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The Fundamentals Of Tasting

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF TASTING AND THE PERFECT SET UP

The science is pretty clear when it comes to how we taste and smell. But how do you taste like a pro? You have to follow some simple rules and steps so that you're consistent but also study the subject if you're serious about it, one of the most overlooked part is the perfect set up for tasting so let's cover it all, starting with what you need and what kind of set up you need so that we can then focus on the tasting aspect. But before we start I have put links to all of my favorite things that I use and you can also go to Tastingskilz.com where I have in-depth reviews of everything that I use and recommend. So what is the perfect set up?

Well for starters it's important to have everything set up before you start tasting so you can focus on your objective. You'll need to have a:

- TechSheet or Aromas Wheel
- Spit Cup
- Water Glass
- Polish Glassware
- The Correct Amount Poured and covered
- Pen, Pencil or computer for how ever you want to take notes

I would also urge you to have proper lighting and a white piece of paper to look at the color – conveniently our TechSheet is white! - to help you get a good visual of what you're tasting.



TechSheet or Aromas Wheel?

What is the difference and why would I use one?

Well for starters having a reference point and following a system is the most important thing and step that you will take since to get good at tasting you need to taste a lot of product and you need to follow a system that is consistent just like an athlete doing the same reps over and over until it's automatic. After 25+ years of tasting I came up with my own TechSheet and it's very versatile. But what are the differences between a technical sheet and an aromas wheel? Well for one a technical sheet is usually a list of steps that you follow and an aromas wheel is a list of aromas so that you have some reference points.

TechSheet 1.0

Nose Clean Fruity Oxidized Corked Intensity Delicate Moderate Powerful Age Assessment Youthful Developed Evolved	Chemical Sulfur Rubbery Hydrogen Sulfide Natural Gas Garlic Skunk Cabbage Burnt Match Sulfur Dioxide Wet Wood Ethyl Acetate Ethanol	Floral Orange Blossom Roses Geraniums Lavender Violets Grassy Fresh Cut Grass Cabbage Juniper Eucalyptus Black Currant Leaf	Fresh Herbs Basil Bay Leaf Cilantro Dill Fennel Kaffir Lime Lemon Grass	Fresh Herbs Marjoram Oregano Parsley Rosemary Sage Tarragon Thyme Vanilla Mint	Hops Cascade Centennial Chinook Simcoe Citra Amarillo Mosaic Crystal	Wood Type Pine Cedar Sandlewood French Oak American Oak Chestnut Woody Burned Coffee Burnt Toast Smoky New Old	Grain Rye Corn Oats Wheat Barley Yeast Bread Dough Leesy Fresh Bread Fermenting Yeast
Tannin	Acidity	Body	Alcohol	Texture	Finish	Length	Complexity
Low Med High	Low Med High	Low Med High	Low Med High	Low Med High	Low Med High	Low Med High	Low Med High
Sweetness	Bone Dry	Dry	Off-Dry	Medium Sweet	Sweet	Lusciously	
Fruit Character	Ripe	Fresh	Tart	Baked	Stewed	Dried	Jammy
Spices All Spice Anise Caraway Cardamom Cayenne Pepper Chili Pepper Cinnamon Clove Coriander Seed Root Spices Ginger Horseradish Wasabi	Spices Cumin Juniper Berries Licorice Mustard Paprika Peppermint Sesame Seed Star Anise Turmeric Flower Spices Jasmin Flower Saffron	Nutty Chestnut Hazelnut Almond Cashew Coconut Peanut Pistachio Walnut Pine Nut Macadamia Peanut Nutmeg Caramel Honey Butterscotch Molasses	Citrus Lemon Lime Grapefruit Tangerine Orange Canned Green Beans Asparagus Green Olives Black Olives Artichoke Chocolate Milk Dark Fudge	Apple/Pear Yellow Green Red Pepper Spices Black Pepper White Pepper Szechuan Pepper Meat Wild Game Venison Bacon Lard	Berries Strawberries Raspberries Blueberries Blackberries Currant Cassis Mineral Wet Stone Limestone Chalk Slate Flint	Tropical Guava Melon Mango Bananas Pineapple Passion Fruit Dried Fruit Apricots Figs Prunes Forest Under Wood Bark Moss Mushroom Green Leaf Chlorophyll Barn Hay Compost Manure Popping Soil	

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Before we learn the steps of how to taste let's cover the basics of how we taste, it's important to understand how it works and what are the major differences to between the Olfactory system meaning your nose and your mouth where the taste buds give you information that the nose cannot.

The olfactory bulb is our most primitive and most powerful sense that we have, giving us our sense of smell. We can smell over a trillion combinations of chemicals. That's right, ONE TRILLION – wow.

Our brains can 'read' these smells and decide whether something is safe or not. That is the brain's first job, to protect us, since survival is the most important thing. The moment safety is established, the brain then moves on to our bank of memories. It uses that bank of memories to decipher whether an experience is good or bad. If a bad experience is established or recalled, then the smell may be nauseating. But if a really good experience is established then a perfectly vivid memory can overcome us with extremely specific recollection of where, when, who, how and why you experienced that smell.

Think back to your childhood, to a fond memory, can you pinpoint a specific smell for that memory? Maybe making cookies with your grandmother in her kitchen? Or how about fresh clothes coming off the outdoor close line? It sure reminds me of summer back home. The crazy part is 80% of what we 'taste' is done with our olfactory bulb, not our taste buds. Without a functional olfactory bulb, we can barely taste anything. Think about a time when you had a bad cold, often you can barely taste anything. Because the nasal cavity is obstructed, blocking your sense of smell, the brain cannot get the full information and that is why your sense of taste is diminished dramatically.

The real magic occurs when you can recall a specific personal memory, what do I mean? Well, my memory of burnt toast isn't your memory of burnt toast. My earliest memory of burnt toast is me in my room has a child; it's cold; I am being woken up by the smell of the burning toast; it's winter and I am on my left side. Now that specific memory isn't yours because we do not have the same life experiences.

For that reason, I believe that things such as points, scores, or other ratings of whiskey, beer, and wine reflect personal tastes. They won't mean the same thing to everyone. They may provide some loose guidance or a frame of reference, but not much beyond that. What I think, or what you think, is what really counts. We may not have the same budget, preferences, experiences nor the same access to products, so always keep in mind that the goal is to understand what is in the glass and why it is in the glass, nothing else. We are here to taste and have fun not lecture people about what we taste or why one selection is better than another. Yes, we can compare, but this is really about the journey, the experience, and what it means to you, as an individual. What it means to me as an individual, will be entirely different so keep that in mind I am only here to guide you.

Let's Taste like a Pro!

You need to follow 4 steps:

The first step is visualizing the product. I know that probably sounds a bit silly but stick with me here. Depending on the beer, whiskey or wine. Below are some examples of things that can be flushed out by simply observing the product in the glass.

Let's start with a few beers.

As we can see there is major differences between these beers but why is that? Well, for starters they don't use the same grain build, yeast type, or malt type thus giving us multitudes of colors and haziness.

Number 1 is lager that has been aged at a very cool temperature for multiple months making it light and clear and that process is called lagering. Number 2 is a brown ale is a little hazier and we can see a real color difference already. When it comes to number 3 it's stout is completely black since this beer has black malts in it. The variations and reasons for beer visual differences are vast – much more detailed than what we explain in Fundamentals.



If you're more focus on tasting beer, then I suggest that you read and learn about brewing, I have some beer book recommendations [\[Here\]](#) that explain brewing methods and will give real insights on how different beer styles are made. This will give you a better understanding of why each is made in a particular style and how they look the way they do!

Again it depends on how they're made and how they're finish for example we have three Glenmorangie here that our all highland whiskies but you can see a real difference between them?

Well for starters number 1 is finish in a traditional used Bourbon cask, number 2 is finish in a port cask and number three is finish in a sherry cask. So if you're into whiskey you should also learn about wine so that you can recognized the flavor profiles so learning about sherry and port is important. For me personally, there is only one book that I recommend when it comes to Whisky book, and you can find it at this link [\[Here\]](#). There are tons of resources out there but this one is the best, in my opinion.



Same Producer defferent colors

Similarly, when we look at these whiskies we can immediately tell there is a difference.

For wine it's simple to see that there is a big difference between those shown between wine 1, 2 & 3 since 1 is light then 3 but



The grape varietals, climate, maceration, ageing process come into play. For example, number one is a Pinot Noir and is always lighter in color since it likes a cooler climate, Number two is an American cabernet sauvignon and cabernet usually likes a hotter environment compared to Pinot Noir but when we look at number three it's a mourvedre from southern France and the hot climate really give us an intense color but also how thick the skin of each of these varieties and the length that it macerates in the juice meaning the time the skin is left with the juice before it's fermented.

If you want to learn more about the world of wine, I have put a link [\[Here\]](#) to my favorite books. Wine was my first passion and I can tell you that it is a deep rabbit hole that never ends and an expensive one too!

But what do I do once I have observed and found the color of the Whiskey, Beer or Wine? Color is only one aspect of it, is it clear? Hazy? Does it have a color variance between the center and edge? Is it viscous and sticks to the glass? Does it have bubbles and if so what kind of bubbles does it make? Remember that you can tell a lot about something by looking at it and really paying attention so stay focus on that and please WRITE IT DOWN!!!!

Step 2 : Smell

Now that we have covered the visual let's swirl it so that we can get some oxygen in the mix and get all the aromas out of the glass so that we can cover the most important step, smelling.

The goal is to identify the aromas that are in the glass itself. To begin, close your eyes so that you can turn off one of the senses and you can focus on the aromas that are in the actual glass. Remember this isn't a race so please take your time on this step and relax.

Now Write your initial thoughts and feelings about your first impressions of what is in that glass and what it smells to you before we move on to the tasting part and don't be afraid to spend some time on this, close your eyes, relax, smell, write your impressions, do this process multiple times until you feel that you've got it, just stay focus and forget everything else this is the most important part in the process of tasting. This will eventually become a place where everything goes away and you'll be transported to a specific memory be it good or bad just stay in the moment!



Step 3 : Tasting!

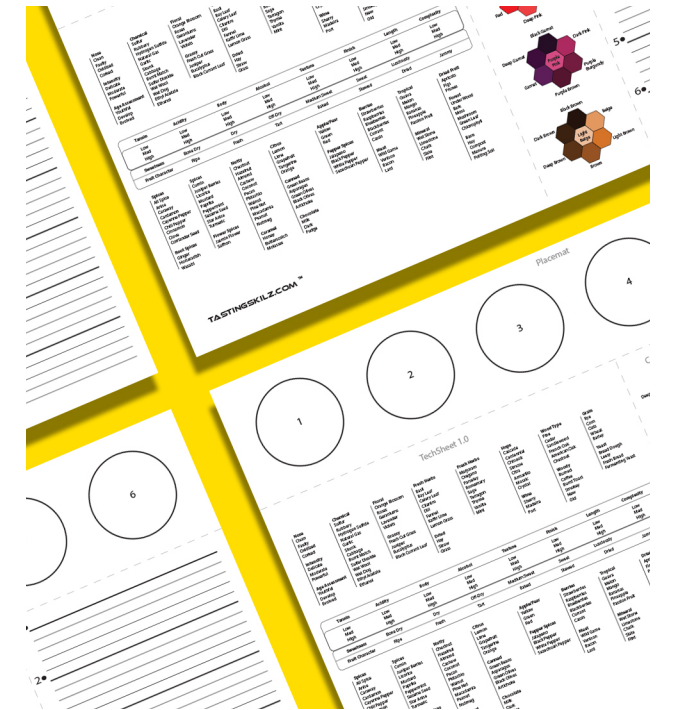


Now that we have identified the aromas let's get to the step that everyone wants to get to – taste. The art of tasting isn't just putting it in our mouth, there is an actual process so let's take a moment to recall how to actually taste. For me this is where I separate the pros from the amateurs – and you are well on your way to be a pro! As I said previously, the olfactory bulb represents 80% of the actual taste and the mouth feel accounts for 20%. Put a little in our mouth and then tilt our head forward, open our mouth slightly and pull air through like a siphon so that we can push all of the aromas through the back nasal cavity and experience everything out of the selection that we're tasting.

Swirl it around properly everywhere in our mouth and once again introduce air before we spit... YES! I said spit! Remember we are here to taste and take notes and not get drunk. We can get to actual drinking once we've assessed all of the selections that we're trying. Don't be in a rush, you're going to get your buzz on eventually but not before we get to the tasting notes. The sequence is simple: visualize, smell, taste, spit, analyze and take notes.

Now write down what you're tasting!

Write down what you're tasting and remember to focus on the viscosity, sweetness, bitterness, complexity, length, acidity, finish. All of the aromas that you got on the nose are they in the flavor profile? Was there apples on the nose? Where they ripe? Fresh? Tart? Baked? Dried? And so on, that is why the nose part is so important since the tasting confirms what you got on the nose. Now WRITE IT DOWN!!!! Once you've written it down go back and confirm and repeat all of the steps once more so from the start: what is the color? Confirm. What are the aromas that I have written down and did I miss anything? Now swirl and taste again, now confirm and add anything that you might of miss in the first taste.



Step 4 : Taking Notes!

The first rule of taking notes is to organize the notes you're taking so that you can compare what you're tasting. For that there is only one solution – A TechSheet allows you to go through the same steps over and over with consistency. Remember that this is about doing the same steps over and over and writing it down so that you get better at it and the simplest way to do that is to follow a system so that you don't skip any steps or can't think of what it actually smells like.

But why a TechSheet? Well, an aromas wheel has never made sense to me since I don't understand why it's in a circle? Should I turn the aroma wheel since I can't read upside-down? After thinking about this problem for multiple years I designed my own TechSheet so that I can have consistency in my tasting workflow.

The [TechSheet 1.0](#) which is designed so that you can apply it to beers, whiskies and wines. It's versatile for any situation. Tips and tricks for how to use it and set it up are found on the website link as well. My goal with this TechSheet is to give you a system so that you can grow and learn from lifetime of tasting.

Alcohol Abuse Resources & Professionalism

Whether you're just a beginner or a professional, no one wants to be around a drunk. I know this isn't fun to hear but knowing your limits is important. If you feel that your drinking has gotten out of hand you can go to this link [Here](#) where I have put some resources. There is no shame in asking for help.

Some of the most successful people in the restaurant/wine and spirits industry are **SOBER.**

They don't drink (but taste) and they work hard and hopefully workout hard too (and so do I). Yes, I will drink and enjoy what life has to offer but I also know that at this point it's important to be honest with myself about

alcoholism and the mental health issues that come with it. I am not here to preach to you about it but it's a subject that needs to be addressed. Otherwise, I am not being honest with you. I can tell you from experience that Alcoholism is a real problem in my industry and that I lose friends to it often but that doesn't mean that we can't have a good time so long as it's in moderation so I beg you to please think long and hard about it and believe me you'll have a lot more fun in moderation since you'll actually remember the evening and what you tasted!

Now that we know the steps of tasting what type of tasting can we do? Well here is a list of the most popular settings that offer you a chance to taste var-

ious selections. A common type of tasting is when we taste multiple beers, whiskeys or wines from the same brewer, distiller, or winery. This is usually a good format since it gives us a real idea of their specific style and what they are trying to do.

Another common type of tasting is regional tasting where we taste a particular style of whiskey from a specific region, Isle for example, where the whiskeys are peated at different levels. The most popular tasting setup is the blind tasting. In a blind tasting, someone sets up various selections and pours everything beforehand. When you sit as a group you taste and then compare notes after to see where you landed with a particular whiskey, beer or wine.





Types of Tastings

Blind Tasting is by far the most advanced and challenging type of tasting. Yes, some of us can find six out of six wines during a blind tasting, but only after many years of tasting and a lot more studying than anyone realizes. Blind tasting is about deduction, it is a process of elimination, and it takes many years to get there. For me personally, it took about ten years of studying, and way more than ten years of tasting. I can tell you from experience, studying is really where this game is played. You need to be a serious expert to be able to identify a wine in a blind tasting. Same can be said for whiskey or even beer.

Some people have better palates than others, some people have better memories than others. But with some practice and rigorous studying you will be able to find four out of six in a blind tasting. Your friends will be amazed!! After all, a duck is a duck, and just because you put it in a line-up with chicken and turkey it does not make the duck a turkey or anything other than a duck. For example, when you find a white wine that smells like jalapeno it is quite obviously a New Zealand Sauvignon blanc.

That is just based on the style of the wine itself. There aren't any other producers of white wine that smell like jalapeno, so it's a natural assumption to make, when you have learned that. When you get to something extremely specific, like a right bank Bordeaux that has some age on it, well then it becomes infinitely more difficult to identify the wine through process of elimination. I can tell you from experience that practice and studying will get you there but it is a hard, yet enjoyable, road!

Verticals and Horizontals are when we taste the same wine or beer from multiple vintages (i.e., 1991, 1992, 1996) side by side. Here we can really dive into characteristics specific to the year the wine or beer was produced. For example, how the climate has affected that particular wine, or how a beer has evolved over time. This is a fun format since it gives you a great sense of how things progress, and you may be able to see and tell when something is at its peak or when it's dead, or in less than ideal drinking form.

When it comes to horizontals we're tasting a region of wines or whiskies so that we compare style among producers in that region. In wine the most common type is selecting a specific 1er Cru appellation, getting bottles from several producers in that appellation and tasting them side by side. What is a 1er Cru? It's a classification that is established from the AOC (AOC means Appellation (region) Contrôlée by Origin so like I said you need to learn and study so that you know and have the knowledge) We can see differences in the style and how each winemaker manipulates the vine, the harvest, the crushing and fermentation and the barrel aging process before they bottle. You can judge who the best producer of that specific appellation is.

Rapid Fire & Expos is by far my favorite format for tasting. When you go to an event where various producer's hand out samples and explain their products. These give you real time access to the people who make the product and can explain what they're trying to accomplish. Even better, you can ask questions and get answers in real time. For me this is the best format since you get to taste hundreds of products in a 3 to 4-hour session.

Tasting at an Expo or in a Rapid-fire format like this is some advanced stuff and a lot of planning needs to be taken into consideration. You want to be prepared properly so that you taste and focus on the products that you want to explore and don't wander around aimlessly and waste time with things that aren't interesting to you. Please remember to spit (more on this in the steps below) and not just drink every sample pour. This is a public event and no one wants to be around a drunk. I can tell you from experience it's not fun answering questions to someone that is completely blind drunk from drinking and totally incoherent. So please taste in moderation when you go to these. Eat before, take a break during, drink lots of water, and eat crackers or something when you're there!

When it comes to studying, collecting and understanding what to buy there is no short cut. A person can read all the magazines and books in the world that give scores, points, and ratings but do you really know what you're buying? Not unless you study the products, regions, and taste similar products and have a good feel for what YOU enjoy. Otherwise, you're just taking someone else's preference as your own.

This is one of the biggest problems that I see when it comes to people who collect beer, whiskies or wines. Many who collect have the means to buy the high scoring products yet don't understand what they're buying! Don't let that be you – let's taste and learn together so we can really find those gems to buy that we will truly enjoy or be excited to collect!!! Remember, your experiences and memories are personal and the more you have tasted, the more educated you will be when making those all-important buying decisions.

There is no way around knowing what you like unless you've tasted a lot of products and studied the specific subjects that you find interesting. In the end this is about you and your enjoyment since it's your time and most importantly, your money. I can tell you from experience I have had wines that people fall all over themselves for which are worth thousands of dollars, yet to me, they were just 'Meh'. In the end they were dead and not worth the money, to me, based on my preferences.

Remember not everyone has the same budget and not everyone devotes the time to educating themselves about the subject and the brands want you to follow the leaders – that's what they hope for. But you are already taking the first step to making more educated choices and not letting the brands or other people's preferences tell you what is good – you can, and should, decide for yourself!!

Books I said in the beginning that studying whiskey, beer or wine would be the most crucial step to becoming a better taster. I've got a collection myself and have a link [Here](#) to my favorite ones. If you read them three times cover to cover you will have more knowledge than most professionals, honestly. Drinking alcohol is one of the most enjoyed experiences around the world and no one could know all of it in their lifetime. I still learn something new every day and there is always something new that comes available. But that's what makes this journey so amazing – it continually evolves and changes.

Practicing, Tasting Purchasing Strategies

It's important to do your research first before you go out and just buy anything off the shelf. As consumers we vote with our purchases. Not every market has access to the same products so please take your time in finding out what would be a good fit for you and your budget so that when you sit and taste and read on the subject you will get the most out of it. You can, for example, buy every grape varietal and style from the Alsace region and cook something to go with it on each night so that you can discover the wines properly and the regional food so that you get the full experience and then have a real specific memory of that wine and where it ranks according to you and your budget.



I hope that this guide to the fundamentals of tasting has given you some new tools to really get excited and to focus on having a real strategy for you to grow and get better at tasting. This is a marathon not a sprint, and even someone with the biggest of budgets can't race to the finish line since it doesn't exist! Thank you for joining our email listing and now you can taste like a Pro if you follow these steps and stay focus!

Thanks!

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