



SIGHT



NOSE



PALATE

\ THE  
GRAPE  
GRIND

# BLIND TASTING GUIDE

I will first say that it's not necessary to be able to identify a wine variety BLIND in many life settings outside of a wine exam. However, learning blind tasting skills is incredibly valuable for anyone intrigued by the elements that make wine so appealing! These include visual elements, aromas, flavors, and textures! Many of the components in this process you do naturally when you are tasting wine (they involve all of your senses) ...blind tasting is all about fine tuning them! Anyone can become an expert taster with practice. The process is all about constant practice and committing certain benchmark descriptors of classic varieties to memory.

These basic components are found in every certification (CMS, WSET, and SWE)! That being said, I do have personal experience with the Deductive Tasting Process from The Court of Master Sommeliers.

This guide is meant to lead you through the process. So line up 2-4 wines (that you don't know) and follow the process one wine at a time!

\*NOTE: you may use your CMS or WSET grid to follow along with your wines, or print a simple framework available on the GUIDES page of [thegrapegrind.com](http://thegrapegrind.com)



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# SIGHT

I've broken sight into the three areas that I believe to be most important when starting this process (more elements are added the further along you go). COLOR is the only element truly necessary for white wines at first, while red wines can include all three listed below.

## COLOR

\*TAKE YOUR WINE and hold it at an angle over a white piece of paper! Doing this in a well-lit space is ideal and having a white background helps you to see the actual color better! Choose the color you believe best fits your wine. (Some may fall into two categories, or fade to another color on the rim.)

### WHITE WINE:

### RED WINE:



WATER /CLEAR



PALE /STRAW



YELLOW /LEMON



GOLD /TAWNY



GARNET



RUBY



PURPLE

\*If a white wine is darker (or more yellow) in color it usually means the wine has some oak influence and/or is oxidized (aged)! It also could mean the grape is late harvest and has seen botrytis (noble rot). Pale wines are typically more youthful or a variety meant to be consumed young.

\*Most red wines are ruby in color, but some gravitate towards purple (thicker skin/higher phenolic compounds) while others gravitate towards garnet (thinner skin/age faster).

\*for some red wines, winemakers use additives to make a wine darker (to appeal to the consumer), however these wines with color additives will not be used in an exam setting (A Nebbiolo should not "naturally" look purple).



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## CONCENTRATION

How well can you read through the wine? The next two components apply to red wines.



PALE



MED



DEEP

\*This is somewhat linked with COLOR! Typically, purple wines are more opaque (deep), while garnet or light ruby wines are more pale! However there are some that fall in opposite camps and that usually has to do with age or winemaking practices.

## STAINING

\*When you slowly swirl your wine, does the color cling to the glass (appearing to "stain" it)? Typically highly concentrated wines will stain the glass more!

\*Determine if there is NONE, LIGHT, MEDIUM, or HEAVY staining.

After you have these down, you can include **TEARING/VISCOSITY, RIM VARIATION, and EVIDENCE OF GAS or SEDIMENT** to your analysis!

## NOSE

\*First SWIRL your wine! You see people do this often and it's actually important. Swirling takes the aromas and lifts them to the surface of the wine. It makes them more available to your nose.

\*When you are smelling TRY NOT TO DO IT TOO MUCH! This one is hard, and you'll probably smell the wine a lot when starting, but know that the more times you smell a wine, the more you are burning out your olfactory bulb! Your best smell is the first and second sniff!



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## INSTENSITY

- \*This one applies to white wines (more so than red).
- \*When you are about to put your nose to the glass, do the aromas jump out at you before your nose reaches the glass? OR do you feel like you are digging your nose into the glass to find them?
- \*Usually intensity is amplified by floral notes! (sometimes it can include vegetal aromas, like green pepper) but almost always it's FLOWERS!
- \*Determine if the intensity is LOW (not floral), MEDIUM (some flowers), or HIGH (extremely perfumed).

## FRUIT

\*There are many fruits in the world, so it helps to think about fruit CAMPS instead of pinpointing specifics at first. You can often find many fruit "camps" in a wine, but think about which ones DOMINATE. For example: the benchmark fruit camps for Riesling are typically Stone Fruit and Citrus, where Chardonnay typically falls in the Orchard Fruit and Citrus Fruit camps (even though both of these varieties can show fruit from each of the below categories).

### WHITE WINE:



#### ORCHARD

Apple  
Pear



#### CITRUS

Lemon  
Lime  
Orange  
Grapefruit



#### STONE

Peach  
Apricot  
Plum



#### TROPICAL

Pineapple  
Passionfruit  
Papaya  
Banana

\*With red wines these "camps" relate to a fruit color! Focus on if the wine is black fruit dominant, red fruit dominant, or BOTH. Blue fruit is almost always a secondary camp (but it IS important because hints of blue can be found in certain varieties like Syrah, Malbec, and Zin). Some wines like Pinot Noir are known for being Red Fruit dominant, while Cabernet is known for being Black Fruit dominant.

### RED WINE:



#### RED FRUIT

Red Cherry  
Strawberry  
Raspberry  
Cranberry



#### BLACK FRUIT

Black Cherry  
Black Raspberry  
Blackberry  
Plum  
Black Currant



#### BLUE FRUIT

Blueberry  
Boysenberry  
Huckleberry



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## FRUIT CONDITION

\*You also need to think about the condition of the fruit. If it's ripe strawberry, the wine might be from a warmer climate or riper grapes. If it's tart raspberry, the wine may be from a cooler climate.

\*Determine if the wine is TART or RIPE (or even JAMMY or DRIED!) on the nose.

## NON-FRUIT

\*SOME of these aromas come from the grape while others come from (or are enhanced by) the winemaking process!

\*Often a little harder to pinpoint non-fruit, but try to pick out the top 2-4 that are DOMINANT and actually define the wine!

### WHITE WINE:



FLORAL: yellow and white flowers (this relates to intensity)

HERBAL: fresh or dried (basil, tarragon, oregano)

VEGETAL: typically alludes to bell peppers (green) and found in the Bordeaux Varieties (Sauvignon Blanc for white) sometimes white wines can also show chive, onion, or radish

EARTH (organic): think of the woods here! Soil, Wet Leaves, Mushrooms

MINERAL (inorganic): this is where the grape picks up aromas from the soil it's grown in (think of fresh river water, wet rocks, or rain on a sidewalk)

HONEY: Usually applies to "rich" late harvest grapes

BREAD/LEES: lees are dead yeast cells that are sometimes left in contact with wine during winemaking (think of how Champagne usually gives you a toasty/bread quality)

BUTTER: some can come from oak, but a majority comes from Malolactic Fermentation (look this one up!)

SPICE: some can come from Oak, like baking spices (Cinn/Nutmeg) and some can come from Botrytis, like Ginger

VANILLA: usually an indicator of Oak! (American oak is more RICH vanilla/caramel/coconut, while French Oak is more SUBTLE and vanilla bean quality)



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### RED WINE:

				
FLORAL	HERBAL <small>*EUCALYPTUS *MINT</small>	VEGETAL	TOMATO/ BALSAMIC	EARTH
				
MINERAL	MEAT/ LEATHER	BLACK PEPPER	BAKING SPICE	VANILLA/ COFFEE/ CHOCOLATE

FLORAL: red or purple flowers! Some flowers are known for being key features in classic wines. Nebbiolo = tar and ROSES Grenache = VIOLETS

HERBAL: fresh or dried herbs! Also can include black tea and licorice. Mint/Eucalyptus can be highly prevalent notes in Australian reds

VEGETAL: typically alludes to bell peppers (green) and found in the Bordeaux Varieties

TOMATO/BALSAMIC: a stemmy/leafy quality or even a sweet balsamic note. This is a dominant aroma/taste in some Italian wines like Sangiovese/Nebbiolo

EARTH (organic): think of the woods here! Soil, Wet Leaves, Mushrooms

MINERAL (inorganic): more difficult to pick up in reds, but can include graphite/pencil shavings, volcanic burnt rock (smoky smell)

MEAT/LEATHER: savory notes! Some describe this as "bloody"

BLACK PEPPER: can fall in the spice camp, but quite different from oak driven baking spices. It can be a major giveaway in some heavier reds, like Syrah

BAKING SPICE: typically Cinn/Nutmeg and Oak driven

VANILLA/CHOC/COFFEE: usually an indicator of Oak! (American oak is more RICH vanilla/mocha/coconut, while French Oak is more SUBTLE and vanilla bean or dark chocolate)

## PALATE

\*Structure is the most important area here, but you will first want to identify if the wine is dry or sweet (for white wine) and also re-evaluate your Fruit and Non-fruit categories.

\*Take a small sip and let it coat your entire mouth (I'm talking around your tongue and the sides).

-I'll also note that it's important to spit if you're going to be tasting a lot (but do what you will with that!)



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# SWEET vs DRY

\*The most important thing to know here is that SWEET and FRUITY are two different things, and are often confused! Sometimes a wine has really RIPE flavors and comes off as SWEET, but SWEET technically has to do with Residual Sugar (or sugar left over after a wine has fermented).

\*Residual Sugar takes practice to identify! Think of it more like a texture, or a feeling, rather than a flavor. (It has a weighted richness/heaviness.)

\*Determine if the wine is SWEET, OFF-DRY, or DRY.

# FRUIT + NON-FRUIT

Re-evaluate these categories and see if your aromas stayed the same or changed on the palate.

## WHITE WINE FRUIT:

			
ORCHARD	CITRUS	STONE	TROPICAL

## RED WINE FRUIT:

		
RED FRUIT	BLACK FRUIT	BLUE FRUIT

# FRUIT CONDITION

## TART

wines more tart in fruit may possibly be from areas with less sunshine

## RIPE

wines with more ripe fruit may possibly be from areas with more sunshine

## JAMMY

generally from warmer climates with lots of sun, or having to do with winemaking techniques

## DRIED

generally aged wines

Determine if the fruit condition on the palate is more RIPE or more TART than the aroma. This can help in identifying the climate or region.

\*Wines that get MORE TART from the nose to the palate are more likely to be from the old world (FR, IT, SP). Wines that stay RIPE or get RIPER from the nose to the palate are more likely to be from the new world (US, NZ, AUS, CH, ARG)!

## WHITE WINE NON-FRUIT:

				
FLORAL	HERBAL	VEGETAL	EARTH	MINERAL
				
HONEY/ BOTRYTIS	BREAD/ LEES	BUTTER/ MALO	SPICE /OAK	VANILLA /OAK

## RED WINE NON-FRUIT:

				
FLORAL	HERBAL	VEGETAL	TOMATO/ BALSAMIC	EARTH
				
MINERAL	MEAT/ LEATHER	BLACK PEPPER	BAKING SPICE	VANILLA/ COFFEE/ CHOCOLATE

\*Remember for non-fruit, you'll want 2-4 that are DOMINANT!



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## STRUCTURE

\*The structural or textural elements are what give a wine its "backbone" and create BALANCE! When a wine is too high or too low in the following elements, it will throw off the entire composition, and sometimes make the wine "undrinkable".

\*All of these components are measured on a scale of LOW (Light), MEDIUM MINUS, MEDIUM, MEDIUM PLUS, and HIGH (Full) (Med- or Med+ are allowed on the CMS scale)



### BODY

LIGHT

MEDIUM

FULL

\*The best comparison I've seen for this is the milk comparison: Light Body is the consistency of WATER (light on the palate, goes down easy). Full Body is the consistency of 2% MILK (heavy on the palate/coats the mouth). Somewhere in the middle is Medium Body, or the consistency of SKIM MILK.

### ALCOHOL

LOW  
(10%)

MEDIUM  
12.5-13.5%

HIGH  
(14.5%)

\*Sometimes you can smell alcohol, but when identifying it on the palate specifically, it will usually HEAT UP the back of your throat (so swallowing a little helps).

\*Alcohol is listed on the bottle, so this is a fun one to actually check!

### ACID

\*Take a sip and see how much your mouth waters. (You are really looking to the sides of your tongue, which is where you will feel acid the most!)

\*Sometimes a lot of citrus can make you think a wine has more acid than it does, so it's important to pay attention to how much you salivate!

### TANNIN (RED WINE)

\*Tannins are compounds from the skins and seeds of red wine and leave a bitter/astringent feeling on your palate. They dry out your mouth and make your tongue feel "grippy". Nebbiolo is a red wine known for very high tannin, while Pinot Noir is known for lower tannin.

### PHENOLIC BITTERNESS (WHITE WINE)

This element is replaced by tannin in red wine, but it's not quite the same thing! What you experience is similar though: a bitter taste that gives your tongue a slight numbness/ting

\*This is often found in Pinot Grigio and Albarino among others.

\*No scale for this one, just note if it is present or not!



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# CONCLUSION

NOW IT's all about PROCESS OF ELIMINATION! This is where it helps to know the benchmark features of classic varieties (that way you can start with three varieties and eliminate them one by one based on your responses to the above categories).

## POSSIBLE VARIETIES

### OLD WORLD vs NEW WORLD

\*Recently this has been harder to guess, as global warming is creating riper "old world" wines and winemaking styles in the new world are shifting! IN GENERAL, wines that are more fruit driven, riper, and have higher alcohol are more likely from the "New World", and wines that are more earth driven, tart, and higher in acidity are more likely from the "Old World".

## POSSIBLE COUNTRIES

### FINAL CONCLUSION!

\*\*\*Now reveal the wine! Were you right? Were you close? If not, that's okay! Think about what aromas, flavors or structural elements you missed, and keep going back to the wine! Being wrong is the best way to learn!

Eventually for you can consider AGE RANGE and QUALITY LEVEL for your Conclusion analysis...

**YOU DID IT!!!  
NOW CONTINUE TO PRACTICE THIS  
PROCESS AND CALIBRATE YOUR PALATE!**