

HOW TO TAKE A WINE TASTING NOTE

This standardized tasting note form has been developed for beginners and professionals alike. For beginners, it provides a framework to record impressions in a meaningful way. For professionals, it puts the repetitive parts of a note in quick multiple-choice selections while still allowing some flexibility.

If this is your first tasting note or if you've never taken a standardized tasting note, the form may look a little daunting. Don't let it put you off – the fundamentals aren't difficult. Indeed, after a few notes, you can be tasting like a pro.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Wine, of course! One of the best ways to accelerate your wine tasting ability is to compare two or more wines at one time.
- A tulip-shaped wine glass. The tulip shape concentrates the aroma to make it more pronounced. Fill the glass(es) to the approximate level shown at right.
- A relaxed and open mind. Relaxation is critical to concentration.



As we go through the tasting note, please refer to the example note at right.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before we taste, let's take care of the information on the top of the tasting note form. Wine labels often require a bit of deciphering, so if you're stuck, please visit www.delongwine.com/labels for assistance.

tasting date, location and tasting partner(s): These can be helpful in triggering your smell memory.

wine name: Wines don't always have a proprietary name (e.g., *Insignia*, *Tignanello*) in addition to producer and region (e.g., *Guigal Côte du Rhône*, *Antinori Chianti Classico*, etc.), so sometimes this part of the form is simply left blank.

producer: Usually this is front and center on the label, but it can be surprisingly difficult to locate.

region/appellation: This part is sometimes confused with the grape variety (i.e., wines from the region *Chablis* are made from the grape variety *Chardonnay*).

grape varieties: Sometimes this requires a little research such as visiting the producer's website.

vintage, alcohol, price: All useful pieces of information.

Let's take a look at the wine. Hold your glass against a white background such as a tablecloth or piece of paper.

COLOUR HUE: Wines have a wide range of hues from pale green to amber in whites to purple-red to brown in reds. The hue of a young wine can give some indication of the grape variety it came from (i.e., *Barbera* – ruby, *Riesling* – pale green, *Chenin Blanc* – yellow, etc.). With age these hues change due to gradual oxidation. Over time red wines become brick and then brown, while white wines become more amber and rosés become more copper coloured.

COLOUR DEPTH: The intensity of colour depth also varies widely. Red wines get lighter with age while white wines tend to get darker.

CLARITY: Clarity used to be of utmost importance since lack thereof indicated spoilage. Since many wines are now unfiltered and may have a slight haze of sediment, only marked cloudiness indicates spoilage.

Extra space is provided for additional notes on the wine's appearance, such as the mousse/bubbles in sparkling wine or the edge/rim in a still wine. In our example, a note about the rim has been added. This information is not absolutely necessary for beginners but can tell a little about the concentration of the solids in the wine. A narrow rim indicates a higher concentration.

tasting date: 5-25-06 location: Home

tasting partner(s): Deborah and Leo

wine name: Belleruche

producer: M. Chapoutier

region/appellation: Cotes-du-Rhône Rouge

grape varieties: Grenache 80%, Syrah 20%

vintage: 2003 alcohol: 13.5% price: \$9.99

COLOUR HUE:
 WHITE: greenish | yellow | straw yellow | gold | amber
 RED: purplish | ruby | red | garnet | brick | brown
 ROSÉ: pink | salmon | orange | copper

COLOUR DEPTH:
 watery | pale | medium | deep | dark

CLARITY:
 clear | slight haze | cloudy

w/ narrow magenta rim

AROMA INTENSITY:
 low | moderate | aromatic | powerful

DEVELOPMENT:
 youthful | some age | aged

AROMAS:
 earthy, raspberry/blackberry jam w/
 light pepper spice, anise, violets

DRY/SWEET:
 bone dry | dry | off dry | medium sweet | sweet | very sweet

BODY:
 very light | light | medium | medium-full | full-bodied | heavy

ACIDITY:
 tart | crisp | lively | smooth | flabby

TANNINS (IF PRESENT):
 LEVEL: low | medium | high TYPE: soft | round | dry | hard

FLAVOUR INTENSITY:
 weak | moderate | flavourful | powerful

FLAVOURS:
 raspberry jam, licorice, soft fruity,
 earthy, black pepper on the finish

FINISH:
 short (< 3 sec) | medium (4-5) | long (5-7) | v. long (>8 sec)

CONCLUSION/BALANCE:
 A little too much alcohol but a good
 simple everyday wine

rating: ★★☆☆☆

FOOD: roast chicken **FOOD PAIRING:** MATCH: perfect | good | neutral | bad

We're now going to smell the wine. Give the glass a big swirl to release the aromas above the surface of the wine and inhale as if you were smelling a flower.

If you sense something wrong, take a look at the FAULTS section on the opposite side of this sheet. If there's a fault in the wine, return the wine to where you purchased it and get a replacement bottle.

AROMA INTENSITY: Some wines are more aromatic than others, but serving temperature can also be a factor. When served too cool, they lack aroma intensity. As a general guideline, whites and rosés should be served at 47-50°F (8-10°C) while reds should be served at 58-65°F (14-18°C). If you want to maximize the aroma, serve any colour of wine at 65°F (18°C); but above this temperature, the aroma, or nose, may be dominated by the smell of evaporating alcohol.

DEVELOPMENT: The age of a wine can be detected in its colour, but also in its aroma. A young wine will usually have a fragrance that is associated with the grape variety it is made from. Tannic young red wines meant to age can seem CLOSED if consumed prematurely. With age, wines can take on more mature aromas such as TOBACCO and LEATHER while becoming softer and more complex. Most wines, however, aren't made to age and will simply become progressively less fruity and, at a certain point, undrinkable.

AROMAS: The hard part. If you're just starting out, it may be difficult to describe the aroma. Take a look at the WINE TASTING TERMS on the other side of this page and remember, when in doubt go for the most general term (i.e., FLORAL instead of VIOLETS). For example, you don't need to describe all the ingredients of a fruit salad. Just start with "fruit" and try to write down the more specific components in the order you perceive them. It takes practice and you'll get much better at describing what you smell the more you taste wines.

VARIETALLY CORRECT? Grape varieties can be identified by certain characteristics. The following is a useful shorthand for some typical descriptors of several common grape varieties.

WHITE WINE GRAPES	RED WINE GRAPES
Albariño: lemons, tropical fruits	Cabernet Sauvignon: blackcurrant, anise, cedar
Chenin Blanc: honey, lemon, wax, wet wool, quince	Gamay: strawberry, banana
Chardonnay: white fruits (cool climates), tropical fruits (warm climates), vanilla (oaked)	Grenache: raspberry, anise, white pepper
Garganega (the Soave grape): lemons, almonds, white fruits	Merlot: plums, chocolate, soft tannins
Gewürztraminer: lychees, spice	Nebbiolo: rose, tar, truffles
Grüner Veltliner: white pepper, lentil, grapefruit	Pinot Noir: red fruits, fall leaves, horseradish
Pinot Gris: white fruits, spice	Sangiovese: sour cherries, tomatoes, clove
Pinot Blanc: green apples	Syrah/Shiraz: black pepper, black fruits
Riesling: apple, honey, petrol	Tempranillo: strawberry, oak, coconut, spice
Sauvignon Blanc: gooseberries, grass	Zinfandel: black cherry, blackberry
Viognier: apricots, exotic perfume, spice	

Time to taste: Take a good mouthful of wine and let it coat all parts of your tongue. Hold it in your mouth for 5-10 seconds. If you need to take another taste, remember to wait 30 seconds for your palate to clear.

DRY/SWEET: Fermentation converts grape sugars to alcohol; sweeter wines simply haven't been fully converted and have varying degrees of RESIDUAL SUGAR. Many white wines and most red wines (that aren't fortified) are DRY but still have a tiny hint of sweetness due to the fruit and alcohol, without which they would be considered BONE DRY. Moving up the sweetness scale, many German Rieslings are OFF-DRY or slightly sweet (although they can be found in all sweetness levels), while dessert wines range

from MEDIUM SWEET to VERY SWEET.

BODY: This is the weight of the wine on your palate, due to the amount of alcohol, glycerol, residual sugar and extract (soluble solids). A common error for new wine tasters is to call all wines light-bodied – and relative to a milkshake, all wines are light-bodied. A very light-bodied wine will feel lighter than water in your mouth while a very full-bodied or heavy wine will feel more like Port (a rich fortified wine). A word of caution: Don't be fooled by TANNINS (see below).

ACIDITY: All wine is naturally acidic. Acidity can be sensed on the sides of the tongue with a slight tingling sensation. At higher levels, you will also start to salivate. The range goes from tart to flabby. Flabby gets its name from the "blah" sensation when there just isn't enough acid to stimulate the tongue. Red wines tend to be less acidic than white wines.

TANNINS: Red wines (and a few whites) get their colour and tannins from contact with grape skins during fermentation. Tannins can also come from oak barrels and are sensed on the top of the tongue. High, hard tannins will have a pronounced raspy drying effect which can confuse the sensation of weight – the drying on the tongue makes the wine seem lighter. Keep this in mind especially with young red wines. A high level of soft or round tannins will give an almost chewy texture to a wine.

FLAVOUR INTENSITY: The intensity on the palate is usually similar to the intensity on the nose. Some wines will disappoint with a lower level of palate intensity and a rare one will have a palate intensity that surpasses that of the nose.

FLAVOURS: The flavours sensed here will usually be similar to the aromas perceived on the nose. The difference here is that the flavours are now entering your nasal cavity from the back door via the rear of your mouth instead of directly through the nostrils. Again, concentrate on picking out a few of the major flavours. The initial flavours/sensations (or lack thereof) are called the ATTACK, followed by the MID PALATE, and then the FINISH after you spit or swallow.

FINISH: In addition to the FLAVOUR(S) on the FINISH, the length of a wine is often an indication of quality; the longer the better. This is fairly easy to determine with a little practise – it's just the amount of time it takes for the flavour intensity to drop off substantially after spitting or swallowing.

CONCLUSION/BALANCE: CONCLUSIONS are your general assessments of the wine, of which BALANCE should play a part. Note here if any of the elements are out of balance, especially if in excess. Excess alcohol feels hot, excess acidity is sharply tart, excess tannins are very rough, and excess residual sugar is cloyingly sweet. Any other impressions – including the positive ones, of course! – should go here as well.

RATING: Ratings are a useful shorthand to determine how much a wine was enjoyed and if it should (or should not) be purchased again. Use any scale you wish; however, the 5-star scale is recommended here for ease of use.

☆☆☆☆☆ POOR
 ★☆☆☆☆ FAIR
 ★★☆☆☆ GOOD
 ★★★☆☆ VERY GOOD
 ★★★★☆ EXCELLENT
 ★★★★★ OUTSTANDING

FOOD PAIRING: This is one of the most practical and useful parts of the note. To keep things simple, only the main dish is noted. Remember: if you consider wine a food, it makes pairing it less mysterious.

That's it. If this was your first formal tasting note, congratulations! Don't be discouraged if you weren't able to sense even half of what was discussed. You'll get better each time you taste.

For more instruction and guided tasting notes, please visit www.delongwine.com/notes

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