



Wine 101: The basics of wine tasting

The basics of wine and wine tasting should be simple and fun - Let's get a foundation for what wine is all about and they how can we really “taste” wine to find out what we like and don't like and learn to explore new varietals and regions!

What is Wine?

Simple enough right? Wine is an alcoholic fermented beverage made from grapes - but not the kind of grapes you find in the grocery store. Wine is made from *Vitis Vinifera* grapes which are generally smaller, sweeter with thicker skins and seeds. Once the grapes are harvested the juice is extracted (we won't get complicated here but there are different ways of doing this). The important difference to note in the basics is how red wine vs white wine is made. Red wine grapes are pressed and left in contact with the skins, stems and seeds, whereas white wine is pressed then the skin, stems and seeds are removed right away. What about rosé you may be asking (great question), rosé wine is from red grapes but made like white wine so the skin contact is very small – hence that beautiful light pink colour!

Styles of Wine

There are 4 main styles of wine:

- *Sparkling* – wine with significant levels of carbon dioxide in it, making it fizzy! Sparkling wine can be made from any red or white grape. Example: Champagne
- *Still* – what we consider “normal” or “table” wine without carbon dioxide.
- *Fortified* – a wine which has a distilled spirit added to it, to increase its alcohol content. Example: Port or Sherry
- *Aromatized* - infusion of botanicals and bittering agents (roots, herbs, bark, spices, citrus or flowers). Example: Vermouth

Common Types of Wine

There are over 10,000 (I know crazy right) varietals of wine grapes grown around the world, but the eight most common (from lightest to darkest) are:

WHITE: Riesling, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay

RED: Pinot Noir, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon

Wine Tasting – the difference between “tasting” and “drinking”

Wine tasting takes a bit of practice. Can you just enjoy drinking wine? Of course you can, but if you are interested in learning a bit about your own palate and how to determine what new wines you might like, then you need to learn how to “taste” wine.

It all starts with the tasting note – learning to write a tasting note will help you become a more educated wine lover! A tasting note is broken down by 3 main parts: appearance, aroma and taste. Use the included tasting note template (there is a simplified and more robust version) to write your own tasting notes.



Appearance: This is as simple as it sounds, how does a wine look in your glass. Is it clear or cloudy? Does it have any sediment? What is the colour (see colour chart included). To properly assess the appearance tilt your glass and hold it over something white – look at the rim of the wine in your glass to assess the colour.

Aroma: What do you smell? What is the intensity of the aroma? Wine varieties certainly have “characteristics” and these can be helpful if you know them to “pick them out” but really is about what you smell in the glass. The more wine you smell (I mean get your nose in the glass and take a big sniff) the more you will learn and identify aromas in wine.

Common terms to describe aromas in wine: fruity (what kind of fruit – berries, stone fruit, citrus, apples pears etc.), dried fruit vegetal, herbaceous, floral, mineral, spicy, sweet spice, nutty, earthy, wood/oak, yeasty (like bread)

Taste: How does your wine taste? (that’s easy – “yummy” or “like wine”). All joking aside how can you get more specific? Are there specific fruits you can taste (besides grapes) what other flavours can you pick up?

COMMON WINE FLAVOURS

WHITE WINE

- Citrus Fruit: lemon, lime, grapefruit, orange and citrus zest
- Stone Fruit: nectarine, peach, apricot, apple and pear
- Tropical Fruit: pineapple, mango, kiwi, lychee, passion fruit, melon
- Minerality (wet rocks)
- Honey
- Grassy/herbal or “green”
- Petrol
- Sweet
- Salty
- Buttery

RED WINE

- Berries: raspberry, blackberry, strawberry
 - Cherry
 - Plum
 - Raisin
 - Wood/oak
 - Leather
 - Earth
 - Pepper (black/ white)
 - Baking spices
 - Coffee
 - Oak
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Your assessment of taste should also include notes on the body of the wine (light/moderate/full), the level of acidity and tannin as well as the finish. For example, if the acidity and/or tannin low, moderate or high, does the finish linger in your mouth or does it dissipate right away? Lastly, consider the overall balance of the wine.



How to assess acidity wine – the easiest way to do this is think about how much your mouth waters when you drink the wine, this is an indicator of acidity and usually uses to describe white wine.

How to assess tannin in wine – you can tell the level of tannin by how dry your mouth is when you drink the wine. The tannin in wine comes from the skins, stems and seeds so is generally only present in red wine.

Overall quality and your rating:

The last part of your tasting note should include how YOU rate the overall quality and value (if you know the price) of the wine and finally how would YOU rate the wine out of 5? Remember wine is a preference and one person's 5/5 may be another's 1/5.

Wine Colour Reference Chart



COLOR OF WINE

Visual Inspection

This chart will help you build your mental repertoire for identifying wines by hue and intensity. You will find it useful for blind tasting and assessing quality.

Hue in Red Wine

Pigment in red wine is affected by several factors including pH level. Wines with red-based hues tend to have a lower pH than wines with blue-based hues.

Advice for Viewing Wine

Look at wines under bright, diffused, natural lighting over a white background for best results. Hue is best observed at the point where the wine meets the glass.

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