

## Preparation/Methodology

### You must have a methodology!

Wines often smell/taste like white or red wine when under the pressure of blind tasting.

### Need a deductive process to break down wine characteristics and components for clues to identification.

### YOU must do the preparation and information gathering yourself to retain it.

### Break grapes down to major and important varieties

### Varietal character is very important as it makes up the basic aroma/flavor profile of a wine.

Weather/Climate – sunlight (or its absence) can be tasted in wines.

### Know and be able to identify the aroma/flavor impacts of cool, moderate and warm climates on wines.

### Grape Research

#### Research each of the important grapes.

Prepare a sheet with all the specific characteristics of each grape – including variations in various climates – then memorize them!

#### Practice writing the “perfect” tasting note on various wines.

This will re-enforce your learning and knowledge.

**Napa Cabernet Sauvignon** – great depth of color, opaque. Aromas of black cherries, dark fruit, new oak and evidence of firm alcohol. Mouth-coating flavors that confirm the nose with gripping, dusty tannins, high alcohol, ripe fruit and substantial extraction. Finish is moderately long shortened by youthful tannins.

### Organize grape varieties by specific characteristics.

Assists in quickly discarding varieties that don't fit the aspects you are tasting (funneling).

It will also help determine what varietal the wine could possibly be.

#### Varieties by specific characteristics

**High acid** - Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Roussanne, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Barbera

**Low Acid** – Gewurztraminer, Semillon, Palamino, Marsanne, Garnacha, Carmenere, Malbec, Merlot

**High Tannin** - Cabernet, Zinfandel, Shiraz/Syrah, Malbec, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, Mourvedre, Carmenere

**High Aromatics** - Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Zinfandel, Gamay

**High Alcohol** - Grenache, Chardonnay, warm climates

**Full body** - Chardonnay, Cabernet, Merlot, Zinfandel, Malbec, Shiraz/Syrah

**Light color** - Merlot, Zinfandel, Pinot Noir, Tempranillo, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, Cabernet Franc

**Lots of oak** - Chardonnay, Cabernet, Merlot, Zinfandel (U.S.), Brunello, Nebbiolo

## A CONSISTENT TASTING PROCESS

### Start from top of head down

1. Engage the brain
2. Look at the wine's appearance
3. Smell the wine.
4. Taste the wine - cover all the taste receptors
5. Evaluate the wine against standards for that style and origin (typicity) to establish quality

## GLASSWARE CONSISTENCY

Same type of glasses - clear, focused-rim crystal

## IDENTIFICATION AND USE OF COMPONENTS

Building blocks of wine aromas and flavors.

Know them and where they are sensed.

Component levels lead to blind identification.

## PRACTICE TASTING EXERCISES

### Organize your tasting.

Same grape, different origins.

Different grapes same and different origins.

**Taste good examples only to learn classic markers for each wine!**

**Shorter sessions, more frequency for effective learning.**

**Marking the glasses.**

**Using a “lazy Susan” to increase frequency of trials and sample evaluations.**

**Work on the wines that are your challenges.**

**Use inert gas to preserve wines – repeat tastings.**

## THE GRID

**A method to “funnel” to the wine's identity.**

**Use an acronym to remember and include important factors on your grid.**

“Can Any Alcoholic Really Taste Fruit Loops” = Color, Acid, Alcohol, Residual, Tannin.... Then fill in minor details....

**Fill in the grid.**

**Look it over, remove wines that don't fit**

**Deduce what the wine could be.**

**Decide what the wine must be.**

## FUNNELING

**Determine what it can't be and discard....**

Deep color – not Pinot Noir, Sangiovese, Tempranillo, Nebbiolo...

High acidity – not Merlot, Grenache....

Restrained oak – probably not new world.

Moderate+ alcohol – probably not hot climate, not Grenache...

**Consider what it could be:**

Potentially cool climate Cabernet, Syrah due to above logic....

Leads away from warm climates, new world.

**Determine what it must be:**

Not exceptionally high acidity.

Gamey, underbrush notes in nose.

Scents of tar and blackberry all lead away from Cabernet.

## EXAM PREPARATION

Develop a consistent tasting procedure.

Drill on your weaknesses.

Practice regularly under exam conditions.

Know when to focus and drill on the knowledge you have. (1 month prior)

Maximize your resources.

Use inert gas to preserve wines, Lazy-Susan to do quick, repetition tastings.

Types of tastings – approach can be different.

One to five glasses handed to you-oral deduction, Sit down written notes.

Proper glassware a significant aid in deduction.

Always practice/taste with spotlessly clean, uncut, clear crystal.

Pack your glasses for travel so they are amply protected.

Mental Preparation

Walk/exercise - to focus your mind and relax nerves.

Mental imagery - imagine yourself doing well.

Swallow some wine if it helps you to calm down.

Prepare yourself the morning of the tasting

No high acid, bitter, sweet, heavy food. Brush teeth without toothpaste.

Sugarless gum for consistent palate. Taste some wine before the tasting.

Saline nasal spray (cleans, hydrates in dry rooms/climates)

First thing in exam room when allowed - write all the grape names possible.

Use the grid – written if possible, mentally always – short precise notes.

Use only the criteria necessary - abbreviated process.

I.e. - mark residual sugar only when present in reds.

Five wines/one producer = one note on wine, one note on wood per wine.

Don't make snap judgments on the wines.

The grid helps note every important aspect of the wine.

It allows the wine time to open and evolve and you to think and focus.

Logically breaks the wine down without rushing to incorrect deductions.

At the end of evaluation weigh what you have found.

It will assist in preparing your notes on wine attributes.

Nose through the wines first

Set back those with high imbalances. (Acidity, sweetness, alcohol...)

Taste in a different order – to check answers.

Sparkling wines – swirl and get rid of the gas to evaluate the base wine quality.

Look for “bankers” – clearly recognizable wines to ferret out the challenging wines.

First deduction is usually the most accurate.

Don't “second guess” yourself.

Taste and describe exactly what is in the glass.

Don't force the wine into a category. (Deduce what it is!)

## WININGWITHWINING<sup>SM</sup>

# A Practical Approach to Mastering Blind Tasting

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**Blind Tasting defined** “Identification of varietal, origin, method of production and quality level of a wine without knowing what it is prior to tasting it.

### Variations on Blind Tasting

**Totally Blind** – No hints whatsoever.

**Partially Blind** – Suggestions offered. “These five wines come from major European countries.....These three examples are different vintages of the same wine....”

**Asked to identify specific traits while knowing others** – These wines are all California Cabernets. Identify the oak type used in maturation.....”

### Validity of the process

A serious process.

Practical use of sensory perception with theoretical wine knowledge.

Tests one's total wine knowledge.

Conditioned to look for specific wine characteristics when tasting “label up”.

Training to break a wine down to its component parts.

Focus on the “funneling” process.

### TWINING'S TEACHING TIPS

Start with basics and expand

Simplify the difficult

Isolate the necessary information

Integrate blind tasting into your classes

Answer detailed questions after class

Use correct terms and define them

Clearly explain the processes

Repeat-improves the deductive process

Illustrate how process impacts wine ID

Make it fascinating and enjoyable!

Simplify power points-initiate dialog

Break down concepts to 3 issues/parts

“Never talk down to your audience.” *Dorothy Fuldheim*