

BASIC APPROACH

Start with dry white wines before sweet whites or red wines. Light reds should be tasted prior to heavier reds and dessert wines should be tasted last.

The wineries will pour about an ounce of wine – enough to examine color, aroma and taste.

Do not hesitate to pour out excess or even to spit the wine into the buckets provided. This enables you to enjoy distinctions among the varietals presented which could easily be lost due to the effects of alcohol or palate fatigue. Professional tasters often avoid swallowing the wines they examine.

It is a good idea to stay with a given varietal until you taste all the wines of interest to you in that category. We will furnish a wide variety of quality cheeses, breads and pâtés to help refresh your palate.

EXAMINING THE WINES

The wines should be examined according to the way they look, smell and taste.

1. Begin by looking at the wine. Is it clear? Is it light or deep? Is it dull or brilliant? Does it possess the color you expect of the varietal?
2. Smell the wine. Swirl lightly. Is your first impression pleasing? Is it clean or are there off-odors? Does it possess varietal aroma? Is it light, medium or intense?
3. Take a small amount in your mouth. How does it feel on your palate? Is it full or thin (watery)? Swish it around and draw in a little air. Is it dry or sweet? Is it pleasant or harsh? Do you detect the astringency brought to the reds by tannins? Swallow a little. Does the flavor relate to the smell? Is it clean? Fruity? Balanced? Is it too hot or metallic-tasting? Is it excessively puckery or is it drinkable? Could you easily enjoy more?

Do not hesitate to ask questions of the vintners. For example, the effects of age will have a significant impact on some wines, especially reds. It's interesting to learn the winemaker's prediction for how a wine will evolve over the course of time.

If you have a favorite wine that you use as a benchmark for a given varietal, this is a terrific opportunity to taste other wineries' editions to compare and uncover the many good values available.

EVALUATION

We have devised a simplified 10-point system of evaluation, similar to the Davis 20-point method. You can use it to grade the wines. Simply enter the number of points next to the wines on your ballot. Details on how to use the 20-point method are on page 4.

<p>Color 0 - 2 points</p>	<p>Clean? Light or deep? Dull or brilliant? Correct?</p>
<p>Aroma 0 - 3 points</p>	<p>Light, medium or intense? Pleasant or off-odor?</p>
<p>Taste 0 - 5 points</p>	<p>Full or thin? Dry or sweet? Smooth or Harsh? Excessively puckery or drinkable? Would you enjoy some more?</p>

If you prefer not to assign a score to the wines, you may simply put a (3) to indicate if you like the wine.

HELPFUL NOTES ABOUT WINES

The following guide may be helpful in establishing your tasting progression. Because there are variations among varietals, this should not be construed as absolute or complete, but rather as a broad picture that you can fine-tune according to your preferences.

WHITES

Light-Bodied
 Champagne
 Dry Chenin Blanc
Medium to Full-Bodied
 Sauvignon Blanc
 Pinot Blanc
 Chardonnay
Off-Dry
 Johannisberg Riesling
 Chenin Blanc
 Gewurztraminer

SWEET WHITES

Johannesberg Riesling
 Gewurztraminer
 Late-Harvest Whites

REDS

Light-Bodied
 Gamay
Medium to Full-Bodied
 Pinot Noir
 Merlot
 Cabernet
 Zinfandel
 Syrah

ROSÉ

Rosé
 White Zinfandel

SWEET REDS

Port
 Late-Harvest Zinfandels

Some of the varietals appear in more than one category due to the differences in their levels of residual sugar (unfermented grape sugar). The percentage of residual sugar constitutes the sweetness or dryness of a wine. The following data will further help in categorizing the sweetness level:

Percentage of Residual Sugar by Weight	General Description
0.5	Dry
0.6 – 1.4	Slightly sweet
1.5 – 2.9	Medium sweet
3.0 – 5.9	Sweet
6.0 and above	Very sweet

STANDARD EVALUATION (20 POINT METHOD)

I. LOOKING

Appearance (0-2)

The wine gets a 2 if it is clear (brilliant) with no cloudiness or floating particles. If the wine has foreign matter, subtract a point. If in addition it is dull or cloudy, give it a 0.

Color (0-2)

White wines should be either straw-colored, yellow or gold, depending on the varietal and type (a hue of green can occur in new whites). When amber shows (frequently a sherry-type aroma will also be present), take away at least 1 point.

Red wines can be light (Pinot Noirs) to medium (most Cabernets and Zinfandels) or even dark (some Zinfandels and Syrah). If the wine is browning (amber), reduce it by point, its turning.

II. SMELLING

Aroma and Bouquet (0-4)

Aroma traditionally refers to odors of the grape. Bouquet has to do with odors that develop after the wine is made. These are frequently merged today, and aroma or bouquet are used interchangeably in many circles.

1. Aroma

- a. Vinous = grapey but lacking varietal character.
- b. Distinct = some varietal aspects are present.
- c. Varietal = you can detect what the grape variety is by the aroma.

These are modified by intensity:

1. Light
2. Medium
3. High

- d. Score 2 points for pleasantly vinous.
Score 3 for varietal overtones.
Score 4 for unmistakably varietal.
- e. The score remains intact unless bouquet takes points away.

2. Bouquet

- a. Refers to odor that is not the smell of the grape.
- b. Off-odors:
 1. Alcohol
 2. Excessive wood*
 3. Moldy odors
 4. Corkiness
 5. Sulfur dioxide
 6. Excessive vegetal notes
 7. Dirty overtones

** Oaky or vanillan overtones are fine if they do not conflict with the aroma of wine*

3. Acescence (0-2)

Refers to volatile acid and the prevailing smell of vinegar. If none, give the wine a 2. If faint odor, give a 1. Strong deserves a 0.

III. TASTING

(Take in some wine but don't swallow.)

Total Acid (0-2)

- a. Can't see it or smell it.
- b. You feel it on the palate. To be right, the sugar and acid in the wine need to be in balance. If acid is low, the sensation is flat or flabby or even soapy.

If the acid is high, the wine will be unpleasantly sharp or tart. Deduct 1 point for either fault or 2 points if the fault is pronounced.

Sugar (0-1)

If the wine is sweet for a dry varietal, it is a fault (sweetness is not a fault in Riesling, but it is in Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blanc). If it is overly dry to the type (Rieslings are expected to be on the sweet side), it is a fault. Deduct 1 point.

Body (0-1)

Refers to the feel of the wine when it is swished about in the mouth. Is it full, weak (thin), or watery? Is it too heavy? What is the tactile impression? Oily (fat, round, slippery) is a good quality in Chardonnays. Big, rich, full as opposed to thin (lacking body or depth).

Swallow it. Does it have a pleasant after-taste or none at all? If it is light, medium or heavy and that suits the varietal – give the wine a point.

Flavor (0-2)

Does the flavor relate well to the smell of the wine? Is it fruity? Is it clean? Does it have balance?

Is it flat (old, lifeless)? Herbaciousness is good in a Cabernet, if it isn't overpowering. Oaky or vanillan finish is fine; vegetal is no good (rotten).

Take off a point or more if the wine is hot in the finish, metallic or stemmy.

A nice, long, smooth finish is important.

Astringency (0-2)

This refers to the puckery sensation caused by tannins. Should be low in whites. Youthful reds are usually high in tannins and will (if the wine is made correctly) smooth out with age. Mature reds would be low in tannin. Whites should be smooth, but Chardonnays can be slightly rough in their youth. Reds will run medium rough, rough, very rough or brutal on the negative side. On the plus side, reds or whites can be soft, velvety, mellow, rounded.

Remember, rough isn't necessarily a flaw in a big young red wine that has not had the chance to smooth with age.

A wine is angular when it is harsh or tart-edged. Take away a point for this (or more if it is excessively rough for the type).

General Quality (0-2)

Is it drinkable? Would it be a pleasure to have some more? Is it elegant (grace, balance, beauty)? Is it a wine of breeding (charm and refinement)? Such lovely wines are at the top of the varietal spectrum.

Many tasters use this final category to move a wine up or down a level when they total the points.

Total scores indicate:

17-20 = outstanding

13-16 = good commercial effort

10-12 = acceptable

0-9 = pitiful