



# Aldiploma Module Two

The Principles Of Wine Tasting

# Grape Varieties And Wine Tasting

This module will give you a step by step guide to tasting wine, including a guide to identifying different flavours and assessing the quality of a wine. You'll also find a cheat sheet on matching wine to your food and tips on how to properly store and serve wine. Once you're a pro and have finished the module, why not try hosting a tasting session yourself?

## 1. Why Do Wines Taste Different?

The different tastes in wine can be attributed to a few key things:

1. The Grape Variety
2. Where the grapes are grown (climate, soil, aspect and so on = terroir)
3. How the wine is made

## 2. Grape Variety

If you find yourself spending hours in the wine aisle trying to decide what wine to buy or are simply looking to try something new, but you're not sure what the wine will taste like, looking at the grape variety is the simplest way to work out what you can expect and if you'll enjoy it.

The table below contains 28 of the most common varieties of grapes, listed alphabetically, and highlights some of the key flavours of these wines alongside the type of wine they usually produce, their style and body:

Grape Variety	Type	Style/Body	Taste
<b>Albariño</b>	White wine	Light to medium	Fresh/peach & mineral
<b>Bacchus</b>	White wine	Light bodied	Crisp/elderflower & grass
<b>Chardonnay - Chablis</b> <b>Chardonnay - NW*</b>	White wine	Light to full	Crisp/apples & honey Ripe/peach & pineapple
<b>Chenin Blanc</b> <b>Chenin Blanc - NW*</b>	White wine/sweet wine	Light to full & sweet	Crisp/pear & apples Ripe/guava and melon
<b>Fiano</b>	White wine	Medium bodied	Fresh/peach & plum
<b>Gavi</b>	White wine	Light to medium	Fresh/citrus & fennel
<b>Gewürztraminer</b>	White wine/sweet wine	Medium	Ripe/roses & lychees
<b>Grüner Veltliner</b>	White wine	Light to medium	Fresh/pepper & grapefruit
<b>Melon de Bourgogne (Muscadet)</b>	White wine	Light	Crisp/mineral & citrus
<b>Picpoul de Pinet</b>	White wine	Light	Crisp/apples and pears
<b>Pinot Gris/Grigio</b>	White wine/sweet wine	Light to full	Fresh/nuts & spice
<b>Riesling</b>	White wine/sweet wine	Light to sweet	Crisp/floral & lime
<b>Sauvignon Blanc</b>	White wine	Light	Fresh/grass & green pepper
<b>Viognier</b>	White wine	Full	Ripe/peach & apricot
<b>Cabernet Sauvignon</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium to full	Structured/blackcurrant
<b>Carménère</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium to full	Structured/cassis & leaf

Grape Variety	Type	Style/Body	Taste
<b>Gamay (Beaujolais)</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Light to medium	Supple/red fruits
<b>Grenache</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Light to medium	Juicy/Pepper & cherry
<b>Malbec</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium to full	Rich/black berry fruits
<b>Merlot</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium	Juicy/plums & cherries
<b>Nebbiolo (Barolo)</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium	Structured/roses & cherries
<b>Nero D'Avola</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium to full	Rich/chocolate & cherry
<b>Pinot Noir</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Light to medium	Soft/red fruits & spice
<b>Pinotage</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium to full	Rich/black fruits & spice
<b>Sangiovese (Chianti)</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium	Structured/cherry & herbs
<b>Syrah/Shiraz</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium to full	Rich/blackberry & violets
<b>Tempranillo (Rioja)</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium	Rich/dill & cherries
<b>Zinfandel</b>	Red wine/rosé wine	Medium to full	Rich/baked rich fruits

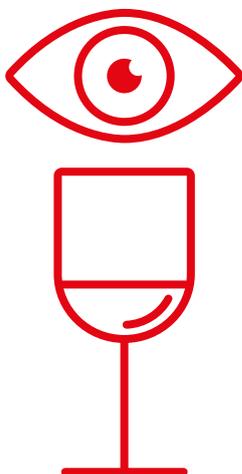
\*NW = New World

## 3. How To Taste Wine Properly

### A Systematic Guide To Tasting Wine

There are **THREE** simple steps to follow that will make it much easier to identify specific aromas and flavours from your glass of wine.

Pour yourself a small measure of each of the six wines from the tasting case in turn and follow the below process; you'll find a table for your notes below the three steps. You might wish to quickly rinse out the glass in between each wine and take a small sip of water to cleanse the palate.



**Look**



**Smell**



**Taste**

## Step 1. Look

- First you need to pour a small, tasting size measure of wine into your glass (maybe start with a couple of inches maximum)
- Once you've poured yourself a small measure, take a look at the wine so you can describe the colour
- For each type of still wine, there are different colours we can use to describe their appearance. Use the below table to help guide you:

Wine Type	Colour
<b>White</b>	water white - lemon yellow - golden
<b>Rosé</b>	pale onion skin - medium salmon - cranberry
<b>Red</b>	youthful purple - ruby - garnet

- The colour of the wine can give you an indication as to what body the wine is likely to have. For example, with red wine, if the wine looks inky and really deep, it is likely to be full-bodied with lots of fruit and flavour. But if the wine is lighter in colour, then it is likely to be more restrained with subtle fruit and softer tannins.

## Step 2. Smell

- Now you have determined the colour of the wine and worked out what that is telling you – it's time to smell the wine!
- Firstly, hold the wine glass by the stem - this will not only stop the wine from warming up, but will also give you greater control over the glass
- Gently swirl it around in a circular motion for a couple of seconds. We recommend going anti-clockwise and if you're struggling to get a good swirl than place the wine glass on a table to steady the glass
- Once you've done this for a few seconds, gently smell the wine; the swirling encourages oxygen into the wine and makes it easier to smell aromas
- This process may seem terribly pretentious at first, but you'll really be able to notice the difference in the aromas (not convinced? Try smelling the wine without any swirling and then after swirling)
- Smelling the wine is a key part of enjoying it. It's not widely known that you don't really 'wine taste' as there are only five basic tastes (sweet, salty, sour, bitter, unami). It is the taste which you determine on your tongue, coupled with aroma that is determined by your nose, that combines to create wine flavour so you really 'wine smell'!
- Use the table below to help guide you on the aromas – you're mainly looking for either **FRUITY** smells (that come from the grape) or **OAKY/SPICY** aromas (from winemaking and wine ageing):

Type of Aroma	
<b>Spice (oak)</b>	e.g. Nutmeg, clove, vanilla or coconut
<b>Fruit</b>	e.g. Citrus, stone or tropical fruits
<b>Herbs/green</b>	e.g. Mint, grass or eucalyptus
<b>Vegetables</b>	e.g. Green pepper, peas or asparagus
<b>Floral</b>	e.g. Rose, elderflower, honey blossom or lavender



## Step 3. Taste

- The final part of the process is to taste the wine so you can determine its style
- Use the same table above to see what you taste – is there any difference to what you smelt?
- As well as tastes, there are also certain components of the wine and its basic structure that need to be considered. The most important of these are:

### Acidity - low/medium/high

To determine how acidic a wine is simply see how much your mouth waters after you've taken a sip (a bit like how your mouth waters after sucking on a slice of lemon). If the wine feels a bit lean and sharp and makes your mouth water quite a lot then the wine is fairly acidic. If it's fresh and crisp but not too sharp then it is medium. Barely watering at all and the acidity will be low.

### Alcohol – low/medium/high (determined by heat on the palate and body weight)

You'll be able to tell this from the 'heat' of the wine when you taste it. The more alcohol in the wine, the more 'heat' it will have and you'll notice some warmth at the back of the tongue if drinking a wine with high alcohol, say 15%.

### Body – light/medium/full

This is the weight of the wine in your mouth – we often use the analogy of water to cream. If the wine feels light like water then it is a light-bodied wine, if it feels heavy in the mouth (like cream) then it's a full-bodied wine.

### Oak – oaked or unoaked

For this one you're looking for whether you can detect any oak flavours. Oak can be quite hard to identify, so if you taste any of the following flavours, it's a safe bet that your wine is oaked: vanilla, toast, smoke, spice

### Sweetness – dry/off-dry/medium/sweet

This one's easy – if your wine is almost syrupy then it's sweet, if you can't taste any sweetness on the tip of your tongue it's dry and if it's somewhere in between it's off-dry/medium

### Tannin (bitter) – low/medium/high

Tannins are usually only found in red wines, so for the majority of other wines you can ignore this part. For tannin you're looking for a drying sensation (very similar to the sensation you get on the sides of your mouth when you drink a cup of tea). The dryer the sensation, the greater the amount of tannin in the wine.

## Step 4. Food & Wine Pairing

When it comes to food and wine pairing the idea is to match the key components of the wine (acidity, alcohol, bitterness, body and sweetness) with the key components of the dish.

See below for some quick tips on how to confidently pair your wine:

- i) **Match the weight of the wine with the weight of the food.** This means that you would ideally match a big meaty steak with a big, fully-flavoured and structured wine (probably red) and would match delicate seafood with a delicate white or rosé
- ii) Work out what the **dominant flavour** of the dish is, so if it is a complicated dish with lots of different bits, focus on that. It could well be the sauce, so for example with a curry it matters less if the dish is a prawn, chicken or lamb dish but more if the sauce is tomato based, coconut or how spicy it is
- iii) **What grows together goes together** e.g. Spanish food and wine - a Rioja goes beautifully with paella and a Sancerre with local goats cheese
- iv) With rich dishes and sauces however, you might want to choose a wine to **'cut through'** the richness to refresh the palate. So with a creamy risotto for example, you could either pick a rich Chardonnay to match the weight of the food or a lighter wine with fresh acidity, to cut through it. Sometimes trial and error and personal preference work here!
- v) Watch out for certain 'tricky' foods like tomato and artichoke! Both need wines with good acidity like Sauvignon Blanc
- vi) Spicy foods go well with wines with some sweetness in so an Indian curry can be delicious with an off-dry rosé or an aromatic wine like a Riesling
- vii) With sweet foods and puddings you need a wine that is sweeter than the food
- viii) Fatty foods that are really rich need wines with acidity - so think Champagne and smoked salmon as they almost work like a squeeze of lemon adhering to the 'cutting through' principle again
- ix) While many people think that the best match for all cheese is Port, Port tends to work best with blue-veined sour/salty cheeses such as Stilton. Champagne, Chardonnay, Sancerre and also red wines make great matches with various cheeses
- x) There is no such thing as a 'perfect' match and the most important thing is that you like it

## Step 5. Serving & Storing Wine

### How to store wine

- If you are buying wine to drink in the not too distant future then it doesn't really matter too much where you store your wine, but certainly if you are keeping it for more than a few weeks, then you do need to keep it somewhere that has a fairly constant, cool temperature (big temperature fluctuations are bad for wine so above the oven for example is a big no-no)
- It also needs to be out of direct sunlight and with no vibrations
- Still wines closed with corks also need to be laid flat to prevent the cork from drying out
- Sparkling wines can be stored vertically or horizontally because of the presence of CO<sub>2</sub>, but wines are often easier to store horizontally as that is more practical for wine racks

### How long does a wine stay fresh for once it has been opened?

- Leaving the spoon in a glass of fizz does not help it retain the bubbles; it does that anyway due to the atmospheric pressure. Champagne stays fizzier for longer than Prosecco and can last 1-3 days once opened. Prosecco would need to be enjoyed by the following day
- Chilling both whites and reds in the fridge will also retain freshness for up to five days after opening, with higher acid whites being able to last for at least 5 days and heavier reds a few days

### Wine serving temperatures

- Generally speaking, sparkling, white and rosé wines are often served too cold and red wines too warm!
- An excellent tip is to take whites, rosé and fizz OUT of the fridge 20 minutes before serving and to pop your red wine IN the fridge 20 minutes beforehand
- If the wine is too cold it closes down the aromatics and makes the wine harder to smell and enjoy whereas if the wine (red) is too warm it highlights the alcohol and can make it 'soupy'
- As a rule of thumb, fridges are around 3-5 °C and ideally your sparkling, white and rosé wines should be served around 9 – 12°C (ditto sweet wines and sherry), whereas reds (and Port) are meant to be stored at cellar/room temperature which means around 16-18 °C, though lighter reds benefit from being served slightly colder
- N.B. wine and ice cubes. Ice cubes melt and dilute the wine so the best thing if you really want to enjoy your wines fridge cold is to pop the bottle into an ice bucket with plenty of water and ice or into an ice jacket and pour smaller measures. You can also buy metal ice cubes so that they don't melt

### Glassware

- Without a doubt glassware makes a difference to the overall wine drinking experience but really, the only thing a glass needs is a stem. If you have a trendy tumbler you can't swirl it properly and you can't smell it properly, which means you can't taste the wine properly
- A decent size glass certainly helps to open the wine up too, certainly for red wines which benefit more from aerating

### Closures

- Wines are generally either closed under cork or screwcap (with a few exceptions) and both make excellent closures
- The advantage of screwcaps is they are easy to open and don't suffer from TCA. TCA is a chemical compound (2,4,6-trichloroanisole) that is responsible for cork taint in wine, which is a musty mouldy smell and taste in the wine that comes from the cork – you'll often hear people say that a wine is 'corked' and this is what it means. It is because of this taint that customers are given the wine to smell in restaurants (even if closed with a screwcap)
- Cork closures have a great sense of ritual though and certainly premium natural corks are a fantastic closure for wines (especially red) intended for long term ageing

## Tasting

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Taste	

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