar in the wine. It is then called "**dry**" (and has less than .5% sugar); sweeter wines are sometimes referred to as "**off-dry**".

**Acidity** = Too much acid (like lemon juice or vinegar) causes a wine to taste sour, tart or harsh. Too little, and it's known as "**flabby**" or "**wilted**". Balance is very important if the wine is to be refreshing.

**Alcohol** = The alcohol shouldn't stand apart from the other elements. When the alcohol is too high, there will be a bit of a burning sensation after the wine is swallowed. Balance is also very important for this component.

**Tannin** = This is an astringent element that occurs naturally in the seeds, stems and skins of grapes and has a mouth-puckering quality. Tannin is the stuff that makes young red wines seem harsh and leaves the mouth feeling dry; its role as preservative is extremely important in high quality red wines that are made to age for many years.

**Fruit** = The taste and intensity of the fruit in the mouth; generally, the better the wine, the more evident the fruit. Also, younger wines will often display more fruit than mature wine.

**Crisp** = An acidic wine that is not overly sweet.

**Palate** = This refers to the taste and feel of the wine in the mouth.





**Finish** = The better the wine, the longer the aftertaste—sometimes over a minute. A long-lingering finish suggests the wine will age well; a short finish suggests that it is meant to be drunk now.

**Balance** = When all the components work together (acidity, sweetness, tannin, fruitiness), it is said to be in balance.

**Complex** = When a wine has multi-layers of flavors that change with aeration time, it is said to be complex.

*A GREAT WINE IS BALANCED, COMPLEX, AND OFFERS A LONG FINISH.*

## 8. Score

Having considered the above elements, what did you think of the wine?

Give it a score, either overall (e.g., use a scale of 1 to 5 or 1 to 10) or by component (e.g., Appearance 0-4, Nose 0-6, Taste 0-6, Overall quality 0-4).

TastingMaster software provides numerous scales for a tasting event.

[Sample Scoring Screen](#)

| Riley   |               |                           |
|---|---------------|---------------------------|
| Wines   | Tasting Notes | Enter a value from 1 to 5 |
| ▶ 2005 Rosenblum Paso Robles [USA] Zinfandel      |               | 3                         |
| ▶ 2005 Brown Estate Chiles Valley [USA] Zinfandel |               | 5                         |
| ▶ 2005 A. Rafanelli Dry Creek Valley [USA]        |               | 3                         |
| ▶ 2005 Peachy Canyon Paso Robles [USA]            |               | 3                         |
| ▶ 2005 Rosenblum Amador County [USA]              |               |                           |

Using simple 1-5 rating scale

5 = I love this wine

2 = This wine is not that good

4 = I really like this wine

1 = I really don't like this wine

3 = This wine is good





Next type or write your comments. Did you like this wine? What was it about the wine that you liked or didn't like? How would you describe the flavor and the texture? The aroma and bouquet? The finish?

|   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| 2005 Brown Estate<br>Chiles Valley [USA]<br>Zinfandel | ABC<br>Berry, fruit; incredibly long finish. This wine is worth every penny. | 5 |
|---|--|---|

## 9. Start again!

Taste the other wines in the same way and then taste them all again in a different sequence. Be sure to update your notes after re-tasting the wines.



## Other TastingMaster Wine Tasting Materials

### Wine Tasting Party Tri-fold

You can print the Wine Tasting Party Tri-fold from the "Get ready for your tasting" tab as you set up a new tasting. You can print a PDF without your wines inserted (write them in yourself) or you can let TastingMaster grab the wines you have selected for the tasting and place them in the Tri-fold before you print it.

This Tri-fold has a simplified version of this "How to Taste Wine" document to be used as a guide during the tasting event. Display it near the bottles of wine or next to the computer where people type their scores and tasting notes.

### Wine Glass Rings

You can print the Wine Glass Rings from the "Get ready for your tasting" tab as you set up a new tasting. You can print a PDF without taster names inserted (write them in yourself) or you can let TastingMaster grab the names of the tasters you have selected for the tasting and place them in the rings before you print.

### Tasting Wine Video

This 3-minute video was produced to complement this document and the Tri-fold. You can show it before people start tasting wine. It can be shown from the TastingMaster Tutorials menu.

## How to Taste Wine





## How to Read a Wine Label

This document will help you figure out what to put into TastingMaster software to describe the wines you will taste. The software itself also includes many tips and pre-loaded lists to assist you as you type in the necessary information about the wines. You can find this document on the TastingMaster Tutorials menu.

## Party Kit

There are many ways TastingMaster software can help you make your wine tasting event professional, as well as save you a lot of time. The party kit includes a wine tasting party checklist ("Hosting a Wine Tasting Party") and be found on the TastingMaster Tutorials menu. Other items, such as email or printed invitations, can be printed from the "Get ready for your tasting" tab as you set up a tasting event.

