Step-by-step Guide to Wine Tasting

To record your impressions of the wine you taste, use the space provided at the end of each section.

Looking

- Fill the glass one-third full.
- Pick the glass up by the stem—holding the glass by the bowl hides the color, and the heat of your hand changes the wine’s temperature.
- Look at the hue, intensity and clarity.
  - Hue or color is judged by tilting the glass, and looking at the wine through the rim. The color varies from the deepest part to its edges.
  - Intensity—look straight down through the wine above.
  - Clarity or how brilliant or cloudy with particles—is observed when light is shining sideways through the glass.
- Swirling to stir up the colors, and prepare the wine for the next step.
- Rest base of glass on a table, hold stem between thumb and forefinger, rotate the wrist. Counter-clockwise for right-handers; clockwise for left-handers.
- Move glass until the wine is nearly to the rim.
- Stop.
- As liquid settles, a film appears on the inside of the bowl, slowly falling irregularly down the sides in the wine’s “tears” or legs.” These indicate the amount of alcohol in the wine. The more tears, the more alcohol.

Color

- Color indicates the specific variety of grape or grapes, and reflects the growing conditions in the vineyard.
  - A warm summer and dry fall produce grapes that are fully ripe with a high ratio of skin to juice resulting in dark colors.
  - A cool summer or rainy harvest produces unripe or diluted grapes, which result in lighter colors and less intensity.
  - When red wines ferment, grape skins are left to soak in the juice. Elements that create color are found in the skins not the juice. The longer the skins soak the darker the color.
• When fermentation is complete, the skins are discarded, yet some solid material remains. Some winemakers remove this material through filtering, other leave a residual deposit.
• Time in the bottle also effects the color. Young red wines are deeper. As they age, the colors lighten from red to “brick” or “amber”. The coloring elements fall out of suspension and create sediment in the bottom of the bottle.

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Smelling

• After swirling, it’s time to smell. Swirling vaporizes the wine, and the thin sheet of liquid on the sides of the glass evaporates quickly, intensifying the aromas. A glass with a narrow rim further concentrates the aromas. Inhale deeply by placing your nose into the bowl.
• Goal is to draw aromas deep into the nose. The wine’s aromas evoke a place and time.
• This is the most complex element, and the most revealing to the experienced wine taster.
  • Grape variety and growing season determine aroma.
  • Winemaking techniques affect aromas. Yeasts that produce fermentation are added to the juice because of the aromas they create.
  • Cool fermentation produces vibrant, fruity aromas.
  • Warm ones give a spicy and earthy tone.
  • The barrels (Cab) in which the wine is held for maturation before bottling can impart aromas. Old barrels are neutral. Wine can absorb orders from new barrels.
• Time in the bottle also effects aromas.
Tasting Wine

- After smelling, take approximately one-third to one-half an ounce into your mouth.
- Don’t swallow. Hold the wine in your mouth for 10 to 15 seconds.
- Roll wine all around your mouth. This provokes sensations.
- Hold wine in your mouth
- Purse your lips, and inhale gently creating a bubbling noise. This speeds up vaporization, intensifying the aromas.
- Chew the wine by sloshing it vigorously to draw flavor.
- Swallow, and exhale gently and slowly through your nose and mouth.
- The better the wine, the more complex and long-lasting residual aromas are.
- We only taste sweet, sour, bitter and salt. Taste is perceived by sense of smell.
- Tasting the wine tells us about the wine’s sweetness, and acidity, the wine’s body, and level of alcohol.
- Alcohol level is determined by the ripeness of the grapes at harvest. The more sugar in the grape results in more strength in the wine.
- Most table wines contain 7-14% alcohol. Sometimes additional sugar added during fermentation called chaptalization increases the alcohol level. Some winemakers chaptalize to reach 12–13%. Increased alcohol levels produce richer textures, fuller bodies, and sweetness to counteract the acid and bitter components.
- Acidity is present in grapes. In hot climates winemakers may add tartaric or citric acid to balance the sugar in very ripe fruit.
- Tannins are extracted from grape skins, and produce an astringent feeling.
- Young red wines meant for aging are injected with tannins as they act as a preservative.
- After swallowing, there is the “finish,” the taste that lingers. If stays only a short time then the wine is simple and ideal for early drinking. The longer the finish, the better the wine.

Adapted from: