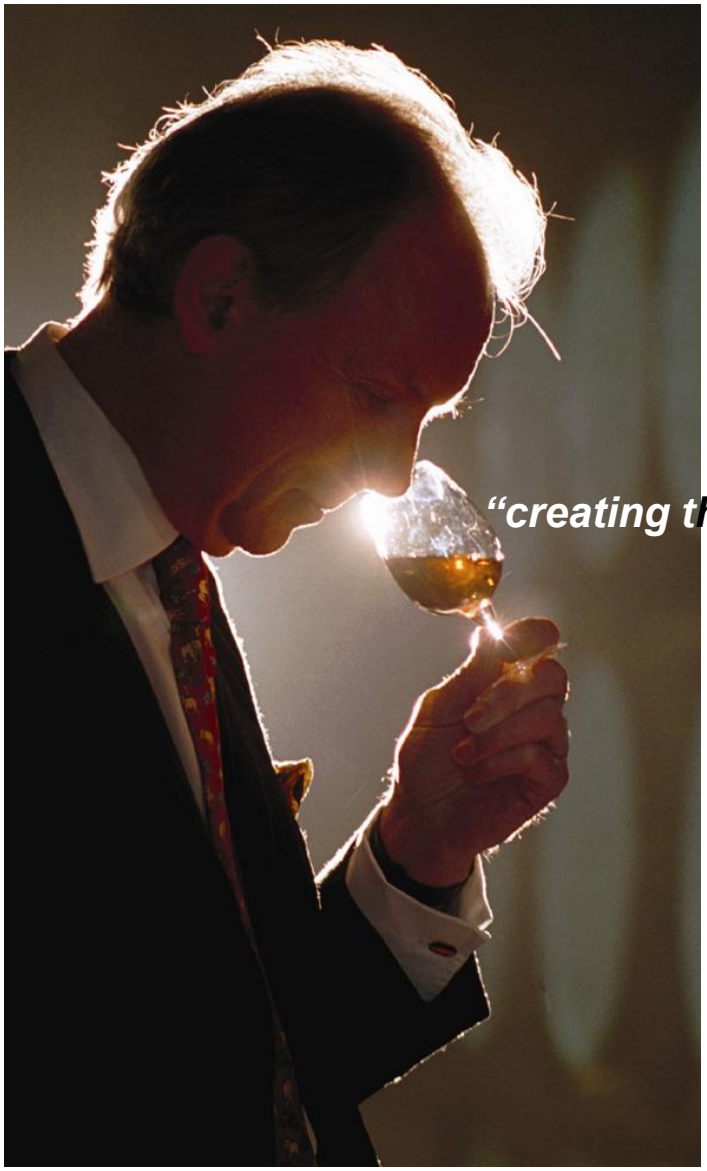

"creating the trade professional"

WSET® Level 4 Diploma in Wines and Spirits

CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT GUIDE

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Welcome

Welcome to the WSET Level 4 Diploma in Wines and Spirits. This guide is designed to help you handle the challenges that lie ahead. It is split into four sections which offer guidance on how to tackle studying and preparing for the theory and the tasting examinations.

Approaching the Theory Examinations

During the course of your studies you will need to pass five closed book examinations and a course work assignment during which you will need to write your answers either in the form of long paragraphs or essays. These examinations are designed to assess your knowledge and understanding of the world of wines and spirits as well as more general skills such as research and writing clearly.

The WSET recognises that people from many different educational backgrounds undertake the Diploma. For some the methods of assessment will present few problems but for others they will appear daunting. This section is therefore designed to help those students who are new to this type of assessment and will take you through the process step by step. Skills such as essay writing are not innate and can be learnt. With practice there is every reason to expect that, by the end of your studies, you will be able to write clear, precise and accomplished answers.

Approaching the Tasting Examinations

During the course of your study you will need to pass four tasting examinations using the WSET Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting. In these examinations you will be required to write accurate, concise tasting notes and use these to make detailed assessments of quality or identify common themes between a number of samples.

Using the WSET Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting Wine takes a great deal of discipline and skill and in this section of the guide you will find a detailed explanation of how to use it. First and foremost it will equip you with a theoretical understanding that will mean, with practice, you will become a more insightful taster. The understanding that you gain from this will also mean that you will be able to approach the tasting examination with greater confidence.

…and finally

The world of wines and spirits is as fascinating and as fun as it is immense and confusing. If, during the course of your studies, it ever appears as if the lights are about to go out remember why you started to find out about wines and spirits in the first place as without conviviality and a human heart this subject is nought.

Part 1: Studying for the Theory Examinations

For many of you, the Diploma examinations will be amongst the most challenging you have to take. There are two reasons for this. First, you are required to learn a significant amount of information. Second, you need to adopt a critical and analytic way of thinking.

Therefore, this part of the Candidate Assessment Guide has been specifically designed to support students for whom academic study and written exams are daunting unfamiliar territory. It is designed to help you pass the exam but the skills that you will need to develop in order to achieve this have a broader application in the way in which you can approach tough intellectual challenges in the future.

What is Critical and Analytic Thinking?

Broadly speaking there are two kinds of questions. Factual recall questions simply require you to state facts. Critical and analytic questions demand you take this information and use it to explain why things are the way they are and how they might be different. Diploma examiners use both type of question.

The difference between these questions and the sort of answers that are required can be explained using three examples.

Q1) What style of wine is red Châteauneuf-du-Pape?
Here the examiner is just after statements of fact that show you know what red Châteauneuf-du-Pape is. Therefore an acceptable answer might say, "Châteauneuf-du-Pape is a full-bodied red wine with relatively soft tannins, medium acidity and high alcohol."

Factual recall questions are used in Unit 2 Multiple Choice Examination and they appear in the paragraph questions that are asked in Units 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Q2) Why is Châteauneuf-du-Pape a full-bodied, high-alcohol red wine with relatively soft tannins?
Here the examiner is no longer just after statements of fact; you are expected to offer explanations as well. To get a good mark you will need to demonstrate that you know what happens in the vineyard and winery that cause Châteauneuf-du-Pape to have these characteristics.

This sample question is typical of the ones that you will encounter in the Unit 3 exam. When approaching paragraph questions in Units 3, 4, 5 and 6 you can gain extra marks if you relate their factual observations to a wider cause and effect. This way of tackling paragraph questions is not always possible or relevant.

Q3) Average alcohol levels in Châteauneuf-du-Pape have been rising over the last ten years. What are the main reasons for this? What if anything should producers do in order to slow or reverse this trend?
Here the examiner is after two things. First of all you would need to explain why alcohol levels are going up. This requires a similar approach to Q2.

Secondly, you would need to establish whether there is anything that can be done about this trend. You would then need to go beyond the issues of cause and effect and look at Châteauneuf-du-Pape in a wider context. You would then have to use the evidence concerning what is actually possible to tell the examiner what you think should happen in the future and why. It would not be enough to simply give your opinion. You would need to relate your opinions to the current issues and concerns in the wine market and give well-argued reasons to back them up.

You will always be expected to provide this type of analysis when tackling a Unit 1 assignment. This style of question can also sometimes appear in Unit 3.

How Should I Approach my Studies?

It should be clear from the previous section that simply learning a long list of facts is not going to be enough to pass the WSET Diploma. For lower level qualifications such as the WSET Level 2 Award in Wines and Spirits and, to some extent, the Level 3 Award, it is possible to memorise the required information as an unstructured mass. There are a limited number of things that you need to know and so for many people this can be a relatively straightforward task.

When it comes to the Diploma this approach is likely to overwhelm the vast majority of people who are simply unable to memorise the required amount of information as a swirling unstructured mass of data.

Let's consider a simple example. Imagine you have been asked to compare and contrast the qualities of Cabernet Sauvignon grown in Bordeaux and Napa. If you take the memorise-everything-approach, you would need to learn the characteristics of Cabernet Sauvignon and all of the factors that are linked to it in the two regions. This is a quite a bit of information but taken on its own this is pretty manageable.

However, consider what might happen if you were to scale this up. What if you had to consider all of the other areas where Cabernet is grown and repeat the process? The amount of unrelated facts you would need to remember would start to grow exponentially.

Then consider what would happen if you had to repeat the same process for every grape variety. Not only is the volume of information growing but also there would be a lot of repeated information. For example; the regional factors and how these factors affect the ripening grapes. This is only one of many angles examiners could take when setting questions. It should become obvious pretty quickly that the Herculean effort involved in just learning all these facts is neither humanly possible, nor practical. After all we all have other things to do with our time.

There is an alternative approach that can not only make your life far easier but also give you the flexibility to be able to confidently answer any question that you may be asked. The trick is to identify common themes that can link the facts together into a coherent whole.

So let's return to the Bordeaux/Napa example. In the memorise-everything-approach you have a number of catalogued mental "filing cabinets". In the example above we have many cabinets that cover each gape variety in every region it is grown in. We already know that there is a lot of duplication in these "filing cabinets". This could be streamlined by storing common information in separate cabinets so

This

A MASS OF UNCATALOGUED DATA

Everything on Cabernet in Bordeaux	Everything on Cabernet in Napa

Becomes

COMMON THEME

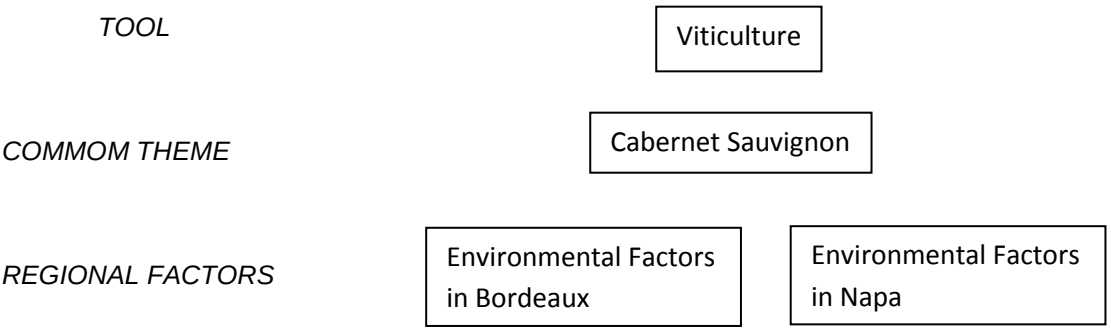
Cabernet Sauvignon

REGIONAL INFORMATION

Regional factors in Bordeaux	Regional factors in Napa

This would mean that if you were asked to consider Tuscany in the compare and contrast along with Bordeaux and Napa, you do not need to call on a whole new “filing-cabinet” filled with everything on Cabernet in Tuscany. Instead you can open a smaller filling-cabinet on the regional factors in Tuscany. As this approach is scaled up much of the duplication can be removed from your “filing cabinets”.

There is one final level you can be add to this picture that can turn this improved set of well-ordered “filing cabinets” into an even more powerful interconnected mental map. For this final level you should stop imagining that all the cabinets are full of facts but instead some are filled with tools.



This may at first sight appear to be very similar to the previous reordering but there is an important difference. This has taken the information back to its most fundamental nature. The parameters within viticulture, such as how a vine responds to light, heat and water, are fixed and can be applied globally. If you can become fluent with these principles then all you need to learn about the key characteristics of Cabernet and the key facts relating to a region such as soil, weather and climate. If you apply the tool “viticulture” to these streamlined filing cabinets it will be obvious how Cabernet will express itself differently. As you have a tool you can work it out and you don’t need to make a big effort trying to memorise the differences.

The even bigger advantage is that by layering your knowledge in this way you can be very flexible in how you use it. The “tools” can be used to link together common themes and regional factors in hundreds of different ways very quickly.

The key to this technique is to identify the “tools” that can link the “common themes” and “regional factors” together. For the Diploma it is worth considering three key “tools”. You can subdivide them as you see fit. We make some suggestions but this is not a definitive list. You should always work with structures that work for you.

Tool 1: viticulture

- climate and weather
- soil and typography
- vineyard management techniques

Tool 2: in the Winery

- grape processing
- fermentation
- maturation pre-packaging
- maturation post-packaging

Tool 3: the global market for wines and spirits

- production trends
- consumer trends

There is an almost unavoidable conclusion that follows from this method of managing information. We cannot recommend enough that you focus a lot of attention on Unit 1 and Unit 2 at the start of your studies. If you invest the time early on and really get to grips with the theories relating to viticulture, vinification as well as market trends you will be able to tackle the remaining units with greater confidence. Many people have found that the impact that this has on their further studies is profound.

First, when you are reading about a wine region it should be far easier for you to understand why the wines taste as they do. This should mean that you can cover material far quicker as you will not be struggling to understand the causes and effects that are being explained and it will be easy to pick out the small number of key facts that that relate to the region from the extra detail you have already got stored away. Second, you will be able to avoid wasting precious time by being able to discriminate quickly between material that is either wrong or simply unhelpful and material that is really insightful.

It can be very tempting to only pay attention to Unit 1 when you have an assignment to do and cram in the facts required for Unit 2 multiple choice exam and forget much of the detail immediately afterwards. Not putting a sustainable effort in for these two units is likely to be a false economy. We firmly believe that if you can spend the time understanding the underlying principles in the first place you can make life easier for yourself in the long run.

Study Skills

This part of the guide cannot hope to be all things to all people. Study skills are very personal and what works for one person will not work for everyone else. It is incredibly important that you try and find out what techniques work for you. In what follows we make some suggestion but this is not a definitive list. If you feel that you have yet to find the perfect method for you, speak to your APP and fellow students for their tips and suggestions.

Planning your Studies

Studying is the steady accumulation of knowledge over an extended period of time. It should be, as far as the Diploma is concerned something that you should try and spread out over the duration of your course. Trying to do everything in one go is likely to lead to a brain overload and you won't get the benefit from your efforts.

So, before you get started you should find out when your examinations are going to be and then take some time to plan what work you will need to do and when. It doesn't matter whether you prefer to do your study over long periods such as a whole day or in very short bursts such as an hour. You should always have a study plan. If you have a clear idea of what you are going to do and when you are more likely to

- cover everything you need to study
- fit your study around your other commitments
- avoid a mad rush of work just before the exam, something no one finds enjoyable.

When studying for the Diploma there are several core tasks you will need to allocate time to

1) reading and taking notes
2) consolidation
3) tasting
4) practicing exam technique
5) revising

This plan can be as detailed as you like, it is up to you, but it is well worth doing. Experience has shown that is something that those who did not do it would do differently if they had their time again.

Reading and Taking Notes

There are many different ways of taking notes. Some people use computers, others pen and paper. Some people write their notes other people highlight sections in a text. As ever the choice is yours and you should always use a method that you are comfortable with. However, there are some hints and tips that have been found to be beneficial no matter what method of note taking you use.

Think back to the earlier section where we suggested that there is a more flexible way of memorising and recalling the information that you need. If you are using this method, and we recommend that you do, you should start to use it from the outset. In the light of this assumption, consider these complimentary points.

- Focus on the key points. This early phase of studying is about getting your "filing cabinets" in place and filling in the most important details.

- It is best not to make a note of everything you read and feel that you should be in command of all the details at once. The mind is similar to your body. An athlete cannot be at full race fitness all of the time it would just put too much strain on the body. Likewise for most people being exam fit is not a state that you can or indeed should maintain for long periods.

- As you read through different sources you are likely to pick up a lot of the supporting material passively. If you focus on "getting the big picture" the supporting examples can flow into your memory quite naturally. Many people find that this information passively acquired is as permanent as information that has been drilled in actively.

Consolidation

This is an intermediate step between your initial studying and the final revision phase which many people find to be invaluable. This is the point where you can build on your original work and reinforce it. There are many ways in which you can approach this phase of your study. It is possible to identify two distinct elements in this phase; primary and secondary.

Primary consolidation – Not everyone has found this to be a useful element. By and large it depends on how confident you are at taking notes and how quickly you feel you have picked up the key points. Consider the following points.

- When you do your initial reading and note taking you do not always get it right. Notes can be too detailed in some areas, insufficient in others, duplicated or just tricky to read or understand when you revisit them. This gives you the opportunity to eliminate these problems and produce a clear and concise set of notes that you can revise from confidently.

- When you consolidate your notes it is best to follow the structure that you have adopted for your "filing cabinets". By going through this phase you can check whether or not you have all the details you need and establish whether you have understood the topic clearly.

  Leave plenty of extra space in your consolidated notes. This means that if you encounter any new information you can easily add it in.

- Some people have found that it is helpful to test their knowledge at this stage too. An easy way to do this is to take a number of compare and contrast scenarios, such as the Bordeaux and Napa Cabernet example, and quickly note down the key points you would want to cover. At this stage, you are testing and therefore reinforcing your "tools" so that when exam time comes you are fluent in its use. You can also make adjustments if you feel that they are not working as well as you would like.

Do not worry if you haven't committed all of the supporting details to memory at this stage. Remember, you can only be exam fit a few times a year. It is not a permanent state of readiness.

Secondary consolidation – Most people would agree that by the time you start revising you should have a sound command of all the important points. Everyone takes on information at different rates. Some people can absorb a lot of information quickly with minimal difficulty whereas others prefer to take more time. This element can therefore be used in many different ways.

- You can use it to refresh information that is already established and repeat the exercises on your "tools".
- You can use it to build up more information in your filing cabinets.
- Hone you exam technique by answering sample questions under exam conditions.

Most people find that a combination of these approaches is of greatest help.

Building your knowledge over time is less intimidating and it does help to keep information fresh in your mind. For example when tackling Burgundy there is an unavoidably large amount of material you have to consolidate. Tackling the villages a few at a time makes a great deal of sense. It is rarely a good idea to leave an area of the syllabus untouched for a long period as no matter how well you may think you know it, memory can always go stale and loose its edge.

If you have little experience with written exams there is no substitute for practice. Tackling exam technique will be covered in much greater detail in Part 3 of this guide.

Revision

This is the point when you should get yourself exam-fit. Let's return to the analogy of the athlete for one last time. During training, athletes will develop their skills and build up core strength and fitness. (This is what you are doing during note taking and consolidation). When athletes get race fit they are adding the final elements that will takes them over the winning line. If they have not done all of the proceeding training then they simply won't get race-fit in time. This is the same with revision. It should be the final push. It is rarely a good sign if you have to do significant amounts of reading and consolidation at this stage.

So, what is exam-fit? Most people would consider that there are three major components:

- All of the supplementary details you need to hold in your memory are readily accessible
- Your mental map is full tested and you have activated as many connections between the filing cabinets as possible
- Rest and relaxation.

There are a number of techniques that you need to consider to help you meet the first two targets. However you choose to proceed we recommend that revision should be done in short bursts. The activities you undertake during revision are likely to be very intense and hardly anyone can sustain this level of activity for very long.

- Read your consolidated notes. For most people the first phase of revision is to read through their consolidated notes. This will bring all the material you have worked on back to the front of your mind and it will help you to identify what extra details you need to supplement your core knowledge.

- Drill in any supplementary material that you feel you need to support the key facts. This is the only point where intense active learning is likely to be the best option. Most people will need to do some of this as it is the time when you need to get all the details in place. This full load

of information is a core element of exam-fitness and it is not a state you should try to maintain for a long time.

- Rigorous self-testing. This should be similar to the work you did when you were consolidating the material. Try and imagine as many questions as you can come up with. It doesn't matter if some are slightly off the wall. This is where you build up the second core element of exam fitness by activating the connections in your mind. We recommend that you should take no longer than five minutes to answer a question you have set yourself. This is the amount of planning time that you will have in the exam and this is a key timing you must get used to. You can also use this technique to identify where your areas of weakness are so you can fill in any remaining gaps.

- Exam practice. This should be used to supplement your self-testing. It is time consuming so you cannot cover as much ground as self-testing. It is an important part of revision you should become comfortable with the length of time you have to answer a question so that in the exam you do not become overly ambitious.

- Prepare revision notes. Some people find these to be a helpful last step. They should be very brief. Any point should only be a word or two. These words, when re-read, should spark off a load of connections in your mind. They should help to keep your connections fully activated as by now you should have the material under control. Consider writing them on index cards. This makes them highly portable and means that you can do quick bursts of revision at any time.

The final target is a particularly personal activity but it is possibly the most important. Nervous tension can be very destructive in the run up to examinations. Take breaks and do other activities which you find genuinely enjoyable and relaxing. Athletes have to rest their bodies and you should also rest and relax your mind.

Finally, twenty four hours before the exam simply stop. If you have worked consistently and diligently during your course you will be ready and any further work is likely to make you more stressed and do more damage than good.

Part 2: Recommended Study Materials

Required Reading

For Units 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 the following material should be sufficient to get you a pass. For Unit 1 these are simply insufficient. This is discussed further below.

- WSET, Study Guide for Unit 1: The Global Business for Alcoholic Beverages
- Robinson *et al*, *Oxford Companion to Wine 3rd edition*
- WSET, Study Guide for Unit 2: Wine Production
- Dave Broom & WSET, *Distilling Knowledge: A Professional Guide to Spirits and Liqueurs*

The Study Guide for Unit 2 (as well as the other Study Guides for Units 3, 4, 5 & 6), Distilling Knowledge and Oxford Companion are all available to buy from the WSET or via your APP. The Unit 1 Study Guide is updated every year and is available on the Diploma student area of the Global Campus.

Supplementary Materials

We would always encourage you to read widely around the subjects they are studying. This is the best way of keeping up to date with what is going on in the wine industry. Furthermore it will help to set your study into a wider context and this will ensure that your examination answers are more authoritative.

The Internet – The internet is an invaluable resource. Some sites are listed below. This list is not comprehensive. They were all checked before the guide went to print for their accuracy and integrity. However, in the fluid world of the internet, content can change quickly so it is ultimately up to you to assess whether what they are reading is credible or not.

Periodicals – Periodicals by and large have a local rather than an international circulation and so it is not possible to list here all of the ones that you might find helpful. Please ask you APP for advice about what you should be reading.

Books – Wine books can be expensive, difficult to get hold and can quickly become out of date. Students should not feel obliged to spend time and money tracking them down. Therefore the list we have included here is modest. Although some of the books are out of print they were all, at the time of print available in on line retailers.

General Books & Websites

- WSET, *Wines and Spirits: Understanding Style and Quality*
- Hugh Johnson & Jancis Robinson, *World Atlas of Wine (6th Edition)*
- Oz Clarke, *Oz Clarke's Wine Atlas (3rd Edition)*
- Tom Stevenson, *The Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia (5th Edition)*

- http://www.jancisrobinson.com
- Google Earth

Unit 2: *Wine Production*

- David Bird, *Understanding Wine Technology (3rd Edition)*
- Stephen Skelton, *Viticulture*

- Oz Clarke & Margaret Rand, *Grapes and Wines*
- Jamie Goode, *Wine Science*

Unit 3: *Light Wines of the World*

- **France** Andrew Jefford, *The New France*
  Oz Clarke, *Bordeaux: the Wines, the Vineyards, the Winemakers*
  Stephen Brook, *Bordeaux: Medoc & Graves*
  Clive Coates, *the Wines of Burgundy*
  Jasper Morris , *Inside Burgundy*
  John Livingstone-Learmonth, *wine of the Northern Rhône*
  http://www.inao.gouv.fr
  http://www.onivins.fr/
  http://www.bordeaux.com (this will direct you to the other local AC websites)
  http://www.beaujolais.com
  http://www.bourgogne-wines.com
  http://www.alsacewine.com
  http://www.vinsdeloire.fr/en_EN/
  http://www.vins-rhone.com/
  http://www.vindepaysdoc.com/
  http://www.suddefrancewines.com
  http://www.languedoc-wines.com/
  http://www.coteaux-languedoc.com

- **Germany** Stephen Brook, *The Wines of Germany*
  http://www.deutscheweine.de

- **Austria** Philip Blom, *The Wines of Austria*
  http://www.winesfromaustria.com/

- **Hungary** Alex Lidell, *The Wines of Hungary*

- **Romania** http://www.wineromania.com/

- I**taly** Nicolas Belfrage, *Barolo to Valpolicella*
  Nicolas Belfrage, *Brunello to Zibibbo*
  http://www.italianmade.com/
  http://www.chianticlassico.com/
  http://www.langhevini.it/

- **Spain** John Radford, *The New Spain*
  Jesus Barquin et al, *The Finest Wines of Rioja & Northwest Spain*
  http://www.winesfromspain.com/
  http://www.riberadelduero.es
  http://www.riojawine.com/

- **Portugal** Richard Mayson, *The Wines and Vineyards of Portugal*
  http://www.viniportugal.pt/
  http://www.ivv.min-agricultura.pt/ (Portuguese language only)

- **Greece** Konstantinos Lazarakis, *The Wines of Greece*
  http://www.greekwinemakers.com

- **South Africa** John Platter, *John Platter's South African Wine Guide*
  http://www.wosa.co.za/
  http://www.sawis.co.za/
  http://www.grape.org.za/

- **Australia** James Halliday, *James Halliday's Wien Atlas of Australia*
  Clive Hartley, *The Australian Wine Guide*
  Max Allen, *The Future Makers*
  http://www.wfa.org.au/
  http://www.wineaustralia.com/

- **New Zealand** http://www.nzwine.com

- **USA** Larry Walker, *The Wines of the Napa Valley*
  http://www.wineinstitute.org/
  http://www.napavintners.com/
  http://www.scgga.org/
  http://www.carneros.com/
  http://www.oregonwine.org
  http://www.washingtonwine.org/

- **Canada** Michael Schreiner, *The Wines of Canada*
  http://www.winesofcanada.com/
  http://winesofontario.org/
  http://www.winebc.com/

- **Chile** Peter Richards, *The Wines of Chile*
  http://www.winesofchile.org/

- **Argentina** http://www.winesofargentina.com/

- **Brazil** http://www.winesfrombrazil.com/

Unit 4: *Spirits of the World*

- **Cognac** Nicholas Faith, *Cognac*
  http://www.cognac.fr/

- Armagnac http://www.armagnac.fr/
- **Brandy de Jerez** http://www.brandydejerez.es

- **Whisky** Dave Broom, *The World Atlas of Whisky*
  Richard Paterson and Gavin Smith, *Goodness Nose* (the chapter on blending)
  http://www.scotch-whisky.org.uk/
  http://straightbourbon.com

- **Rum** Dave Broom, *Rum*
- **Tequila** http://www.crt.org.mx/

Unit 5: *Sparkling Wines of the World*

- Tom Stevenson, *World Encyclopaedia of Champagne and Sparkling Wine* (new edition in preparation)
- Champagne http://www.champagne-civc.co.uk

Unit 6: *Fortified Wines*

- **Sherry** Consejo Regulador Jerex-Xeres-Sherry, *The Big Book of Sherry Wines*. http://www.sherry.org/
- **Port** Richard Mayson*, Port and the Douro* http://www.ivdp.pt/
- **Madeira** Trevor Elliot, *The Wines of Madeira* http://www.vinhomadeira.pt

Part 3: Examination Technique

Examination technique is not something that should be seen to be somehow separate from the study and revision that you have done. It is an integral part of it. Everything you do, all the notes you take and the mental maps you set up should feed naturally into the answers you give in the exam. The techniques you use to express yourself are the very obvious, visible expression of the order that you have brought to the material you have been studying. They are one and the same.

Therefore, everything that is discussed in this section will draw on the principles that have been outlined in Part 1 and there will be references in what follows that may not make sense if you haven't read the previous section.

The Fundamentals

There are four very important fundamental elements to exam technique that are true no matter what question type you are tackling; timing, answer the question, plan you answer and clear writing.

Timing

Diploma exams are intense. Therefore it is very important that you allocate your time proportionately between the questions that you are required to answer. Each response can only gain you a maximum number of marks no matter how well written so failure to complete all the questions is likely to result in a fail grade.

The time you have to answer each question is limited. This is why it is so important to answer questions under exam conditions during your revision phase so that you know how much you can actually write in the allotted time. This practice will mean that you are less likely to overrun when answering a question by trying to write an overly ambitious answer. The examiners are fully aware that it is not possible to write everything on a given subject in the allotted time and they are not expecting you to do this.

The following timing recommendations are tired and tested.

Unit	Duration	Timing Recommendations
Unit 1	75 (1 question)	As a rule of thumb you should consider dividing your time up in the following way. • 10 minutes planning your answer • 60 minutes writing it. • 5 minutes which can either be used in the planning phase or as a buffer if you overrun when answering a question. However you do need to be flexible when tackling this exam. The single question is normally, but not necessarily, divided into three parts. The marks allocated to each part will vary from one case-study to another. Consequently, it is not possible to recommend how much time should be spent on each individual part of the question as these do vary. You should look at the number of sub-sections and the marks allocated to each at the start of the exam and use this as a guide to how you should plan your answer and divide up the writing time.
Unit 2	90 minutes (100 questions)	Timing is hardly ever an issue in this exam. There is more than enough time to answer all the questions and check your response as well.

Unit 3 (theory paper only)	3 hours (5 questions)	There are two different approaches to this exam which have proved to be equally successful. Realistically, there is no time to check your responses in any detail. Therefore it is absolutely vital that you plan what you are going to write before you start writing anything. **Option 1** • 25 minutes to select which question you intend to answer and to write you plans. Maximum of 5 minutes per question. • 30 minutes to write each answer • 5 minutes which can either be used in the planning phase or as a buffer if you overrun when answering a question. **Option 2** • 5 minutes to select questions and use as a buffer if you overrun when answering a question. • 35 minutes per question. For each question spend 5 minutes planning your answer and 30 minutes writing it.
Units 4, 5 and 6	65 minutes (1 3-part question)	The duration of the exam for these units has recently been extended. An extra five minutes was introduced to give students some planning/thinking time. These are mixed exams and we recommend that thirty minutes should be given to the theory and thirty to the tasting. Therefore you should give no more than ten minutes to writing an answer to each part of the question.

Answer the Question!

Every teacher and examiner has at some point offered this piece of advice. Nevertheless it is clear from the Diploma examiners report that this advice remains as relevant as ever.

When drafting questions for Diploma exams, the Examiners take great pains to ensure that the wording is explicitly clear. This means that questions contain vital, key words that tell you exactly what you need to focus on in your answer. Read every question carefully and no matter how experienced you are under exam conditions it is always a really good idea to underline any key words. This ensures that you focus on answering the question as it is set, that all aspects of the question are covered and that you do not stray “off topic”.

This is a recent example from Unit 3 that clearly illustrates this point.

> *Describe the climate, main soil types and key grape varieties found in the four districts of the Loire Valley (40% weighting). Explain how these factors, and others, combine to produce Muscadet Sèvre et Maine sur lie, Bonnezeaux, Chinon and Sancerre. (60% weighting)*

This question was answered very poorly and in many cases this was down to the fact that candidates were not answering the question as it was set. The examiners noted that;

- Many candidates failed to read the question carefully enough to realise that the first part required them to consider the sub-regions in broad terms, not just in respect of the named wines.
- Many candidates simply repeated the same facts they had given in the first part of the question in the second part rather than ***discussing why*** the wines taste the way they do.

This advice is as important in a paragraph question as in an essay question. For example if you are asked to write about Islay Malt Whisky you will gain very few marks by simply writing about Malt Whisky in general. Likewise, if you are asked about red *Vins Doux Naturels* (VDN) you will get no marks for commenting on Muscat based VDNs.

Plan your Answer

It is possible to get a pass grade for some paragraph questions by simply engaging in a brain-dump, in other words writing down everything that comes to mind in an unstructured manner, so long as it is relevant.

However, when it comes to the longer structured answers that are central to Unit 3 and Unit 1 this approach will inevitably result in a fail grade. More importantly if you have worked through the study scheme outlined in the previous section this sort of approach should seem as unnatural as it is inadequate. It is undoubtedly true that no matter what the question type, the best answers have a coherence to them which is the result of planning in the exam room and proper preparation beforehand.

How to plan an answer properly is covered in detail in the next section.

Clear Writing

Examiners want to give you marks. It stands to reason that factual accuracy is paramount but, on many occasions, students make it very difficult for examiners to award marks as their answers are badly written.

There are many ways in which writing can become unclear. We have highlighted the most common problems that examiners encounter and include some examples to show ways in which unclear writing can be made clearer.

Content Not Style

All too often students find writing long answers challenging because they believe that they have to adopt a style that is not natural to them. This is simply not the case. In fact, it is better if you use simple English.

You do not need to try and make your answers stand out by adopting a literary style. This can often sound false and become very annoying for the examiner who just wants you to show that you understand the subject. Consider the following example,

> *"….a...rhetorician, inebriated on the exuberance of his own verbosity, and gifted with an egotistical imagination that can at all times command an interminable and inconsistent series of arguments to malign an opponent and to glorify himself."*

This was an attack made by one nineteenth century British politician, Disraeli, on another, Gladstone. Disraeli was mocking Gladstone's style of speaking by exaggerating its complexity.

It is of course unlikely that any Diploma student would ever indulge in such extravagance. In the context of a Diploma exam this would be an extreme example of allowing style to get in the way of content. The point Disraeli was making could be made more simply.

> *"…a public speaker who shows off by using complicated language. He likes to attack others and make himself look good."*

The other stylistic posture that should be resisted might best be described as "the fear of the simple". This is the effort to make statements sound more important by avoiding plain statements, something which nearly always makes a simple statement become muddled and

confusing. Examples abound in government and corporate brochures. Consider this tannoy announcement from a train guard made as his train was pulling into the terminus.

> *"..for those with fares to pay I will be visible on the platform near the front of the train."*

This should have been a simple announcement letting passengers know they could buy tickets from the guard as they left the train and where he would be. However, not only is it unhelpful as "the front of the train" is an unspecific area, it has also been reduced to a silly statement that would be more appropriate on the *Hogwarts Express*. The visibility of the guard was never going to be in question! This has happened because the guard felt the need to make a simple statement more grand. All that was needed was

> *"..for those with fares to pay I will be standing by the first set of doors on the first carriage."*

For no extra effort clarity has been restored.

Short Sentences

The best way to ensure that the content in your answers is not confused by the style in which it is written is to use short sentences. This does not mean that there should be a word limit on every sentence. Instead you should think that if the sentence falls into several parts then each part should be a sentence in its own right. Consider the earlier paragraph about the guard. Three of the sentences could very easily have been rolled into one.

> *What should have been a simple announcement letting passengers know they could buy tickets from the guard as they left the train and where he would be was not only unhelpful, as "the front of the train" is an unspecific area, but it was also reduced to a silly statement that would be more appropriate on the Hogwarts Express after all, the visibility of the guard was never going to be in question.*

This sentence is in correct English but its length means that the points become harder and harder to pick out. When presented as three sentences it is easier for the reader to pick out the points one at a time.

You might feel that short sentences make for a very austere style of writing and you would be right. However, this is not a problem. Remember you need to communicate your understanding quickly and clearly to the examiner and this is one of the best ways to do it.

English as a Second Language

You need a good standard of written English to be able to pass the Diploma but the Examiners are aware that for many students English is a second language. If this applies to you then you have no need to be concerned.

The examiners realise that it is very difficult to write error free in a foreign language at the best of times. You will not lose marks for errors in your written English so long as it is clear what point you are trying to make.

Question Types

There are several different question types that examiners can use. They are;

- paragraph questions
- structured open response questions
- essay questions
- Unit 1 Course Work Assignments & Case Study (There are a number of extra points that need to be made about Unit 1 so these will be considered in their own section)

Paragraph Questions

These questions appear in various formats in Units 3, 4, 5, 6.

- In Unit 3, a paragraph question typically offers you a choice of six subjects. You will be expected to write a paragraph answer on five of these in thirty minutes.
- In Units 4, 5 and 6 the paragraph question is compulsory and you will be expected to write all three paragraphs in thirty minutes.

Timing

Timing is vitally important as you must answer all of the parts of the question in order to score well. Each response can only gain you a maximum number of marks no matter how well written so failure to complete all the parts is likely to result in a fail grade. You do have a tiny amount of thinking time in Units 4, 5 and 6 but when it comes to Unit 3 it is worth considering the following advice. If you cannot see your way to writing 5 paragraph answers within a matter of seconds, think twice about answering the question.

Sufficient, Relevant Content

Even though you only have either 6 or 10 minutes per paragraph you need to include a sufficient level of detail. Examiners do not expect Unit 3 responses to be quite as long as Unit 4, 5 and 6 as there is less time available per section. Do not think that for each response you are limited to a single paragraph. Think of these questions as a short written answer. We have included some examples to help you understand what is required.

These come from a Unit 3 question on North America and shows what is possible in the time. The subject was Finger Lakes.

> Finger Lakes is one of the three wine growing area of New York State. Here the site climate is largely different around the individual lakes. This is a production area of aromatic white varieties such as Riesling, Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer.

There is nothing factually wrong with this answer and but the level of detail is simply insufficient.

> The Finger Lakes are a collection of glacially cut lakes that are in the north of New York State. Viticulture here is split between the production of table grapes and juice (the majority) and winemaking. The climate here is marginal for grapes as the continentality is so huge. Winter temperatures can slide to -20C and as a result many producers felt it was impossible to grow V. vinifera. However, hard wood species that have the warmest and most protected sites have been shown to be able to not only survive but also thrive. Key amongst these is Riesling. When grown on the steep slate slopes and with the best aspect it is able to ripen perfectly and produce wines with a clear and penetrating acidity and classy varietal fruit. Other varieties, principally white and aromatic are made as are significant volumes from both American and hybrid wines. It is an AVA.

This answer is more complete. Other facts, such as the names of the other aromatic grape varieties, could be included and the last sentence is a rather clumsy add on. It is not just the level of detail that stands out but the fact that it is related to viticultural issues.

Planning an Answer

Planning is as important for these questions as any other. You could simply engage in a brain-dump but there is a real risk that you miss some obvious points or drift off topic. It is not possible to think up a structure from 1st principles in the time available in the examination, therefore this thinking is best done in advance of the exam. A study of past papers will reveal that certain types of questions tend to come up. You should spend the time undertaking this research and plan your own strategies so that you have an answer template in your mind for the main types of question you identify.

What follows are some examples of answer templates. These are neither a definitive list of question types nor do they represent the only way of approaching them. They are a starting point to help you think about how you might approach these questions and offer possible solutions to other types of question which could very easily come up.

Grape Variety Questions:

- Names (including common synonyms)
- Colour
- Qualities (e.g. skin thickness, tannins, acidity, flavours)
- Vineyard activities (e.g. benefits of different soil types and why, disease risks and management strategies, pruning and canopy management techniques used and why)
- Winery activities (e.g. why is it suitable for a given style, how it responds to different techniques)

Never be afraid to state the obvious. Palomino is a white grape variety. You will only get a mark if you say so! Also think of cause and consequence. Touriga Nacional may have thick skins and high tannins but why is this important for Port production and what quality does this give the wine.

Process questions:

Vineyard

- Climate & weather (associated advantages and risks)
- Soils (what are their key qualities why is this important)
- Pruning (techniques used and their advantages and disadvantages)
- Harvesting (methods used and their advantages and disadvantages)
- Practical considerations (need for equipment and labour)
- Cost implications (how any of the above has an impact on the bottom line)

Winery

- Post-harvest handling (issues faced, grower v. producer)
- Extractive techniques used (pre, during and post fermentation /fortification)
- Fermentation temperature (range and why)
- Yeast (cultured or ambient and why)
- Oak (new/old, size of vessel and why)
- Maturation techniques (unaged, biological, oxidative, heat)
- Cost implications (how any of the above has an impact on the bottom line)

Everything you learnt in Unit 2 is potentially relevant here. Whether the question relates to viticulture or vinification always think how what you are describing has an impact on the final style, quality and price of a wine. Answers that not only describe how but also explain why will always score more marks.

Producer Questions:

- History
- Key wines & brands
- Key markets domestic & export, trends
- How they have responded to local challenges (e.g. land ownership, labour resources, technology, reform)
- Future plans and challenges

These questions can be very open ended as many important companies and trade structures are very old. Rather than focusing on history this is a good opportunity to relate these to the current issues in the market area. For example Diageo owns a lot of brands. You may not be able to list them all but it is as if not more important to demonstrate a knowledge of their overall strategy and how a handful of important brands fit into this.

Structured Open Response Questions

These questions are unique to Unit 3.

Timing

When answering these questions it is best to divide your time

- 5 minutes planning
- 30 minutes writing

When you are nervous and under exam conditions it can be very tempting to think that planning time is wasted. This could not be further from the truth as, unlike paragraphs questions, these questions demand thinking time.

Planning an Answer

There are three distinct parts to the planning phase. They are;

- identify what is being asked.
- identify the key points
- find the examples that will support each point.

If you have chosen to follow the study approach that we have outlined these steps will be easy to execute. You will be able to link up the various "filing cabinets" using your mental map. It is not possible to suggest a strategy for every possible kind of question that the examiners could ask. The suggestions made for paragraph questions above apply equally for these questions and can all be used as foundation for these longer answer. You should look at past paper to work out what types of question you would like to prepare for. Remember, material from Unit 1 and Unit 2 are vitally important ingredients for successful answers.

Here we will work through a single example to show how to plan and then write a good response. The question is

> From the point of view of the consumer, what are the strengths (50% weighting) and weaknesses (50% weighting) of the wine of Alsace?

Identify what is being asked

This is the vital first step that ensures you answer the question that has been set.

- Point of view of the consumer – there is no need to focus on general information about viticulture and vinification in Alsace.
- Strengths and weaknesses – they have equal weighting so they will need to be given equal prominence.
- Alsace.

Identify the key points

This question asks you to focus on the consumer so you could start by listing what the factors are that influence consumers to have a positive or a negative view of a wine region. You would need to think through your mental map to the Unit 1 material where you considered consumers. Issue you might consider are:

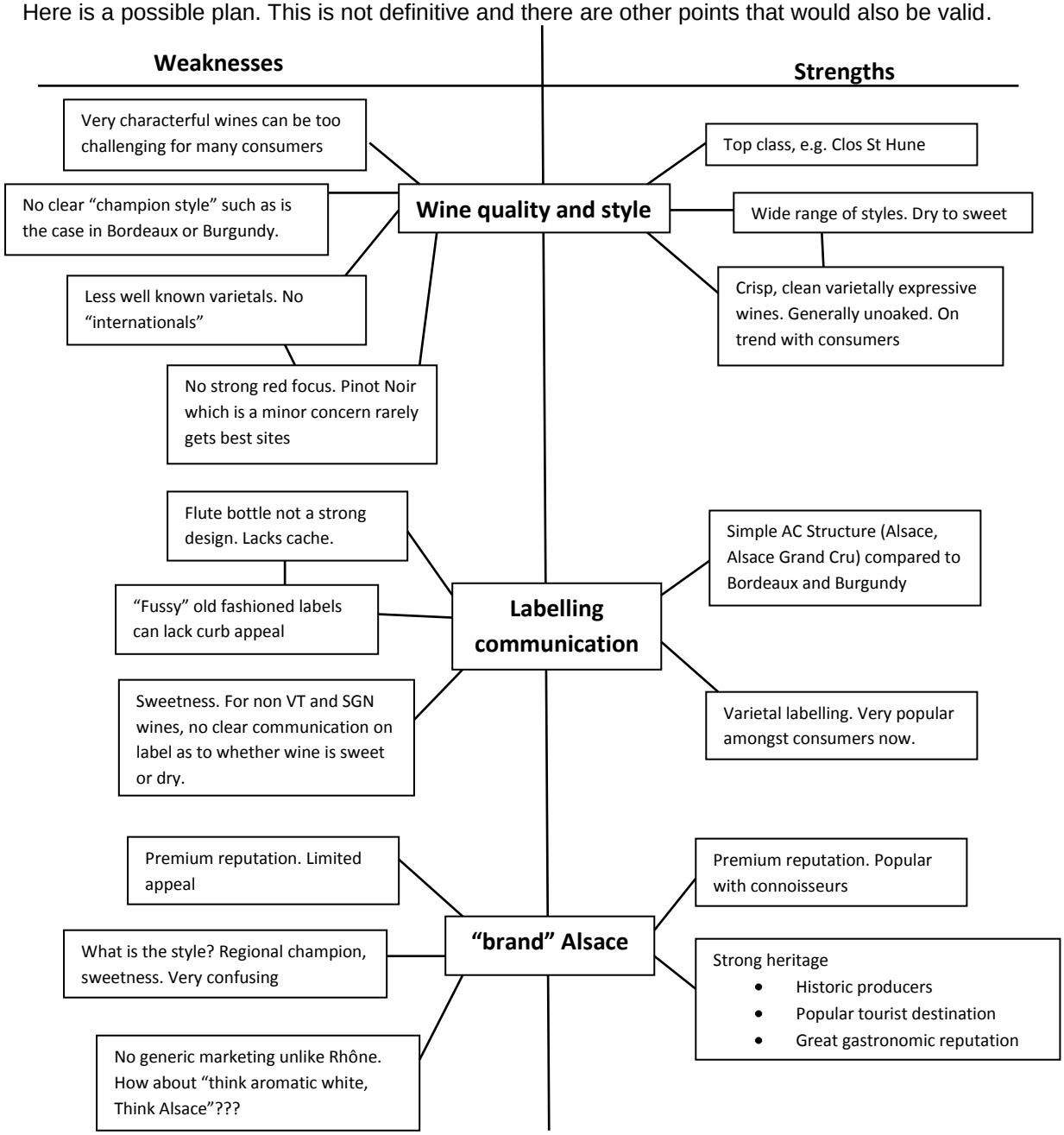
- wine quality and style
- labelling communication
- image of “brand” Alsace.

Find the examples

This is where you need to build up the key examples that will make up the detail of your answer. You need to take the key facts you have stored concerning Alsace and now turn these to the issue at hand. Here it is vitally important you discard irrelevant detail. If you think soil types is important for the consumer they you need to be sure you can back this up. Maybe the variety and variation this creates is the more important point and one you should be focusing on instead. You may think that for most consumers soil type is utterly incidental.

Using the study techniques we have highlighted a form of visual mind mapping is a complimentary tool that many have found to be helpful. This is outlined below but there are many ways you can do this on paper and you should use the method that best suits you.

Here is a possible plan. This is not definitive and there are other points that would also be valid.



Writing your Answer

However you choose to write your plan you need to know how you are going to turn it into an answer. This is something that you need to consider as you refine your own methods. For example if you were using the method demonstrated above, each box can become a paragraph. So how do you stitch all of these paragraphs together?

Introductions and Conclusions – For many structured open response questions, such as our Alsace example, which do not ask for a personal commentary, these paragraphs are not essential. However, they do add a clarity to your answers which will invariably benefit from their inclusion.

- **Introduction –** It should come as no surprise that the best introductions are short and get to the point quickly. Three to five sentences will normally be more than enough. For these questions the introduction should set the context and signpost what you are going to say in you answer.
  It is common for some small changes to happen to your plan as you write. It is perfectly acceptable and sensible to write this paragraph last so that it ties in exactly with what you have written.

- **Conclusions –** Once again this paragraph only needs to be very short and offer a brief summary of the key points. Better answers might include a brief personal commentary but this would not be a deciding factor in whether an answer was a pass or a fail.

Signposting – This is a vitally important technique for writing a good answer. Remember the examiners want to give you marks and it is always easier for them to do so if you make it visibly clear what the points you are making by using subheadings, underlining or bullet points.
Take care when using bullet points. Do not be tempted into thinking that simply listing the points as outlined above is good enough to get a pass. These points need to be worked up into paragraphs and you are expected to write in full sentences.

How to Write a Paragraph – This basic rule of thumb holds true for the Diploma. You should make one point per paragraph and you should be able to make this point in one simple sentence. The remaining sentences should then provide the supporting evidence. You should include clear examples that back up your point as well as highlighting any exceptions. This is a good example from a student who answered the Alsace question. (This has been copied as written and includes and error in the English which is highlighted)

> Determining whether a wine will be sweet or dry: As nice as it is for producers to make sweeter or drier styles, its not easy to tell even year by year with the same producer what exactly the style will be. While most Alsatian wines tend on the dry side for table wines, there are producers (Deiss for example) who range and tend sweet. This can make decisions hard for the customers as they really have to be familiar with the wine or the producer to be sure of style.

How to order your Paragraphs – In structured open response questions the overall order is often determined for you by the examiner and it is always best to follow their instructions. In the example given above it is clear that working through the strengths and then the weaknesses is the best option. Once you have settled on the overall structure it is normally best to order the paragraphs in order of importance. For questions that focus solely on production it can be better to order the paragraphs to follow the order in which the processes happen.

Sample Answer A (fail unclassified)

In Alsace wines are normally sold as varietal wine. For consumers that is clear, but for the producer not always that easy.

The Alsace area is in the no-east of France. It is a long area north-south on the west side of the Vosges mountains. It is existed because of pushing up land thousands of years ago by eruption of the earth under the sea.

For this the area is very different in soils and mesoclimats. Calcaious because of the fossils of the sea but also alluvial and with some limestone and clay. Therefore it is very important to choose the right grape/vine for the right site. That is somewhat the basic of the law for the Alsace wines. The wines are only made from four noble grapes and only grown on specified sites.

Now several producers believe they make a great wine of e.g. Silvaner grape on a Grand Cur site and so they cannot call it a grand Cru athough it is better than the Riesling wine from that site. One of those is Marcel Deiss who believes in grapes all grown together is better and he succeeded in his work – laws are changes and still goes on.

<u>But now for the consumer</u>: a lot of wine was used to be sold as cheap, easy-drinking wine an example is "Edelswicker", made from several grapes. For a lot of consumers this is still their favourite wine. It is good that Alsace set this as a kind of "Brand": consumers know what they buy. In any case what type of wine. Also when the grape is mentioned on the label it is obvious what you can expect. That is the strength of Alsace for the consumer. Also the wines are not too expensive except for the "grand crus".

A weakness can be the that by global warming the wine became too sweet and dull. Also is a fact that the "new world" and recently the Languedoc are (vin de pays d'Oc) sell a lot of varietal wines so are competitive with Alsace. Consumers have more choice in the style of wine they like.

Now, with the new laws, it has not become more easy for the consumer to know what is in the bottle. The consumer must know now the names of the grand cru sites if the varietal is not mentioned.

There is no introduction and (with one exception) there is no signposting throughout

All of this content is completely irrelevant as it is has nothing to do with the consumers perspective of strengths and weaknesses.

These two paragraphs contain multiple points (Edelswicker, varietal labelling and Grand Cru global warming and competition). Each paragraph is a list and "why" these are strengths/weaknesses is barely touched on. Compare this to Sample Answer B where each point has its own paragraph.

This sentence shows a worrying lack of understanding concerning sugar ripeness, residual sweetness and how they are managed. Basic errors like this should not be made at this level.

Sample Answer B (merit)

From the point of view of the consumer, Alsace has many strengths but some weaknesses that perhaps make it one of the wine of today that is greatly appreciated by many but misunderstood as well.

A very short introduction to set the scene. Nothing more is required.

Strengths:

1) <u>Labelling style of Alsatian wines</u>: For the most part, Alsatian wines are labelled by their variety and this makes consumers feel comfortable. Many European wines use only their region of origin, and consumers must know and memorise what grows where in the world. Varieties on the label make it easier for some consumers to know what they are buying, Quality is another positive for labelling, thought a bit more subtle – there are not many different tiers of quality in Alsace legally as there are in other regions. Alsace AC and Alsace Grand Cru AC make it easier in some ways for customers to understand what they are buying.

2) <u>The range of grapes grown in Alsace</u>: Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc, Riesling, Muscat, Gewurztraminer, and Pinot Noir all thrive in Alsace. The consumer has a lot to choose from in terms of grapes though some might say the "style" is all similar – more on that in weaknesses.

3) <u>The range of styles in Alsace</u>: Whether the consumer wants a bone dry, lighter style, a bone dry concentrated style, a sweet style, or a very sweet style, Alsace has a lot to offer. There are everyday off-dry blends like

This paragraph is an excellent development on the basic model as a number of points have been grouped thematically.

However some of these points could have benefited from a little more development.

Edelswicker that can be inexpensive, or there are moderately priced varietal wines like Pinot Gris or Gewurztraminer that, depending on the producer can be sweeter or drier. There are premium, top quality Vendages Tardives that are late harvested and delicious, as well as Selection Grains Nobles that are sure to be sweet and stand as one of the world's best examples of botrytis-affected wines.

Weaknesses:

1) Determining whether a wine will be sweet or dry: As nice as it is for producers to make sweeter or drier styles, its not easy to tell even year by year with the same producer what exactly the style will be. While most Alsatian wines tend on the dry side for table wines, there are producers (Deiss for example) who range and tend sweet. This can make decisions hard for the customers as they really have to be familiar with the wine or the producer to be sure of style.

2) Affordability: Many of the great Alsatian wines that will make consumers love Alsace are pricey. Zind-Humbrecht wines start at around $20 (dollars) and only go up. Some of the basic Alsace AC wine is lower quality and consumers might feel that they get more for their money elsewhere in the world. The styles in Alsace can be costly to produce, and many won't spend money on a sweet wine like they would on a high-end red (in the US at least). Many consumers don't understand how expensive it is to hand-harvest on steep slopes or wait for wines to be affected by botrytis.

3) Lack of understanding about the region or style: Many consumers don't understand the value of letting a higher end, botrytis affected sweet Alsatian wine age, nor do they "get" Alsace as a region. With its German influence (sometimes government), many might associate it or its wines with Germany, and for some consumers who still associate Germany with only sweet wines, this can be a bad thing. Additionally, Pinot Noirs from Alsace are not big and heavy by any means, and some consumers either don't; understand that and are disappointed, or, forget about Alsace all together when it comes to red wines because they associate it only with whites.

4) A language barrier when it comes to vineyard Alsatian Grand-Crus: Some consumer are intimidated by languages they don't understand. Though varietally labelled, vineyard named Grand-Crus like "Sporen" or "Steinart" as well as village names like "Guibwiller" or "Turkheim" can seem intimidating to new consumers.

Overall, Alsace, has a lot to offer with more consumer education, perhaps the strong points of Alsace, easy labelling, and delicious wine will outweigh the negatives, and more will enjoy!

This answer is superbly signposted throughout. The two main sections and the individual points are clearly marked out.

Throughout the paragraphs are well structured. The candidate makes great use of the one point per paragraph principle.

This answer has a style and clarity that those who are unfamiliar with writing could do well to copy.

The question does not require a personal commentary so a very short concluding paragraph which is all that is necessary.

Essay Questions

For many students the word essay causes a genuine sense of terror. In fact, the fear that these questions cause is due in large part to false assumptions over the style of writing that is required. There are far more similarities than differences between a structured open response question and an essay question. In order to demonstrate this point let's imagine that the sample question above has been changed into an essay question to read,

> From the point of view of the consumer, what are the strengths and weaknesses of the wine of Alsace? (80 % weighting) Do you think that the strengths outweigh the weaknesses? (20% weighting)

Similarities

- Timing for your answer (5 minutes planning, 30 minute writing)
- The three stage planning phase is exactly the same.
- The approach to writing is exactly the same from the style of the language to the use of signposting and the way in which you write a paragraph.

If you look at the question as it is now all of the information that you could have used in your previous question is completely valid.

Differences
The principle difference is this question and the previous one is that you are required to offer a personal commentary.

Therefore once you have listed what you think the strengths and weaknesses might be you need to define what it is that you think consumers really want. Maybe you think they want a consistently tasty wine with packaging that tells them what they are going to get and makes them feel good about themselves when choosing it. You can then apply this test to your lists. For example, when considering label communication is varietal labelling and a simple AC system more important than flute bottles, old fashioned labelling and confusion over sweetness levels. You might consider that the issue concerning residual sweetness is the most important point as it means that the packaging is fundamentally flawed making it impossible for a consumer to know what they are going to get even if they are a connoisseur.

Writing your Answer
In order to be able to persuade the examiner that your analysis is correct you will need to structure you answer ever so slightly differently.

Introduction – This is a required element in an essay. There are two reasons for this.

- You define any terms that the question has left unclear. In this Alsace example you must make it clear what you think consumers want so that you can justify your opinion concerning whether there are more strengths than weaknesses.
- You need to signpost what points you intend to raise to back up your argument.

There is a little more to cover here but, this does not need to be much longer that an introduction for a structure open response question. Time spent on a long introduction is time wasted.

Middle section – This is where you would present your evidence. You can present your supporting material in exactly the same way as you would have done in the previous question by listing the strengths and then the weaknesses.
Remember it is perfectly acceptable to clearly signpost your answer. In this example you could have two section one labelled *Strengths* the other *Weaknesses*.

Conclusion – This is also a required section in an essay. It is vitally important and the examiners can show this by allocating it a percentage of the marks. In this example it has 20% of the marks.
An easy way to do this would be to restate the definition by which you believe consumers will assess Alsace and show how important each piece of evidence is. This will then reveal whether overall one outweighs the other.

Unit 1

There are two different methods of assessment used in Unit 1. Each one will put different demands on you and will be considered separately. First we shall consider two common elements; research and personal commentary.

Research

Research is one of those word that can sometimes make students worry excessively. However, in essence, it is no more complicated than studying for any other Diploma exam. All you need to do is find out about a given subject and consolidate the information you gather so that you can answer a question on it.

The aspect many people find intimidating is where to start. When you are studying for the other Units there are recommended materials that are specifically tailored to your needs and these can be used to steer you through your studies. This is rarely the case with Unit 1. It can be helpful to consider the following approach

Preparation
Read the brief and identify the core issues that you are being asked to look into.

Then, you should consider doing two things before you do any reading. First of all note down what your know about the subject. Then spend some time thinking about the issues. For example, if you face a question over generic bodies, use what knowledge you have concerning how wine is made and sold as well as your habits as a consumer to think what could be done to promote a wine region. Think in very broad generic terms, there are always going to be common issues. These two steps will help you to gather your thoughts and give a focus to your initial research.

Initial Research
You should consider reading as many different sources as possible these include

- Wine trade magazines
- books
- the internet
- OCW
- WSET study guides

Consolidation
Once you have gathered a significant body of information you should stop reading and consolidate it in order to bring a structure and order to the data. This will help you to form your opinions on the key issues and identify whether you have enough detailed information to be able to answer the question. At this point it can be very helpful to ask yourself two complimentary questions:

- “I think that X is the right point of view. Can I prove it?”
- “The point of view Y challenges X. What are the strength andweaknesses in their arguments?”

These questions should then give you some very precise areas to look into in order to fill in the gaps in your knowledge.

Secondary Research
This is where you need to fill in the gaps that you have identified. You can use similar resources to before but you should also consider other options such as contacting key opinion formers who can give you first-hand evidence. This kind of research can add a great deal of credibility and authority to your work, in particular the personal commentary.

You can then as required alternate between reading and consolidating. This way you can steadily deepen your knowledge, clarify your opinions and establish how you intend structure the material you have gathered so that you can successfully answer the question.

Personal Commentary

Regardless of whether you are tackling a Case Study or a Course Work Assignment the examiners will always ask for your personal commentary. This is the hallmark of Unit 1 and unless you can do this convincingly you are likely to struggle to pass the unit.

When you write your personal commentary simply stating your opinion is not enough. You need to back up you opinions with evidence that not only supports them but also demonstrates why the opposing point of view is incorrect.

Case Study

The Case Study Brief provides a lot of context surrounding the subject area. You should read this very carefully as it is designed to direct your research into specific areas. The question in the exam will be limited to issues that are raised in the Case Study Brief.

Getting Ready for the Exam

You should be able to identify from the Case Study Brief what the key issues you need to research are. Here is a previous brief:

The Importance of Generic Promotional Bodies for the Wine Industry.

Many wine producing countries have generic promotional bodies. One example is the Deutsches Weininstitut. Part of their "who we are" statement is as follows:

"The Deutsches Weininstitut (DWI, or German Wine Institute) is the German wine industry's marketing organization responsible for the generic promotion of the quality and sales of German wine domestically and abroad. At this time, some 40 men and women, under the leadership of the managing director, work in the interest of German wine at the wine institute's headquarters on Gutenbergplatz in Mainz. In addition, there are more than a dozen "Information Bureaus for German Wine" in the most important export markets, from London to New York to Tokyo."

Another example is the Wine Institute of California, which describes its brief as follows:

"The Wine Institute of California uses funding from the Department of Agriculture in Washington DC, under an agricultural export support programme, to raise the profile and promote the sales of California wine outside the USA. It maintains offices in the major markets of: the UK; Canada; Japan; and mainland Europe, and part-time or PR support in emerging markets such as the Far East." **a**

Where a national generic body exists, the size of its budget and the source of that money will affect how it goes about its work. As a result, generic bodies have adopted various tactics in their efforts to promote their wines. **b**

There has always been much debate in the wine industry about the importance or otherwise of generic promotional bodies. In some cases (e.g. Wine Australia), the national generic promotional body has been thought to have played a significant role in the development of key markets. In others cases (e.g. Italy), there has either been no national generic promotional body or any initiatives that have been taken have been perceived to be largely ineffective. **c**

There are three key issues that can be clearly identified.

a) Generic bodies; their mission statements and the role they play in promoting a country's wine
b) Finances for Generic bodies, their sources and the impact they have on how they do their work
c) The debate about their relevance and future.

You should undertake your research as outlined above. Then in plenty of time before the exam we recommend that you should not only fully consolidate the material but also undertake revision.

The Case Study is different from a Course Work Assignment as you do not know what the question is going to be before the exam. As you are preparing it is best if you do not try and second guess the examiners. Keep an open mind and revise as if you were preparing for any other Diploma exam. Although, the topic areas that can be examined are limited by the Case Study Brief there are always likely to be several ways in which the examiners could tackle the issues. If you go into the exam with a pre-prepared answer in the belief that you know exactly what the question is going to be you could very easily be setting yourself up for a nasty shock.

The question that was asked on the Case Study example above was

The Importance of Generic Promotional Bodies for the Wine Industry.

a) Give an overview of the sort of mission statements and key objective adopted by the various national generic promotional bodies. Describe the activities undertaken by the generic bodies in pursuit of their objectives (40% weighting)
b) Where does the money come from to finance generic bodies? Discuss the tension that this can create (30% weighting)
c) How effective do you think national generic promotional bodies are in developing the market for their country's wines? Do they represent value for money? Suggest ways in which generic bodies might improve their performance. (30% weighting)

Tackling the Examination

When you open the exam paper you will see the question for the first time which will be printed alongside the Case Study Brief. The question will be divided into subsections all of which need to be answered.

The question needs to be approached in the same way as the structured open response questions, see above, although the level of detail you are expected to produce is far higher. You are required to show that you have a detailed command of the material. In order to be successful you will need a strong argument and supportive examples that show that you have a comprehensive understanding of the issues. You should, wherever possible, indicate which resources you have used in the course of your research.

If you have done plenty of research you will have more information that you can possibly use. Planning is therefore utterly critical. Spend the time making sure that you know what you are going to say before you start. The subsections will logically follow on form each other and although they need to be signposted clearly they should be treated as a whole. When writing your answer you should,

- write a brief introductory section
- tackle each subsection in turn, using the weighting of the marks to indicate how much attention you should give each section
- write a brief concluding section.

There is no specific upper or lower word limit. However, given that you have 75 minutes to tackle this question you are expected to provide detailed and sophisticated arguments which can rarely be successfully made in a short answer. As a very rough guide, five sides written in average sized handwriting is the typical length of a good answer.

Course Work Assignment

A course work assignment is similar to a case study in that you are given a brief and required to answer the question set using the structure that the examiners provide. The main point of difference is that you are given the question at the same time and so you can use this to give a focus to your research at a very early stage.

As you are not required to answer the question under exam conditions and you have several months to tackle the question, there are a number of extra requirements that you have to meet which you will need to take into consideration.

Plagarism, Collusion and Cheating

If you attempt to gain a grade by fraudulent means, you can be severely punished by WSET® Awards.

Copying material from a textbook, article, electronic file, the Internet, or another student, even if you paraphrase, may be considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is claiming another person's thoughts, writing, inventions, *etc*. as your own.

Quoting directly without quotation marks is plagiarism.

Copying the work of a fellow student is treated very seriously, as it is unlikely to happen inadvertently. Don't lend your notes, computer disks or assignments to other people if you suspect they may copy them. You may find it difficult to prove that you were the originator of the work.

If the assignment is an individual piece of work, make sure that it is your own work and not that of a group. Presenting a piece of work as yours when it is, in fact, the work of a group is collusion and is a form of fraud.

Penalties for plagiarism include being marked failed on the assignment or failed on the unit or possible disqualification from future exams. This penalty may also have to be applied to the original as well as the copied piece of work if it cannot be established which was the copy and which the original.

Tackling the Assignment and the Word Count

The Course Work Assignment needs to be approached in a similar way to the Case Study. The Assignment should be planned and written as a whole and the sub-sections that the examiners require you to cover should be signposted clearly in your answer.

An important difference between these two assessments is that there is a required word count for the Course Work Assignment. Your Assignment must be between 2500 and 3000 words long otherwise you will be penalised. An assignment that is less than 2500 words will be failed and any words over 3000 will not gain any marks.

If you have never written anything this long then consider tackling the work in three phases.

Phase 1- Write your Assignment

Take your time to make a very detailed plan. You should know exactly what you are going to write before you start writing. At this point it can be very helpful to share ideas with your colleagues and fellow students.

Write the first draft of your Assignment without worrying about the word length. You should try and adopt a clear, precise writing style, nevertheless with this first draft most people find that they write over 3000 words.

Once you have finished the first draft put it to one side and do nothing with it for a few days. This break will mean that when you re-read it you will be fresh and more critical of your own work.

Phase 2 – Review your Assignment

It is possible to critically review your own work and make any necessary reductions to the word count at the same time.

Read through each paragraph very carefully. As you are doing this you should ask youself two questions. First of all, ask, "what point am I trying to make?" If you have taken a break between the first draft and the review you will find it far easier to be ruthless and discard or rewrite sections that are not good enough. Then ask, "can I make this point more efficiently?" It is easy to use too many linking words, adjectives and adverbs when you write a first draft which can be removed without having an impact on what you are trying to say. Sometimes you will notice that you have skirted around the issues before you get to the point you are trying to make. This extra material can also be cut with no ill effect to your arguments.

Consider the following early and final draft taken from an Assignment on the topic *The Role of Science and Technology in Wine Production.* The student has tightened up the points being made by removing extra words and in the first sentence getting to the point more quickly.

Early Draft – 214 words

Climate Change

It is not possible to summarise the climate change debate here but if the figure of +0.3^{o}C every decade quoted by Pancho Campo MW and others is correct the impact on wine science will be significant.

a) **Vineyard –** As large areas of the global vineyard would become challenging or ultimately unsuitable for viticulture , researchers will need to develop rootstooks and clones that are more drought tolerant and delay ripening. Ironically, grower may need to re-introduce some shade to help keep the grapes cool and to help retain their flavour. Growers will also need to reassess their water management strategies as availability is reduced and costs go up and seek out cooler areas with soils with excellent water holding capacities.
b) **Winery –**Higher temperatures will mean a greater emphasis on temperature control and as alcohol levels rise then there will be a greater need to intervene with sophisticated technologies such as reverse osmosis or spinning cones to produce a balanced wine. Producers are also being encouraged to reduce their carbon footprint throughout the supply chain and to reduce their energy inputs or to increase their use of renewable energy.

Final Draft – 186 words

Climate Change

If the figure of +0.3^{o}C every decade quoted by Pancho Campo MW and others is correct the impact on wine science will be significant.

a) As large areas of the global vineyard would become challenging or unsuitable for viticulture , researchers will need to develop rootstooks and clones that are more drought tolerant and delay ripening. Ironically, grower may need to re-introduce some shade to help keep the grapes cool and retain flavour. Growers will also need to reassess their water management strategies as availability is reduced and costs go up or plant cooler areas with excellent water retaining soils.
b) Temperature control in the winery will be even more important and as alcohol levels rise there will be a greater need to intervene with sophisticated technologies such as reverse osmosis or spinning cone to produce balanced wine.
c) Demand will grow to reduce carbon footprint and energy inputs throughout the supply chain and to increase the use of renewable energy.

This may only be a saving of 28 words but over the entire length of an Assignment these edits can reduce the word count by several hundred words.

In most cases these techniques are enough to bring the word count under 3000. However, if this fails, there is another method you can use. Review your Assignment plan and identify any examples that can be removed without having an impact on the points you are trying to make. You will always have more information than you need so it is very important that you choose the most effective examples.

If your word count is under 2500 words then do not be tempted to pad it. If you are just adding adjective and adverbs in order to reach 2500 words it is likely that you are not tackling the issues in an appropriate level of detail.

In this situation you should in the first instance review your plan and ask yourself “have I covered all the points that are required?” and “Is there enough detail in the examples to support my arguments?” If you are honest with yourself these questions are normally enough to help you build up your assignment with valuable extra content. If you just cannot see the way forward, consider asking your fellow students or your colleagues for ideas and suggestions.

Phase 3 – The Final Polish

Some people do not do this as a separate phase but others have found it to be helpful. As we will discuss below, referencing and writing a bibliography are important elements in a Course Work Assignment. Referencing is a task that requires a lot of concentration to get right and some people find it very distracting to add in references whilst they are writing. They prefer to do it at the very end when everything else has been completed. Likewise the bibliography is a distinct task and can easily be completed as a final task.

Spelling and Clear Presentation

This is the only Diploma examination where you may be penalised for poor spelling or presentation. You will only ever loose or gain a small number of marks but it is important to stress some key points.

- You will not be penalised if you are not a native English speaker and your written style is not entirely fluent.
- You are likely to be penalised for poor spelling. You have plenty of time either to check this yourself using a computer or get someone else to check it for you.
- Nearly every student writes their assignment on a computer. This is not required and you can hand-write it. You will not be penalised for hand writing your assignment.
- Clear presentation can be achieved by using many different techniques such as bold headings, different point sizes, bullet points. Whatever methods you use, they should be used consistently throughout the document.

Referencing

References are required in your Course Work Assignment. You will be penalised if you do not use them in your assignment.

They are an important part of any considered piece of writing whether it is academic or not. They can be used in three very different ways.

- First, they are your proof that you have fully researched the topic by showing that the concepts and data that are used can be checked by the reader. For the academic this is vital as any assertion needs to be checkable or demonstrable otherwise, quite rightly, its validity will be called into question.
- Second, they help the reader to clearly distinguish between yours and other peoples' thoughts. For the student this has an added benefit as it ensures there can be no accusation of plagiarism.
- Finally, they can be used to add a little context to you comments that is valid but which might otherwise detract from the flow of your argument.

Once again let's take a look at a section from the Assignment on *The Role of Science and Technology in Wine Production.* All of the three possible uses for footnotes are used here.

Concluding Remarks

In the future there are likely to be two very important factors which will present wine science with very different challenges; global warming and consumer pressure.

Climate Change

If the figure of +0.3^{o}C every decade quoted by Pancho Campo MW and others[1] is correct the impact on wine science will be significant.

a) As large areas of the global vineyard would become challenging or unsuitable for viticulture , researchers will need to develop rootstooks and clones that are more drought tolerant and delay ripening. Ironically, grower may need to re-introduce some shade to help keep the grapes cool and retain flavour. Growers will also need to reassess their water management strategies as availability is reduced and costs go up or plant cooler areas with excellent water retaining soils.

b) Temperature control in the winery will be even more important and as alcohol levels rise there will be a greater need to intervene with sophisticated technologies such as reverse osmosis or spinning cone to produce balanced wine.

c) Demand will grow to reduce carbon footprint and energy inputs throughout the supply chain and to increase the use of renewable energy.

Consumer Pressure

Wine science has given consumers the consistent, fruity wines they love. However as the pressures of exchange rates, taxes and price promotions put growing pressures on both retailers and producers[2], the wine world will increasingly fragment towards two opposing poles;

a) Individual flavour and provenance at a premium price will be the choice of the minority. Science has a role in this: the main thrust of Gladstones' book was to fully account for terroir in scientific terms and inform future vineyard management techniques and site selection[3]. However, some will turn away from science altogether. The rise of natural and biodynamic wines, all be it on a small scale to date, are clear evidence of this.[4]

b) Multiple retailers will not abandon a large body of customers who prefer inexpensive fruity and off-dry wines to price inflation. To reach certain price points British and made-wine[5] will come to the fore with brands with a potential to reach a size far in excess of those currently limited by geographical designations[6]. Such products with their tight QA and cost parameters, their need for healthy grapes and clean fruity flavours and their complex blending demands will place ever greater demands on scientist to deliver a consistent product. For the majority of consumers science will remain the driving force behind their enjoyment.

These market pressures represent at once the triumph and the limits of science. Its theories and experiments can be used to inform vineyard management and bring ever greater control to the winemaking process but how the resulting wines are received by consumers is ultimately beyond its capacity to predict or explain.

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[1] The website of the The World Conference on Climate Change and Wine http://www.climatechangeandwine.com/ convened by Pancho Campo MW in 20o6, 2008 and 2011 (last accessed 25/10/11).
[2] This debate surrounding the pressures on retailers and producers is very topical. The producers view was recently put by Cox in *Harpers* Issue no: 69 October 21 2011.
[3] Gladstones, *Wine, Terroir and Climate Change*, p. 1
[4] Waldin, *Biodynamic Wines*
[5] Made-wine is defined by HM Revenue & Customs as "..a wide variety of drinks that do not fall under the heading of spirits, wine, beer or cider but are made from the alcoholic fermentation of any substance or the mixing of wine with another substance." http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/wicimanual/wici6030.htm (last accessed 30/10/11)
[6] Dan Jago of Tesco predicted the rise of made-wine in a speech to the 2011 WSET BACK course. This was supported by personal communications with Laura Jewel MW of Tesco and industry commentator Robert Joseph. Joseph also sees a significant future for off dry wines, especially Moscatel, and aromatized low alcohol wines because they are not very "wine-like". His views on wine trending were articulated at 2011 WSET BACK course and 2011 International Sparkling Wine Symposium.

This is also a good example of how to present references. Here the student has used footnotes others prefer to place their references in brackets within the body of the text. For example (Rawlings and Greaves, 2003). The examiners do not require you to use one system over another. Nevertheless, there are some common rules that apply.

- When referencing a website you should put in the full URL that will take the reader directly to the page in question. As websites can change at any time it is considered to be best practice to add the date when you last checked the link.
- When referencing a book you need to be as precise as possible. You should include the authors name, the title of the book and relevant page numbers.
- When referencing a magazine you should give the publication title, issue number and page referenced for the article.
- When citing unwritten sources it is best to be as specific as possible. These are inevitably harder to check but the detail adds credibility to the reference and makes possible for the reader to follow up.

Bibliography
You are required to include a bibliography with your assignment. You will be penalised if you fail to do so.

A bibliography complements your references. They are proof that you have fully researched the subject. Any work that you directly reference in your assignment must be included in the bibliography. You are not limited to these works but if you include works that you do not reference you should briefly state why you have included them. They may provide valuable context which you were not have been able to include specifically in your assignment. However, be warned, the number of unreferenced entries must be kept to a minimum. An examiner will be unimpressed by a long list of works if the information in them remains unused or unreferenced.

The examiners do not require you to adopt a particular convention when presenting your bibliography but you should consider the following pointers.

- Consider sub-dividing the works either by type (*e.g.* book, magazine) or subject.
- Works should be listed alphabetically by author surname and should ideally include the following information
    - author or editor
    - title and edition if relevant
    - publisher
    - date of publication
- For websites include the full URL and the last time you visited the site (see above).
- Italics can be used to make this information easier to read.

For example;

> Gladstones, John, *Wine, Terroir and Climate Change*, Wakefield Press 2011
> Limmer, Alan, *The Chemistry of Post-bottling Sulfides in Wines*, http://nzic.org.nz/CiNZ/articles/Limmer_69_3.pdf (last accessed 30/10/11)
> Robinson *et al*, *The Oxford Companion to Wine (3rd Edition)*, Oxford University Press 2006

Appendices and Footnotes
These are not included in the word count. However, they should be used in moderation. Do not be tempted into thinking that this is a way of cheating the word count. Students who do this do not get the extra marks they are trying to gain as examiners simply ignore the extra content.

As noted above, footnotes can add a little context to an argument. The examples given above (footnotes 2, 5 and 6) are at the absolute limit of what is necessary and acceptable for your course work assignment.

You can use appendices for additional information that supports a point you are trying to make but which would take up too much space if placed in a footnote. You can also use these to record any interviews, which you did as part of your research, or any other referenced material that cannot be accessed by the examiner.

Part 4: WSET Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting Wine®

Purpose

The **WSET Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting® (SAT)** provides a structured way of writing a complete, detailed, description of a wine. It gives a common vocabulary that can be used by wine professionals and amateurs to communicate their perceptions to each other. The SAT is divided into two parts: a descriptive part and an evaluative part. It is supported by a **Lexicon** of descriptive words covering some suggested aroma and flavour terms, and words for describing balance, texture and overall impression.

The first, descriptive, part of the SAT should be a purely objective description of a wine, and covers how the wine presents itself in appearance, to your nose, and on your palate (including the impressions that linger after spitting/swallowing). For the purposes of the Level 4 Diploma exam, this presents the examiners with a chance to assess two important skills:

1. correctly assessing the levels of various components of a wine, relative to appropriate scales
2. creating an evocative description of a wine, that communicates what the wine tastes like to someone who has not tasted it.

The second, evaluative, part requires you to use evidence from the descriptive part to draw conclusions about the wine. This receives far more attention at level 4 than at lower levels. For the purposes of the Diploma exam, the most important of the conclusion-drawing skills are:

- presenting a well-argued quality assessment of a wine
- judging the potential of the wine for further ageing.

The examination will also sometimes ask you to identify the origin and grape variety/ies (sometimes of a single wine; sometimes of a group). Other things may be asked too, for example price band of the wine, or production factors that account for the style of the wine.

Diploma examiners recognise that different tasters have different levels of sensitivity to wine components such as sugar, acid and tannin. However, the examiners also assume that through a combination of practice and coaching you will have calibrated your palate alongside those of other expert tasters, to be able to classify the levels of these and other components as ‘low’, ‘medium’ or ‘high’, relative to the general world of wine. Aroma vocabulary is more personal, and there is room for more freedom here, with the restriction that the terms used in the tasting note must make sense to the reader (examiner) as well as the writer.

Types of Tasting Paper

In all units 3, 5 and 6 examinations wines are presented in flights of three. There may be a common link between the three samples, and if so this common link may be stated (for example ‘wines 1 to 3 all come from the same region’, or ‘wines 1 to 3 are all made from the same grape variety’, or even more specifically ‘wines 1 to 3 all come from Spain’). But the common link may be left unstated. In some cases the examiners may ask you what you think the common link is, and may ask you to provide reasons to support your conclusion.

Note that although typical question styles will be described here, and past questions are a good idea of what will be asked in the future, the examiners may decide to change what they ask in the evaluative part of the exam without announcing what this will be. Therefore, be flexible!

Unit 3

You will taste and comment on twelve wines in total. These are divided into four flights of three, with a short break between the first six wines and the last six wines. You have one hour for each block of six wines. Your grade is based on their total score across the twelve wines. For unit 3, the theory and tasting papers are treated separately: if you pass tasting and fail the theory (or vice versa), you only need to retake the part you have failed. Exceptional performance in theory combined with a fail for tasting (or vice versa) does not even out as an overall pass: both parts must be passed separately.

The wines used in the exam can come from anywhere within the Unit 3 syllabus, and are not limited to the 'recommended tasting samples' listed in the specification.

There will usually be two '**identify the common link**' flights. The common link could be grape variety, or origin, or it could be a factor (in the vineyard or winery) that affects the style of the wine. Arguments for common links will be described in detail below.

There will almost always be a flight where there are three wines in a similar style (same grape variety, same origin) but at **three different quality levels**. This is a chance for you to show you can correctly identify and evaluate quality levels in considerable detail. Quality arguments are discussed below.

Because not all wines are suitable for 'common link' and a very limited number of wine styles are suitable for 'three different quality levels' flights, there will usually be at least one '**mixed bag**' flight of three wines. This provides the examiners with a chance to pick wines from the whole of the syllabus.

Any of these formats may be all white, all red, all rosé, or may mix white, red and rosé wines.

Units 5 and 6

You will taste and comment on just three wines in an exam that combines tasting with theory. Unlike unit 3, your marks are based on your combined tasting and theory scores, so a good score in one part can make up for a marginal fail in the other, leading to an overall pass grade.

The most common format is the 'mixed bag', but it is also possible for the examiners to present candidates with a trio of wines with a (stated or unstated) common link, or even three wines from the same origin but differing in style and/or quality.

As with unit 3, any of these tasting exams may be all white, all red, all rosé, or may mix white, red and rosé wines.

General Points for Using the SAT

The SAT consists of a left hand column with general headings such as Clarity/brightness, Intensity, Colour, Other observations, and a right hand column with some specific terms to use. In some cases, candidates are restricted to using the specific terms, and in other cases the specific terms are optional. This will be explained in more detail below.

The SAT is supported by a second document: **The Lexicon**, which in the laminated copies of the SAT is printed on the reverse side. The words in the Lexicon are optional suggestions: they are not a complete list of the words you may use.

Where terms in the right hand column of the SAT are separated by **hyphens** (for example lemon-green – lemon – gold – amber – brown), candidates should select ONE of the terms to describe the wine. Be specific. Even if you think the wine sits on the border of ruby and garnet (for example), make

a decision, rather than using a vague range such as 'ruby-garnet' or 'ruby to garnet'. If both ruby and garnet are valid descriptions, then this will be noted in the marking key. If candidates use a range ('ruby to garnet', 'low to medium (-)'), then the examiner will NOT grant them the mark even where the marking key allows a range. This is because candidates are not using the SAT correctly. Where candidates use alternative words (e.g. 'straw', 'cherry' for colours, or 'crisp' without qualifying a level for acidity), they will also NOT be awarded marks. Candidates and educators may know individually (or within their community) what they mean by these and other additional words, but for the exam to be valid, the meaning of words needs to be consistent between *examiners* and candidates. The main reason for limiting candidates to such a short set of terms is that calibrating eyes, noses and palates to achieve consistent use of these words alone presents a considerable, but manageable challenge. Achieving consistent use with a wider vocabulary would be even harder, and is not necessary: the terms provided are sufficient to describe any wine with accuracy.

Most instances where hyphens are used require you to place the level of something on a scale ranging from low (or pale, light, dry, short) to high (or deep, full, luscious, long). As with Level 3, you should treat all of these as **three-point scales** that are further subdivided. Medium (+) is therefore not a point equidistant between medium and high, but is a subdivision of medium. It can be thought of as 'medium, but towards the upper end of the medium band'. 'Medium' is divided this way because the majority of observations for the majority of wines lie within 'medium', and subdividing this makes it possible for candidates to differentiate within this commonly-used area. For most components, only 'medium' is subdivided but sweetness is the exception. Each point on the three point scale is divided into two. 'Dry' is subdivided into 'dry' and 'off-dry', 'medium' into 'medium-dry' and 'medium-sweet' and 'sweet' is subdivided into 'sweet' and 'luscious'. This reflects the fact that most wines are dry or off-dry and the huge differences in sugar levels between sweet wines.

It can be tempting for candidates to over-use **medium (including + and -)**. But the danger is that their tasting notes consist almost entirely of mediums, and fail to capture the differences between wines. Some candidates have found it useful to make their initial assessment of the wine using a *non-subdivided* three point scale. The restricted range of terms encourages you to be bolder in using the ends of the scale. Then, they can return to the components they have described as 'medium' and decide whether to further refine this assessment with a (+) or a (-). Another way to help avoid over-using 'medium' is to think of 'medium' (including medium + and medium -) as meaning the same as 'unremarkable'. For many components of many wines, the level is indeed unremarkable, and in these cases it is appropriate to use medium (including + and -). However, many of the wines used in Diploma exams will have at least some remarkably high or low levels of components.

You may find it helpful to look at the wine as a whole, and make a decision of 'which are the **remarkable features** of this wine', or 'which are the features that make it different from a generic red, white, rosé, sparkling wine', etc. If they you the acid is a remarkable feature, but your awareness of wines with even higher acidity is making them hesitate to describe the acid as 'high' rather than 'medium (+)', then you should remember that 'high' is also a band: its use should not be limited to wines that are at the very extremes. Be confident to use the ends of the scales.

Currently the only penalty for missing a remarkable feature of a wine is that the candidate fails to gain the mark for that component.

Where terms in the right hand column are preceded by '**e.g**.', the candidate is not restricted to the terms in the SAT. In the case of the lines Aroma characteristics, Flavour characteristics and 'palate: other observations', you are strongly encouraged to use the Lexicon (see more detailed remarks under 'nose' and 'palate' below). This lexicon is used for producing the marking key, and candidates will be able to gain full marks using just those terms. However, where candidates wish to use other words, the examiner will reward where appropriate. This means that the terms used by the candidate should be understood by the examiner, as well as being valid descriptions of the wine.

Write full sentences, not bullet points. Remember that the examiner wants to test your ability to communicate your impression of what the wine is like, and not just your ability to assess levels of structural components. There are examples below of model tasting notes, written in sentences. These demonstrate that turning bullet points or lists into prose does not require many more words (or much more time). You can use the same sentence structure for all of your notes, and doing so may even help you avoid missing structural components.

The **awarding of marks** for the descriptive part of the tasting exam follows a fairly rigid formula, though examiners are free to make small adjustments where they judge this is appropriate. Generally each of the 20 marks for the descriptive part will be awarded for getting one element correct. If the candidate misdescribes that element, then they cannot recover that lost mark elsewhere. So, for example, if you describe a pale lemon wine as deep lemon, and correctly identify some tartrate deposits, legs and some petillance, you could get a maximum of two out of the three marks available for appearance. The marks for 'Other observations' are capped at one, which the candidate could have gained simply for mentioning tears, and they gain their second correct mark for describing the colour correctly (but miss the mark for intensity).

Appearance

Three marks are awarded for assessing the appearance:

	all wines
Clarity/brightness	0 marks
Intensity	1 mark
Colour	1 mark
Other observations	1 mark

Candidates should aim for brevity throughout the exam, but especially here. 'Clear and bright, medium lemon, showing tears' could get all three marks if the description is correct. 'Clear and bright, medium lemon core with some hints of pale lemon-green at the rim, and flashes of deep gold and amber, with pale watery tears and some bubbles at the rim' might sound poetic, but it also seems as if the candidate cannot decide whether to classify the wine as gold, lemon or lemon-green. They have also wasted time that could better be spent on nose, palate or quality evaluation.

From August 2012 to August 2013, the mark that is available for Other observations for either a still or a sparkling wine can be gained by making a simple observation such as 'showing tears' or 'bubbles'.

Clarity/Brightness

No marks are awarded for noting that the wine is clear and bright. But if a wine is dull or slightly hazy (but not faulty) then the 'Other observations' mark may be allocated for noting this.

This line is included in the SAT because lack of clarity or brightness can be evidence that the wine may be faulty. Candidates should always note this, but no marks are awarded because all wines shown in Diploma exams should be in good condition.

A perfectly clear wine does not scatter a beam of light passing through the body of the wine. Most wine has a low level of suspended particles that will scatter the light slightly, particularly if the wine is bottled without fining or filtration. If the amount of scattering is within acceptable levels, the wine can be described as 'clear'. The opposite of clear is 'hazy'. If the wine has an unusually high amount of suspended particles, this may be evidence of a fault, such as microbiological activity.

A bright wine has a glossy, reflective surface, like a mirror. Some wines are brighter than others: generally wines that are younger or lower in pH are brighter than older higher pH wines. If the brightness is within acceptable levels, the wine is described simply as 'bright', wherever on the

brightness scale it falls. The opposite of bright is ‘dull’, and as with haziness, dullness can be evidence of a fault, such as excessive oxidation.

Thus with a quick glance, a healthy wine can be described as ‘clear and bright’ before specifying the colour. Excessive haziness or dullness should alert the taster that the wine may be faulty, and the precise nature of the fault can often be determined by assessing the colour or aromas.

Intensity

The level of intensity can be assessed by holding the glass at a 45˚ angle and seeing how far the colour extends from the core (deepest part of the bowl) to the rim (shallowest depth of wine). For red wines, it can also be assessed by looking down through the wine at the point where the stem of the glass is attached to the bowl, to see how easily the stem can be seen.

All white wines appear colourless right at the rim, but a white wine that has a broad watery rim should be described as pale, whereas if the pigment reaches almost to the rim it should be described as deep. All red wines appear opaque at the core, if poured into a sufficiently large glass. Looking at the rim, if the wine is lightly pigmented from the rim to close to the core, it can be described as pale. It should be easy to see the stem of the glass clearly through such a wine. If the wine is intensely pigmented right up to the rim, it should be described as deep, and looking down through the wine in the bowl, it should be almost impossible to see the stem. You can also form your own intensity scale by seeing how easily words, or your thumb, can be seen when looking through the wine half way between the core and the rim.

Sparkling, sweet and fortified wines should be assessed using the same scale used for white, rosé or red wines (as appropriate). So, an Amontillado Sherry that may be lower in intensity compared to other oxidised Sherries should still be described as ‘deep’, even though an ancient Oloroso, PX or Rutherglen Muscat would be even deeper.

Colour

Colour is the balance of levels of red, blue, yellow, green or brown found in a wine, and is independent of the level of intensity.

The composition of a wine at the surface or the rim is the same as the composition at the bottom of the glass, so the colour does not change when looking through different parts of the wine in a tilted glass. However, because the depth of liquid changes, the intensity of colour changes. White and most rosé wines are very pale, almost colourless at the rim, so the colour is best judged where there is sufficient depth of liquid for a clear colour to appear: the core. By contrast, many red wines are so deeply pigmented that they can appear opaque at the core, so the colour of red wines is most accurately assessed near the rim.

Many components contribute to wine colour, but as a very good approximation white wine hues can be placed on a scale that runs from green (due to chlorophyll) through yellow to orange and brown (due to the effects of oak extraction, age or oxidation). The most common colour for white wines is ‘lemon’. If there is a noticeable greenness to the colour, the wine is ‘lemon-green’. If there is a hint of orange or brown, the wine is ‘gold’. Wines with a very noticeable level of browning could be described as amber or brown, but these will generally be wines that are very old, or wines that are deliberately oxidised.

Red wines can be placed on a scale that runs from bluish-purple (due to grape skin pigments) through red (from pigmented tannins) to orange and brown (due to the effects of oxidation or age). The most common colour for red wine is ‘ruby’. Wines with a noticeable blue or purple colour are described as ‘purple’. If there is a noticeable orange or brown colour but the wine is still more red than brown, it is described as ‘garnet’. If the wine is more brown than red, it may be described as garnet or even

tawny. Brown should be used for wines where no redness in the colour remains. Tawny and brown are usually seen only in very old wines, or wines that are deliberately oxidised.

A similar scale exists for rosé wines, which can be considered as pale red wines, but by convention have their own set of appearance descriptions. Most rosés are described as salmon, which lies between purplish-pink ('pink', or the rosé equivalent of 'purple') or an orangey-pink ('orange', or the rosé equivalent of 'garnet'). 'Onion skin' is a distinctly brownish pink, equivalent to 'tawny' in red wines.

Note that although certain colours are more often found at certain levels of intensity (brown, in a white wine, is usually deep, whereas lemon-green is rarely deep), it is possible to encounter all permutations of colour and intensity. Thus, 'deep lemon' differs from 'medium gold' both in the intensity of colour, and where it lies on the green-yellow-orange-brown spectrum.

Some colour descriptors such as 'brick', 'tile' and 'straw' are widely used when describing wines. These are not included in the WSET Systematic Approach to Tasting. It would be impractical to clearly define all these terms and the words selected for the Systematic Approach to Tasting are sufficient to describe all wines with sufficient accuracy.

Other Observations

For the reasons given under 'colour', there is no need to remark on any apparent difference in colour between the core and the rim of a wine.

When served in a suitable glass, all wines show tears (streams of liquid adhering to the side of the glass after the wine has been swirled). Wines that contain sugar or high alcohol levels are more viscous and have thicker, more persistent tears. Some red wines are so intensely coloured that the tears are visibly pigmented.

Wines for Diploma exams are decanted and so should not show any deposits. However, where there are deposits, the candidate can gain a mark for mentioning their presence. But this mark is not in addition to mentioning tears. The same applies if the candidate feels the wine is dull or hazy enough to be worthy of remark.

There are a few other observations that can be made about the appearance of a wine. Some wines may show small carbon dioxide petillance or bubbles, which can be evidence of a fault (such as refermentation or malolactic fermentation in the bottle). Some light-bodied, unoaked white wines are handled very carefully, in order to retain some of the dissolved carbon dioxide produced during the fermentation to add desirable freshness and texture. In sparkling wines, the size and persistence of bubbles are often cited as a factor when assessing quality, but bubble texture is more usefully assessed on the palate. For this reason, there is no need in Unit 5 to spend time assessing size, speed or persistence of bubbles in the glass –such information will often tell you more about the glass than about the liquid. However, candidates that make brief remarks on these can gain the mark for 'other observations' this way.

When swirling wines, the surface can catch reflections from other light sources or objects in the room. These can appear as pretty highlights or flashes of colour, but are not an intrinsic property of the wine.

Nose

Seven marks are available for describing the nose:

	all wines
Condition	0 marks
Intensity	1 mark
Aroma characteristics	5 marks (but see below for details)
Development	1 mark

Condition

As with 'brightness/clarity', no marks are awarded for describing the wine as clean, because all Diploma wines should be in good condition and sufficient back-up bottles are usually supplied to ensure faulty wines do not need to be used. In situations where there are insufficient back up bottles to serve the needs of the examination the wine will not be shown and the examiners will calculate an aegrotat mark from the other two wines in the flight. Where it is necessary to draw a conclusion from three wines the examiners will take this into account. It is important to stress that this is a very, very rare situation.

If the wine looks healthy (clear and bright), it may still show a fault that reveals itself on the nose. It is important that you should be aware of and able to identify common wine faults and with practice, you should be able to identify the most common ones:

- TCA (Tricholoroanisole) and similar taints give the wine aromas reminiscent of damp cardboard. At low levels the taint can be hard to identify, but the wine will lack the expected level of fruit and freshness. This kind of fault can be due to a tainted cork (in which case a replacement bottle is unlikely to be affected), or due to tainted winery equipment, such a barrels (in which case a whole batch may be faulty). Because the origin can lie in the winery, this problem is not limited to bottles closed with a cork.
- Reduction gives the wine a 'stinky' character, sometimes like rotten eggs, and sometimes more like boiled cabbage, boiled onions or blocked drains. Very low levels of reduction can be surprisingly pleasant, adding character and complexity, and are sometimes misdescribed as 'minerality'. In some cases the stinky aromas will dissipate once the bottle is open.
- Oxidation is the opposite of reduction. The wine will be deeper coloured and more brown than it should be. It will have aromas of toffee, honey, caramel or coffee, and will lack freshness and fruitiness. This could be due to failure of the closure, excess dissolved oxygen or insufficient sulfur dioxide at bottling, or the wine being too old.
- Volatile acidity ('V.A.') gives the wine aromas similar to vinegar or nail polish remover. All wines have some volatile acidity, and low levels help make the wine seem more fragrant and complex.
- Brettanomyces ('Brett') is a yeast whose activity gives wine plastic or animal aromas reminiscent of sticking plasters, hot vinyl, smoked meat, leather, or sweaty horses. Some consumers enjoy these characters, and do not consider 'brett' to be a fault.
- Out of Condition: A wine that is too old, or which has been stored in bad conditions (too hot, too bright, too variable), can lose its vibrancy and freshness, and taste dull and stale. There may be elements of oxidation too.
- Sulfur Dioxide is present in all wines, but levels tend to be highest in sweet white wines. At very high levels it can give a wine an acrid smell of recently extinguished matches. At lower levels, it can mask the fruitiness of a wine. Insufficient sulfur dioxide can lead to oxidation.

Intensity

As a general rule, if when you insert your nose into the glass the aromas are immediately apparent even without sniffing then they are ‘pronounced’. If, even after inserting your nose and sniffing repeatedly, you find the aromas to be faint and hard to detect, the intensity is ‘light’. Otherwise, it is medium (but may be on the upper or lower side of medium)

Aroma Characteristics

More than a thousand different compounds have been found that could contribute to aromas in wines. It would be difficult to learn all of these, and probably impossible for anyone to learn to distinguish all of them. Even if this were possible, it would be of limited value for communicating to people who weren’t familiar with these compounds. Instead, we take advantage of the fact that many of the compounds, or combinations of compounds have aromas that are similar to (and sometimes identical to) other more familiar aromas.

For the five marks available for describing the aroma characteristics, you should not think in terms of one mark for each named aroma. This is because:

- For some wines that are very simple in style, there aren’t five distinct aromas to find, though there may be aromas that can be described equally approximately by two or three alternative words. Noting the simplicity and the more general character of such wines (neutral, jammy and ripe, perfumed, etc) is just as important as finding specific aromas (‘lemon, grapefruit, green apple, pear), and is more evocative than a shopping list of fruit that fails to describe how those fruits express themselves (distinctly or vaguely, as fresh fruit or baked or cooked or confected, etc).

- For more complex wines, a list of five aromas may miss something important about the wine. For example, a very complex oaked Chardonnay where the aromas are described as ‘mango, red apple, pineapple, peach, fig’ would not be an accurate and complete description of the aromas because the candidate has made no mention of oak.

For this reason, examiners use their judgement when awarding marks for aroma descriptors, rather than simply awarding a mark for each listed item in the marking key. Their decisions take into account how complete and appropriate the candidate’s list of aroma descriptors is.

Technical chemical vocabulary is sometimes used when describing wines, and in the Diploma exam you can use these terms if you feel comfortable using them accurately. Whichever vocabulary you choose to use, it is important that your audience (in this case the examiner) understands you.

One way to think of the process is as follows:

Before going into great detail regarding the exact nature of the aromas present, try to group them into the following general headings of primary, secondary and tertiary aromas (not all of these are present in every wine). The next step is to take each of those that are present and describe them precisely.

Primary aromas are fruity and floral aromas that originate in compounds found in the grapes. Some primary aroma compounds can be detected in the fresh grapes and juice, but for others the juice has to be fermented before they can be smelt or tasted. Primary aromas are generally the aromas that distinguish one grape variety from another while the wine is young. Fermentation generates some fruity and floral aromas which are, strictly speaking, secondary aromas. These include the pear-like aromas found in some inexpensive cold-fermented whites, which can be difficult to distinguish from ‘true’ primary aromas. For the purposes of describing the wine and assessing its development, candidates will not be penalised if they classify these as primary aromas.

Within the primary fruit aroma clusters, it can be useful first to think ‘what kind of wine is this?’ For a white wine, is it fairly neutral and simple, or is it an aromatic style. If it is a simple wine, then a short list of fruit descriptors will be sufficient. For an aromatic wine, is it mainly fruity/floral (like a Muscat, Riesling or Viognier) or is it more herbaceous (like a Sauvignon Blanc)? Is there one intense aroma or is it aromatically complex as well as intense? For red wines, are the aromas mainly black fruits (most dominant in Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah) or mainly red fruits (which generally dominate in Pinot Noir, Sangiovese)? In all cases, look at the character of the fruit to decide whether it is more fresh (suggesting early harvest or cool ripening conditions) or jammy or tropical (suggesting later harvesting or hotter ripening conditions). Thus when expressing primary fruit aromas you can show insight by putting them into appropriate groups, for example:

- Simple, non-aromatic and neutral (hint of lemon and pear)
- Herbaceous (green pepper, fresh cut grass, asparagus)
- Fresh and floral (green apple, blossom)
- Tropical and ripe (mango, fig, pineapple)
- Ripe black fruit (cassis, cooked black cherry, prune)
- Fresh red fruits (strawberry, raspberry)

For each wine, there will be a maximum number of marks that can be gained for describing any particular primary fruit cluster. Within this maximum, candidates can think of the following as a guide to how they will gain marks:

- One mark for describing the cluster in some detail. (‘black fruit’ and ‘herbaceous’ are too vague to be worthy of a mark, but ‘ripe and jammy black fruits’ or ‘vaguely defined and rather generic black fruits’ and ‘pungently herbaceous’ are evocative enough to gain a mark. The examiner will use their judgement here).
- One additional mark for each particular descriptor included within the cluster, up to the maximum available for that cluster.
- One mark is gained for each appropriate particular descriptor, even where the candidate does not group it into a cluster.
- Exception: for some very simple wines, a single remark (on its simplicity, neutrality, or characterising the fruit character) may gain two marks.

Secondary aromas arise due to production processes that occur in the winery (other than ageing). The most obvious of these are aromas extracted from oak, but secondary aromas also include nutty, buttery characteristics from malolactic fermentation, and yeasty, creamy and biscuity aromas that develop through lees contact.

Tertiary aromas have their origin in ageing processes. The ageing process could be oxidative (caused by the action of oxygen), for example due to a long period in oak. This will add tertiary coffee, toffee, caramel and chocolate aromas. Or, the ageing process could be a reductive one (protected from the action of oxygen), for example due to a long period in bottle. This develops the fruit towards savoury flavours of mushroom, vegetable and earth.

Try to think of all the secondary and tertiary aroma clusters you can find. For the purposes of constructing the marking key (and limiting the marks available to candidates who omit to mention them), the most common and important of these clusters are:

- Secondary aromas extracted from oak
- Secondary by-products of yeast autolysis
- Tertiary aromas generated by oxidative ageing processes
- Tertiary aromas generated by reductive (in-bottle) ageing processes

This is not a complete list: other sources of secondary and tertiary aromas include

- Secondary by-products of malolactic fermentation
- Secondary aromas extracted from lees contact
- Secondary aromas added due to biological ageing
- Secondary fixing of stinky reductive sulphur compounds due to storage in reductive conditions
- Secondary esters generated by yeasts
- Secondary effects of brettanomyces
- Tertiary volatile acidity (where this is at a low enough level not to make the wine faulty).

If the wine only has primary fruit, then all five marks will be allocated for this. But you should still decide whether the wine is very simple (in which case they should describe the simplicity) or whether the primary fruit is rather complex. In a complex wine there may even be more than one type of primary fruit character present: for example, the tropical passionfruit aromas and herbaceous green aromas in a high quality Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc.

If oak is present, then the fruit marks may be capped at three or four (depending on how important the oak element is), with the remaining mark/s only available to those candidates that mention oak-derived aromas. Ideally the candidate should identify these as coming from oak, but mentioning the presence of aromas such as vanilla or toast will gain the marks.

If the wine is showing some development, then the fruit marks may be capped at three or four (again, depending on how important the ageing element is). If you have described the wine as 'developing' rather than 'youthful', then you should certainly name something that is evidence for this.

If the wine is showing oak and development (e.g. a Rioja Reserva), then the clusters may be capped as follows:

- 3 maximum for fruit
- 2 maximum for oak
- 2 maximum for tertiary aromas

But you would only get a maximum of 4 marks if you fail to mention one of these three groups.

This adds up to more than 5, and allows the candidate to gain the full five marks in several different ways, all of which require the candidate to mention at least one characteristic under each of the three clusters:

- 1 for fruit + 2 for oak + 2 for tertiary aromas
- 2 for fruit + 1 for oak + 2 for tertiary aromas
- 2 for fruit + 2 for oak + 1 for tertiary aromas
- 3 for fruit + 1 for oak + 1 for tertiary aromas

Similarly for wines where other aspects such as yeast autolysis, oxidation, biological ageing etc are important features of the aromas, then your marks will be capped below five if they fail to mention these.

Bearing this in mind, you maximise your chances of scoring full marks if you:

- ensure you cover all the important aspects of the aromas
- cluster your aromas into meaningful groups.

But note that this is an attempt to explain how the examiner may use their judgement in the awarding of marks, rather than a precise description of exactly how marks are always awarded.

Thinking in terms of aroma clusters will bring objectivity and insight to your descriptions, and also help maximise the marks that you gain by ensuring your descriptions don't miss anything important. Having already divided the aromas into primary, secondary and tertiary clusters to form an initial impression about the development of the wine, you then need to be more specific about the particular aromas you find, but you should ensure that your list of aromas covers all the main kinds of aroma present in the wine (fruit, oak, malolactic, oxidative etc). However, do not get hung-up on these minutiae. It is important to remember that whether a particular aroma is 'butter' or 'cream' may be hard to agree and examiners take a flexible approach when awarding these marks. It is far more important that you concern yourself with aroma clusters. Whether a wine seems aromatic in style, is unoaked or is made from very ripe fruit can usually be agreed by experienced tasters, and these elements form the basis for the allocation of marks.

Obviously, in their attempt to describe the wine as completely but as accurately as possible, candidates should avoid mentioning aroma groups that are not present in the wine, e.g. mentioning oak in an unoaked wine, or tertiary characteristics in a young fresh wine.

Development

Generally if the wine is dominated by primary or secondary aromas, it can be described as youthful. It is common for the secondary aromas (e.g. oak, butter) to stand apart from the primary aromas of fruit at this stage, as they are not yet fully integrated. If the main aromas are tertiary aromas the wine can be described as fully developed, even if there are still significant primary and secondary aromas present. At this stage, the secondary aromas will usually be fully integrated and may be hard to distinguish from the tertiary aromas. A wine should be described as developing if it is some way on the journey from 'youthful' to 'fully developed'. Once a wine ceases to improve, it becomes past its best. This could be because it has lost too much of its attractive fruit, or because the flavours that have started to appear are unpleasant.

Not all wines develop in an interesting way. Almost all rosés, most inexpensive whites and many inexpensive reds pass directly from 'youthful' to 'past its best'. Their attractive youthful fruit fades and the stale aromas that begin to develop are unpleasant. Such wines are either youthful or in decline and past their best.

Some wines have already undergone an ageing process when they are released, and a significant portion of their aromas will be tertiary, though the wine is intended to benefit from further ageing. These include most Vintage Champagnes, and ageable red wines such as Classed Growth Bordeaux or Rioja Gran Reserva, which have been aged in barrel and perhaps in bottle before release. These wines are 'developing' when they are released.

Some wines are released after going through a complete ageing process. These include Tawny Ports and all Sherries and Madeiras. These wines are 'fully developed' on release, because they are not intended to benefit from further ageing.

Palate

There are a different number of marks allocated on the palate for still white/rosé wines, still red wines, sparkling white/rosé wines, and sparkling reds.

	Still White/Rosé (including fortified)		Still Red (including fortified)		Sparkling White/ Rosé		Sparkling Red	
Sweetness	1 mark		1 mark		1 mark		1 mark	
Acidity	1 mark		1 mark		1 mark		1 mark	
Tannin level	0 marks		1 mark		0 marks		1 marks	
Tannin nature	0 marks		1 mark		0 marks		0 marks	
Alcohol	1 mark		1 mark		1 mark		1 mark	
Body	1 mark		1 mark		1 mark		1 mark	
Flavour Intensity	1 mark		1 mark		1 mark		1 mark	
Flavour characteristics	2-3 marks	Total 3 marks	2-3 marks	Total 3 marks	2-3 marks	Total 3 marks	2-3 marks	Total 3 marks
Other observations	0-1 marks		0-1 marks		0-1 marks		0-1 marks	
Mousse	0 marks		0 marks		1 mark		1 mark	
Finish	1 mark		1 mark		1 mark		1 mark	
Total	**9 marks**		**11 marks**		**10 marks**		**11 marks**	

This represents a modest change from previous practices but makes the marking scheme easier to understand.

There are six elements that are common to all wines. Each one is allocated one mark which can only be awarded by making an accurate observation for that element. They are ‘Sweetness’, ‘Acidity’, ‘Alcohol’, ‘Body’, ‘Flavours intensity’, and ‘Finish’.

The marks for ‘Flavour characteristics’ and ‘Other observations’ are linked and are the same for all styles of wine. You can get three marks by just covering flavour characteristics. However, if you do not gain three marks this way you can get one mark for a relevant comment under ‘Other observations’. Marks for ‘Other observations’ are capped at one.

For still reds and all sparkling wines there are extra structural elements that you must comment on be it tannin or mousse or both. These elements are all allocated one mark each which can only be awarded by making an accurate observation for that element.

The advantage of this system is that each element is appropriately and consistently weighted regardless of the type of wine being assessed.

Note that although in some cases, the effect of one component can interfere with the impression made by another (alcohol and fruit add to the perception of sweetness, and acid can mask sweetness, for example), as a trained taster, you are aiming to assess the actual levels of these components, not the apparent level, as objectively as possible.

Sweetness

Sweetness is mainly the flavour of sugar present in the wine, though alcohol and glycerol can add a perception of sweetness too. Unlike other components in the SAT, where only ‘medium’ is subdivided, each of the three points (‘dry’, ‘medium’, ‘sweet’) for sweetness is subdivided into two. The ‘Dry’ end of the scale is subdivided because there is a useful distinction to be drawn between those wines that are truly dry, and those that are in a basically dry style (for the purposes e.g. of food and wine matching), but which are softened with just a little sugar. The ‘Sweet’ end of the scale is subdivided to reflect the very wide range of sweetness that can be found within wines that are classified as sweet wines.

A dry wine has a sugar level below the threshold of perception. If the wine is basically dry in style, but there is a tiny amount of detectable sugar, the wine is described as off-dry. Many ‘dry’ Alsace Gewurztraminers, Brut Champagnes, and inexpensive New-World ‘dry’ reds and whites are really ‘off-dry’. Where examiners expect good tasters to notice the sugar, they will be strict and only accept ‘off dry as a description. Where the sugar is barely detectable (e.g. when it is masked by acid), examiners are more flexible and are likely to accept either ‘dry’ or ‘off dry’ as valid descriptions of the wine.

Medium-dry to medium-sweet covers wines with a distinct presence of sugar, but which are generally not sweet enough to partner most desserts. In the case of medium-dry wines, much of the sweetness may be masked by acid, as happens with many Vouvray demi-secs. The medium-sweet category includes White Zinfandel and many Vouvray Moelleux.

Sweet covers wines where the presence of sugar has become the prominent feature of the wine. This rather broad category covers most classic sweet wines such as Sauternes and Port. There are a few very sweet wines which can be are described as ‘luscious’. Here the level of sugar is such that the wines are notably more viscous and the wine leaves the mouth and lips with a sticky sweet sensation after swallowing/spitting. Examples include Rutherglen Muscats, PX Sherries and some Trockenbeerenauslesen.

Label terminology for sweetness is legally controlled in the EU and furthermore the defined scales for still and sparkling wines are different. You should not be led by these legal boundaries and should not write your answers referring to the level of residual sugar in g/L. Instead you should rely on the assessment of the level of sweetness in the wine as it presents itself in the exam. For example a demi-sec Champagne, which must have a residual sugar level in the range 32-50 g/L, should be described as either medium-sweet or sweet depending on the level of sugar.

Acidity

Acidity gives wines their freshness, and together with the alcohol makes them a hostile environment for microbes. The main acids in wine are tartaric and malic (from the grape juice) or lactic (converted from malic acid in all reds and many whites). In some cases, acid is added in the winery. Unlike volatile acids, these acids are odourless and can only be detected on the palate. The volatile acids found in wines tend to have a very noticeable, harsh impact, even when the level (in g/L) is relatively low.

For most people acids are detected most strongly at the sides of the tongue, where they causes a sharp, tingling sensation, and cause your mouth to water, as it tries to restore its natural acid balance. The more your mouth waters, and the longer it waters, the higher the level of acid in the wine. Note that if you are dehydrated when tasting, your mouth will water less. Wine is an acidic drink, so even a wine described as having low acidity will be acidic compared to many other beverages, though as a wine it will feel broad, round and soft. High acidity tends to be found in wines made from grapes ripened in cool conditions, and causes these wines to be especially mouthwatering.

Sweetness and acidity can mask each other, but look for the mouthwatering effects of a very sweet wine as evidence for its high acidity.

Alcohol can create a burning sensation similar to acidity, but as with sweetness look for the mouthwatering effect to see whether this is due to acid or alcohol for any particular wine.

Red wines generally tend to have lower levels of acidity than white wines, so their levels should be judged against other red wines. This means there is one acid scale for white and rosé wines, and a separate one for red wines.

For the purposes of the Diploma exam, judge sparkling and fortified wines using the same scale as red, white or rosé wines (as appropriate). This means that many sparkling wines will have high acidity and many fortified wines will have low acidity.

Tannin

Tannin is extracted from grape skins (in red wines and a few rare whites) and oak (in oaked red and white wines), and can also be extracted from grape stems and seeds.

They are detected through the senses of touch and taste. Tannins bind to proteins in your saliva, causing your mouth to dry up and feel rough; they contribute to the richness of texture of a wine and they also have a bitter flavour. The astringent, drying sensation can be felt most clearly on the gums above your front teeth, so ensure you coat this area with a little of the wine you are tasting. For most tasters, the bitterness is detected most clearly at the back of their mouth.

Generally, tannins should not be mentioned for white wines and rosé wines. The exceptions are white wines made with skin contact (which can cause a waxy bitterness) or with a high impact of oak (which can make the wine slightly astringent), and robust styles of rosé where you can gain a mark (under 'other observations') for these subtle effects, though the level of tannin in most cases will be 'low'.

Tannin levels must be assessed for all red wines. It is easy to misread the levels because not all tannins have the same effect: unripe tannins tend to be more aggressively astringent, whereas ripe tannins contribute more to textural richness. It takes experience to be able to conclude that a basic quality Cabernet Sauvignon made from barely-ripe grapes has a medium level of tannins, despite them being very astringent and harsh, whereas a high quality Shiraz from a very hot region may have very high levels of velvet-textured ripe tannins despite showing very little astringency.

Tannin nature must also be described for all red wines. For the purposes of the Diploma exam, you can limit yourself to the categories provided on the 'tannin nature' line of the SAT, or use vocabulary provided in the Lexicon in the lines 'Tannin (red)' and 'Tannin (grain)'. You may even use other words, but be aware that the examiner has to be clear what you mean before they can award the mark. See 'Other observations' below.

Descriptions of tannin nature tend to fall into one of two types. You could describe the impression of ripeness of the tannin: underripe tannins are astringent, bitter and can taste 'green' whereas ripe tannins provide richness and body. Alternatively you could describe the 'grain' or texture of the tannins. Ask yourself, how smooth do they feel? Are they rough (like coare ground sandpaper) or are they smooth (like a fine fabric)? Generally, ripe tannins are also fine textured and unripe tannins feel rougher.

Alcohol

Alcohol is detected mainly through the sense of touch. Although alcohol is less dense than water, it is more viscous, and higher levels make a wine seem heavier in the mouth. At low levels, the wine can seem a bit watery.

At high levels, alcohol triggers pain receptors, giving a hot, burning sensation, especially after spitting or swallowing. This burning sensation can be confused with the tingling sensation caused by acidity. If you are trying to distinguish the two, look at whether the wine is also mouthwatering (and therefore high in acid) or feels thick and viscous (and high in alcohol). It may be high in both.

Alcohol levels in wines are generally rising, but currently a wine with medium (+/-) alcohol would have a level of about 10.5-14.0% abv. Within this range, 10.5-11.5% abv would be medium(-) and 13.5-14.0% abv would be medium(+). Anything below 10.5% abv would be considered low, and anything above 14.0% abv would be considered high.

For fortified wines where alcohol levels start at 15% abv, the medium level would be 16.5 to 18.5% abv.

Body

Body, or mouthfeel, is the textural impression created by a wine. It is not a single component, but is an overall impression created by all the structural components working together. For most wines, alcohol is the main factor contributing to body. Sugar and fruit extract add to body, whereas high acidity makes a wine feel lighter in body. Generally high levels of tannin make a wine feel fuller bodied, but low levels of astringent tannin can make it seem harsher, thinner and therefore lighter in body. For a wine that is high in alcohol, with ripe tannins, and intense flavours (= full bodied), or a wine that is low in alcohol, high in acid and delicately flavoured (= light bodied), assessing the level of body is straightforward, and the concept of body is a helpful one. For wines that are sweet, but high in acid and low in alcohol (for example), it can be harder to agree on the level of body, and the decision will be based on which of these factors contributes the most to the texture of the wine.

Mousse

Mousse is relevant only in the discussion of sparkling wines. For most sparkling wines, expect the texture to be creamy –enough to provide a lively sparkle on the palate without seeming too frothy or aggressive. Some young sparkling wines are extremely lively, and seem to explode on the palate, then lose all their bubbles in one quick blast. These would be described as aggressive. Other sparkling wines –generally those that have undergone extensive ageing, or those that are bottled at a lower than typical pressure of dissolved carbon dioxide – have bubbles that are very soft and fine. These are described as delicate.

Flavour Intensity and Characteristics

Flavour intensity and flavour characteristics are detected through the sense of smell. Once the wine is in your mouth, your body heat raises the wines temperature and causes aromatic molecules to rise up the back of your nose to the receptor that handles your sense of smell. Your brain integrates these impressions with the taste and touch impressions provided by your mouth.

Generally, flavours on the palate should be the same as aromas detected on the nose. However, the warming of the wine on your tongue can release larger quantities of some aromas, and bring them to your attention where you were unable to detect them on the nose. Savoury, earthy, spicy and oaky aromas tend to be more prominent on the palate. Fruity and floral aromas are sometimes less prominent on the palate than you would expect, based on the nose.

Note that far more marks are available for Aroma Characteristics, so that is where you should provide your most extensive list of aromas. Under Flavour Characteristics, you may use a selection of these, making sure you have something from each of the clusters you have identified.

Other Observations

These should be used sparingly, but can help bring a tasting note to life. If when you read your note covering aroma and flavour characteristics and levels of structural components, you find that it is evocative of the wine in front of you, then there is no need to add anything extra. You may find that something is missing, and generally where this happens it is something connected with the texture of the wine, or the way the components fit together, or some other aspect such as the overall impression of the aromas and flavours.

Some suggested terms are provided in the Lexicon. Most of these should be combined with the level of the relevant structural component, and are generally relevant where the level of the structural component is remarkably high or low.

There are many words here. We do not suggest you memorise or use them all, and there is no requirement to use any of them. Most of these words are difficult to define using other words, and

their use is most easily explained using examples of wine to illustrate where they are appropriate (or inappropriate). But if you decide to use any of them, the word-descriptions below give a guide to what the examiners would consider when deciding whether to include the word in the marking key.

If you do use some of these words, we suggest you avoid the temptation to overload your tasting note with them (there would be a maximum of one mark available for a well-chosen word). Instead, decide what you think is the most notable structural component of the wine, and qualify this one component with one descriptive word, but do not forget to include a word assessing the level.

Sweetness

- The wine is dry and austere...: it is bone dry (well below 4 g/L) and probably has rather meagre fruit and high acidity too. Muscadet or Chablis can show this.
- The wine is luscious and unctuous…: this indicates that the sugar level is so high (maybe over 250g/L) that it makes the wine particularly viscous and mouthfilling. A Riesling Trockenbeerenauslese would be an example.
- The wine is luscious and cloying /sticky…: as with unctuous, but the overall impression of sweetness is such that the wine is unbalanced and too sweet. This is true of some inexpensive sweet wines. PX and Rutherglen Muscat could also be described as sticky, but in this case it is a negative association but part of their style.

Acidity

- …with a high level of tart/green/sour acidity: the acid is unpleasantly high and out of balance with the rest of the wine. 'Green' also indicates unripeness of flavours (maybe in a very basic quality Champagne), and 'sour' can suggest the aggressive 'bite' of volatile acidity.
- …with a high level of lively/refreshing/zesty acidity: the acid is high, but the effect is a pleasant one. This is often true of a German Riesling Kabinett, a good quality Champagne, or a Hunter Valley Semillon.
- …with low levels of acidity making the wine flabby/thick/heavy: the wine lacks enough acidity to seem balanced. Some inexpensive Viogniers show this quality.
- …with low levels of soft acidity: although low, the level of acid is in balance for this particular style of wine. Alsace Gewurztraminer or Pinot Gris can typically be characterised this way.

Alcohol

- …and low, delicate alcohol: although low, the level of alcohol is in balance for this style of wine. This would be especially appropriate for wines in the 8-9% abv range such as Mosel Riesling Kabinett
- …and low (or medium (-)) light/thin alcohol: the alcohol level is low enough to make the wine seem to lack vinosity, or richness of texture. It seems to lack something texturally as can be the case for some Italian Pinot Grigios.
- …and a high (or medium (+)) level of warm/generous/heady alcohol: though high, the alcohol is in balance for the wine style, and gives the wine a gentle heat, or a pleasant richness of texture. Heady suggests the level is remarkably high (15.5% or more for a light wine; 20% of more for a fortified wine). This can be true of some well-made Barossa Shiraz or California Zinfandel.
- …and a high level of hot/spirity/burning alcohol: the level is high, and not integrated into the wine. It is unbalanced to the degree that it causes an unpleasant burning sensation on the palate or in the finish. Some New World Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignons suffer from this.

Fruit (including ripeness and freshness)

Component balance terms for fruit could be used to qualify or describe the fruit aroma cluster, for example:

The wine has light/medium/pronounced flavours of…

- …austere/severe green fruits (green apples, unripe pears, greengage): In this and similar usages, this implies the wine is in a restrained, distinctly non-fruity style, and that the fruit that is present does not seem very ripe. This is not necessarily a negative descriptor, in for example Chablis.
- …hollow/meagre…: as for austere/severe, except that the lack of fruitiness detracts from the quality of the wine. A Touraine Sauvignon or Muscadet from a difficult year might suffer from this.
- …neutral…: as austere, but no suggestion of underripeness. Just that the fruitiness is inexpressive as in many Italian Pinot Grigios.
- …well defined red fruits (strawberry, raspberry, red cherry) the aromas/flavours of strawberry, etc are very clear and distinct within the wine –the wine expresses the particular character of these fruits rather than some general red-fruitiness. The opposite would be e.g. vague/generic red fruit (strawberry, raspberry, red cherry), which would suggest that there is a fruitiness that can be characterised as more red than black, and maybe suggest strawberry etc. but does not express any of these particular fruits very clearly.
- …soft/juicy/generous red fruits (strawberry, raspberry, red cherry): the wine has a very overt fruitiness, though this may be counterbalanced by other components such as oak. Beaujolais, or a fruity style of Chilean Carmenère.
- …refreshing/fresh red fruits (…): the fruit aromas are well defined, and closer to the character of freshly picked fruits than to baked, dried or preserved fruits. This suggests youth and ripening in cool, marginal conditions. Chinon, some Red Burgundies and well-made mid-market Red Bordeaux are noted for the freshness of its fruit.
- …baked/cooked/jammy red fruits (…): the fruit aromas suggest processing such as heating. Such aromas are present in wines made from very ripe grapes, generally ripened in hot conditions (though equally they could be harvested late). This can be the case in Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Priorat from certain producers.
- …over-ripe red fruits (…): as with baked/cooked/jammy, but this implies that the level of ripeness detracts from the quality of the wine –for example because flavour definition has been lost. Again consider some Châteauneuf-du-Pape or Priorat from certain producers.
- The wine is fruit-driven with medium/pronounced flavours of …: indicates that fruit is the dominant characteristic of the aromas and flavours, and dominates the impression on the palate to the extent that structural components such as acid and tannin are in the background. This is true of some Valpolicella, Beaujolais and many inexpensive new world reds.

Tannin Nature, including ‘grain’ and ripeness

…a low/medium/high level of

- …ripe/soft tannins: in some wines, the level of tannins can be high yet because they are ripe, they contribute more to the richness of texture of the wine than to any impression of astringency or bitterness. This is true of many Barossa Shiraz.
- …unripe/green/stalky tannins: usually a characteristic of ripening in cool conditions, but some grapes ripened in hot conditions can have jammy fruit and high alcohol yet with unripe tannins. The main impression is of astringency, and the sensation is not pleasant, and the impression of greenness or underripeness is often enhanced by unripe green flavours (which can occur together with jamminess and overripeness).
- …coarse/chunky tannins: the tannins are very astringent. This is similar to unripe/green/stalky, except that there is no impression of unripeness in the flavours. This is usually a negative quality
- ...firm/grippy/muscular tannins: this also implies a high impression of astringency, but in this case this is a positive aspect of the wine –part of its character, or perhaps the tannins are well

integrated due to there being plenty of fruit to provide balance. Barolo, Cru Classé Bordeaux or high quality Napa Cabernet are classic examples of this.

- ...fine-grained/silky/velvety/talc-like tannins: this is a positive quality. The tannins have evolved, either due to ripening on the vine or due to ageing processes, to the point where they seem to 'caress' the palate, rather than dry it out. Examples include mature red Burgundy or Rioja.

Where words are grouped together in the same bullet point, they are treated as interchangeable for the purposes of the Diploma exam, even where slight nuances of difference are described here.

Finish

The finish is the collection of sensations after you had swallowed or spat the wine.

How long the sensations linger is an important indicator of quality, but when assessing the length of the finish you should only count the persistence of the desirable sensations –this is sometimes usefully described as aromatic persistence.

A wine with a very long lingering bitterness could be described as having a bitter aftertaste, but if the fruit impressions disappear quickly, the finish should be described as short. How long the sensations last will vary from taster to taster. Generally, for a basic quality wine, the pleasant flavours will often disappear within a few seconds, and the finish is short. Such wines may be deliberately designed to avoid having an 'aftertaste'. For a very fine wine the flavours can last for a minute or more, and the finish is described as 'long'.

Although tasters can objectively agree which of two wines has a longer finish, perceptions of length vary from taster to taster so it does not make sense to promote a precise scale for length in seconds.

Conclusions

The marks awarded for concluding remarks can vary depending on the marks allocated on the palate (see *Palate* above) and topics the examiners choose to focus on. You must make sure you read the question carefully so that you answer all the parts set by the examiners. As a rule of thumb the more marks given to a section the greater the detail required by the examiners. Some examples of typical divisions of marks include:

	Unit 3	Units 5 and 6
(Detailed) Assessment of Quality	4-8 marks per wine	2-5 marks per wine
Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing	1-4 marks per wine	1-2 marks per wine
Grape variety/ies	1-2 marks per wine OR 10 marks referring to all three wines	1-2 marks per wine
Country of Origin Region of Origin	1-2 marks per wine OR 10 marks referring to all three wines	1-2 marks per wine OR 3 or 6 marks referring to all three wines
Which characteristics in the 3 wines lead to this conclusion?	5 marks referring to all three wines	3, 6, or 9 marks referring to all three wines
Price Category	1 mark per wine	1 mark per wine
Age in Years	1 mark per wine	1 mark per wine
The examiners may ask questions about price, suitable markets, age of the wine, vintage, production methods, and other aspects referring either to individual wines or the wines as a group.		

However, it is important to remember two points:

1) In order to ensure fairness in flights of wines which include both red or white/rosé wines any marks that are allocated to 'Assessment of quality' and/or 'Assessment of readiness for drinking/potential for ageing' will be the same for each of the three wines in the flight.
2) Common link questions are a regular feature in the Unit 3 examination but they do sometimes feature in Unit 5 and 6 examinations too.

Quality Level

There are many different scales used to assess quality. Numerical or point scales are common. Here we use a descriptive scale, ranging from 'poor' to 'outstanding'. As long as wines are rated along a single dimension of quality, it is easy to convert points to descriptions and vice versa.

In some situations you may find it useful to judge wine quality against a price point. In order to do this, you must judge the absolute quality first, and then take the price into account. Such a judgement is an assessment of value for money, rather than a true quality assessment.

In other situations you will find it useful to judge a wine against other wines of the same type ('is this a good example of a Napa Cabernet Sauvignon?'). This requires considerable skill, and experience with the category being judged. It also requires the judge to have an idea of what the type of wine should taste like. But even in classic regions, styles change. Should a wine judge mark a Bordeaux Cru Classé 2009 poorly because it doesn't taste like the Bordeaux wines of the 1980s, or should they judge by the standards of the time, or the standards of the particular Chateau? If assessment against the peer group is the only kind of quality assessment that ever takes place, it makes no sense to say one region produces higher quality wines than another. In order to make such comparisons, we need a set of quality criteria that can apply to all wines.

Therefore in your Diploma tasting exam, your quality judgements should be absolute –not taking price or origin into account. However, if you are sure of the origin, you may find it helpful to use established quality scales (such as regional-commune-premier cru-grand cru in Burgundy) in order to be precise about how good you think the wine is. This is optional.

You should start by placing the wine into a quality category. You should later provide an argument to explain to the examiner why you have selected this category. Generally the marking key will accept more than one quality category, and you can gain full marks as long as you provide a convincing argument to justify your choice. In terms of putting wines into quality categories, it is helpful to think in the following terms:

A 'good' wine has a balance of fruit, sugar, acid and tannin, and all the components are integrated. It is free of faults, and shows some characteristics of its grape variety (perhaps typical aromas or typical levels of structural components), or region (perhaps cool or warm climate fruit character).

If a wine is a little out of balance, dilute in flavour or has a generic character that fails to express any particular grape variety or region, but is otherwise drinkable, then it is 'acceptable'. If the poor balance, any minor faults or any dominant flavours of components make it unpleasant, then it is 'poor'. If any faults make the wine unsuitable to drink, then it is simply 'faulty'.

A 'very good' wine displays particularly clear expression of grape variety, and more precise regional character (representing its region, rather than just its climate). It may also show some elements of elegance, concentration, length or complexity that lift it out of being merely 'good'. An 'outstanding' wine should be almost entirely free of criticism. It should precisely represent a classic style, and be elegantly balanced, and well crafted.

Having selected a quality category, you need to provide the examiner with your reasons: this is a chance to persuade the examiner that your quality assessment is a fair one. The marks available for quality assessment vary, and the minimum level of detail expected for your argument will also vary, but you will never be penalised for providing arguments that are too detailed, as long as you have time to write them. As a rough guide,

- For an outstanding wine you should be able to provide four distinct positive reasons to convince the examiner why the wine is in that top category.
- If you have decided that the wine is 'very good', then try to find three positive things that make it more than just 'good', and always include at least one negative reason why you have not placed the wine in the 'outstanding' category.
- If it is just 'good', then provide two positive reasons why it is more than just 'acceptable' and two negative reasons to explain clearly why you think the wine is not 'very good'.
- If the wine is merely acceptable, then provide three negative reasons for not assessing it as 'good', but one positive reason why it is better than 'poor'.
- And if it is 'poor' quality, then provide four separate negative reasons why it is in such a low quality category.

Reasons for Quality Level (Detailed Assessment of Quality)

Many criteria are commonly used when assessing the quality of a wine. There can be disagreement over how well a given wine satisfies a particular criterion ('is this wine really balanced, despite its 15% alcohol?'), and over its relative importance, compared to other quality criteria ('the 15% alcohol is too high, but that doesn't really matter too much because the most important thing is that it is very concentrated and full of character'). This means there is room for experts to disagree about the level of quality of any particular wine. However, in many cases there is close agreement about both the quality level of a wine and the reasons for its quality level. The following list is not exhaustive, but is sufficient for you to be able to provide detailed and persuasive arguments to justify your quality assessments.

Balance in wines can be thought of as a set of scales, with fruit and sugar on one side, and acid and tannins on the other. An increase in fruit or sugar can be brought into balance by an increase in acid or tannin. With too little fruit or sugar, the wine will seem angular, austere or thin. With too little acid or tannin, it will seem unstructured and clumsy. When assessing balance, you should also consider how well integrated each of the separate components is. Even if the fruit is balanced by acid, the acid can seem harsh or aggressive, for example. Alcohol should be well integrated, whatever its level, and so should aromatic components such as those derived from oak. When referring to balance in your arguments, rather than just saying whether the wine is balanced or not, you should be able to discuss:

- how well balanced the wine is
- how the overall balance is achieved
- how well integrated each of the wine's components are
- and, for very fine wines, the overall impression of harmony of the parts, or of gracefulness or elegance of the wine as a whole.

When discussing balance you can provide a more nuanced argument if you are able to take into account the intended style of the wine. Medium (-) or low levels of tannin might be appropriate in a Pinot Noir (where the structure is provided by acidity) but would be inappropriate in a Cabernet Sauvignon of premium quality, for example. The level of acidity appropriate in a Condrieu is lower than what would be expected in an Alsace Riesling, yet both could be considered to be well-balanced, relative to their style. When judging wine blind, you are generally unable to take such factors into account, and the examiners do not require it of candidates, but if you are able to link the particular balance of the wine to the expected style, than marks will be awarded for this.

Concentration of flavours and structural components is frequently cited as quality criterion. A wine that has weak, dilute flavours is seldom high in quality, but above a certain level more concentration does not necessarily mean higher quality. If a wine is intensely flavoured, think about whether it is also balanced. When using this as a factor to determine the quality level of the wine, it is useful to focus on the intensity of flavours on the mid and back palate, and concentration generally accompanies aromatic persistence on the Finish, so it can be useful to consider these two factors together. When discussing the finish, you can show insight and detail by describing not just the length of the finish, but also what happens: what sustains the finish (sugar, acid, tannin, alcohol, or some combination of these) and whether the finish complex or simple.

Complexity and expressiveness of flavours or aromas are desirable features in a wine. The complexity can come from the fruit character alone, or it may come from the combination of secondary and tertiary characteristics. If a wine is very simple, it can quickly become boring to drink. But simplicity is not always a negative, and not all fine wines are complex: sometimes purity and clarity of expression are what makes a wine great, and adding in oak or tertiary complexities (for example) would detract from the quality. Those wines that are complex seem to change in the glass as the nose becomes acclimatised to the initial aromas and more sensitive to others as they appear. A great wine can also express some of the character of its origin, either with purity or with complex detail. Some of this character may come from the grape varieties used, but in outstanding wines the character can reflect the location where the grapes are grown too. When discussing complexity of a wine, you should mention not just whether a wine is complex or not, but what provides the complexity, i.e. which clusters of aromas/flavours are present in this wine (thinking of groups of primary fruits, secondary and tertiary characteristics)

When discussing expressiveness (or typicality), you should do this with caution (you are tasting the wine blind and may be incorrect), but where you feel confident to do so, you could mention:

- which elements of this wine are typical of its grape variety or region
- how purely expressed, and how clearly defined are the characteristics linked to variety or origin
- whether any elements are atypical for the grape variety or region.

Ageability is often used as evidence for quality. In order to age well, a wine needs to have sufficient levels of structural components (acid and tannin) for it to last, but it also needs to have the potential in the flavour extracts to generate interesting and attractive aromas and flavours as it ages. This is discussed under 'readiness for drinking'.

Note that although ageability is a factor that can be taken into account when assessing quality, it is possible for a wine to be outstanding, even if it has a short drinking life, provided that during that life it has a sufficient combination of balance, concentration, expressiveness, complexity or purity.

Readiness for Drinking/Potential for Ageing

Where one mark is allocated for this, the candidate simply needs to decide which category to allocate to the wine. Where two or three marks are allocated, then the candidate should provide reasons for their decision, and make a judgement about how much longer the wine will remain in that category. This will always be an estimate, and in this instance the candidate can provide a sensible range, such as 'up to 1 year', '1-2 years', '2-3 years', '3-5 years', '5-8 years', '7-10 years', or 'more than ten years'. Because this is an estimate of something that is itself unknown even to experts, it is unrealistic to present this information as a single date. The marking keys use the categories listed here and markers use their judgment and discretion when candidates use ranges that fall outside of these parameters.

The first thing to consider when assessing readiness for drinking is whether the wine is the kind of wine that benefits from ageing at all.

If it is mainly fruity, with a light acid or tannin structure, then it is almost certainly in the 'drink now: not suitable for ageing or further ageing' category. Such a wine may have a 'shelf life' of a year or more, but the fact it will last does not mean it should be considered suitable for deliberate ageing or cellaring, because generally the wine is in decline from shortly after the moment of bottling. If it seems like it should have been fruity, with a light tannin or acid structure, but has lost its freshness, or the flavours that have developed through the passage of time are unpleasant and at a level high enough to spoil the wine then it is simply 'too old'.

If the wine has a very firm structure of acid or tannin, and has a high level of flavour concentration, then it may benefit from ageing. You need to consider what will happen to the wine with time, and this requires experience of seeing how wines develop in the bottle. Generally, the flavours develop away from fruit and towards more savoury, earthy and spicy characters. The tannins soften, alcohol level does not change, and acid and sugar levels change very little (though sweet wines very slowly taste drier as they age). With this in mind, you can make a tentative prediction of how the wine will develop over time, and how much the developments will improve the wine, compared to how it tastes now. On the basis of your prediction, you may decide to place it in the 'can drink now, but has potential for ageing'. This covers wines that are drinkable but continuing to improve, those that are at their peak and still changing in interesting ways. It can also include some wines that are in slow decline but which are still good to drink, as long as some of the changes that are occurring are interesting rather than just reflecting loss of quality. When you are providing reasons for your answer, you should ideally indicate whether you believe the wine is improving or declining (or at peak). If you believe that the wine will be so much better in a few years' time that it would be a waste to drink it now, then you should classify it as 'too young'. Note: this does not mean the wine is undrinkable, but rather that there is enormous scope for further improvement. If it has undergone an ageing process but is close to the end of its drinkable life, or if it is in unambiguous decline (where the changes that are occurring with the passage of time are all subtracting from the quality of the wine) then you should classify it as 'drink now: not suitable for further ageing or further ageing'. If you think the wine was so much better in the past, that is has been a waste to keep it so long, then it is simply 'too old'.

Identifying Origin and Grape Variety/ies

In order to identify a wine correctly, you need skill, knowledge and luck.

Your tasting skills can be used very effectively to identify the kind of wine you have. Furthermore when a greater number of marks are allocated to this kind of concluding remark your arguments are as important as the identification. If you have misplaced the location of a wine but have given valid reasons for your choice then you will get most of the marks that are available.

When trying to construct your argument, it can be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the quality of the wine very good or outstanding, suggesting it probably comes from a classic old world or premium new world region, or is the quality just acceptable or good, suggesting it may come from a less prestigious region? If the wine is of very high quality, this also limits the possibilities of the grape varieties from which it is made.
- Does the wine seem to come from a hot region (riper fruit aromas, fuller body, higher alcohol, lower acid, riper tannins), or a cool region (fresher fruit, lighter body, lower acid, and perhaps more astringent tannins)?
- Does the wine seem old world or new world in style? For some varieties, such as Chardonnay, the differences can be small. For others, such as Pinot Noir, the new world wines generally have more fruit, the fruit is purer and more clearly defined, and the structural elements (acid and tannin) are less prominent, whereas old world wines tend to be more savoury in character, with more prominent acid and tannins. Of course, this picture is confused by many new world producers successfully making savoury, structured wines, and some old-world producers making some lightly-structured, very fruity wines.
- Is there any prominent varietal character? For white wines, it can be helpful to group varieties into those that are intensely aromatic (Muscat, Viognier, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc…), and those that are more neutral (Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Garganega, Trebbiano…). Within these, further clues can be found in the nature of the aromas (fruity/floral or herbaceous), level of sugar and acid, and the use of oak. It can be helpful to group black varieties into thick skinned grapes that give deeply coloured wines (Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Malbec, Carmenère…) and thinner-skinned varieties that generally give paler coloured wines (Pinot Noir, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, Grenache…). Within these, further clues can be found in the aromas (fruity, herbaceous, spicy or savoury), the levels of tannin, alcohol and acid, and the texture of the tannins.

Where Diploma papers require you to provide reasons for your choice, these are the kind of factors you can refer to. When structuring your answer, you may find it helpful to divide your answer into two parts:

- One or two sentences identifying characteristics that the wines have in common, which are consistent with your choice of grape variety or region (though this may not always be possible: sometimes the diversity of styles is evidence for certain regions over others). These can include levels of structural components, evidence of production techniques (use of oak, oxidation, or late harvest for example), evidence of climate (hot, or cool, or somewhere in between), and even quality (wines of very high quality are produced in a limited number of regions and countries).
- For each of the wines, where they differ, discussing how the things that make them unique within the flight are consistent with (or typical of) your choice of variety or region.

Your skill in classifying the wine as an aromatic white from a premium-quality cool-climate old-world region (for example), can then be combined with your knowledge of which wines fit this description. There will usually be more than one possibility. There are many wines that are exceptions to what would normally be produced in a given region –wines of outstanding quality produced in unknown

regions; neutral style wines produced from aromatic grape varieties; and old-world style wines produced in new-world regions, for example. Because of this, you need luck on your side to guess the identity correctly – this is why the WSET Diploma awards relatively few marks for identification compared to description and quality assessment. But if you have used your skills and knowledge well, then even if you are incorrect, your guess should be a good one, and you will be correct some of the time.

Price Category

Simply state which one of the price categories the wine lies in. It is up to the candidate's Approved Program Provider to set these, and use the categories consistently in your course. The categories will be the same as those used for the WSET Level 3 Award in Wines and Spirits, but with one extra category (to make possible a subdivision within very fine wines). As a rough guide, the following are the price categories currently (2012) used by the WSET School in London:

- Inexpensive: up to £5.99
- Mid-priced: £6.00-£11.99
- High-priced: £12.00-£19.99
- Premium: £20.00-£49.99
- Super-premium: £50.00+

These prices are for shop retail including all taxes.

Age in Years

This is effectively asking you to guess the vintage of the wine. Depending on whether the candidate's exam is in January or June, and whether the wine is from the northern or southern hemisphere, the age of the wine will be a number of years, plus a fraction. Candidates should guess to within the nearest year, and marking keys will often accept one of two answers.

Candidates should use evidence from two sources to make their decision. Firstly, the overall state of evolution of the wine (colour development, presence of tertiary aromas, and indications of any period of ageing e.g. in oak). And secondly, based on the overall style and quality level of the wine, how long is it likely to take to reach that stage of evolution. A premium quality Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon might still be saturated purple and intensely fruity at 10 years old, whereas a Barolo of similar quality level would be paler and browner in colour, and more savoury in character at 5 years old.

Examples of Good Tasting Notes

Entry-Level Italian Pinot Grigio

Appearance:
The wine is clear and bright, pale lemon, with tears.

Nose:
The wine is clean, with light intensity aromas of very simple, neutral fruit (pear, apple, grapefruit). It is youthful

Palate:
The wine is dry, with medium (-) acidity, medium (-) alcohol, watery light body and light intensity flavours of simple neutral fruit (pear, apple, grapefruit). The finish is short.

Detailed Quality Assessment:
Acceptable Quality. The wine is clean and correct, and there is a balance between the light acid structure and the rather neutral fruit. The lack of flavour and short finish, though appropriate to the style, indicate a wine of fairly basic quality. ALso, the wine is very neutral and simple, and expresses little if any varietal character. It is no more than a technically correct example of a generic style of easy-to drink white, rather than anything expressive or fine.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing:
Drink now: not suitable for ageing. This wine lacks any kind of acid structure, and the fruit flavours are too weak for them to develop into anything interesting. The fruit will fade quickly –over 12 months.

High Quality Italian Pinot Grigio:

Appearance:
The wine is clear and bright, medium lemon, with tears.

Nose:
The wine is clean, with medium intensity aromas of fresh stone fruits (peach, apricot), with some green fruit (pear) and banana and hints of sweet spice (ginger). It is youthful.

Palate:
The wine is dry, with medium acidity, medium (+) alcohol, medium body and medium (+) intensity flavours of fresh stone fruits (peach, apricot), apple and ginger. The finish is medium (+) and slightly waxy.

Detailed Quality Assessment:
Very Good Quality. The wine shows very well-defined and quite complex fruit character, ranging from fresh notes of pear, through to some tropical and spicy notes. This indicates well-ripened, but not over-ripe grapes. Although there is no other source of complextity (it is unoaked, and young), the wine has plenty of character. It is also very well-balanced between the fruit and the acid, with concentration on the palate. There is some waxiness, which makes the finish slightly bitter, but this is typical of this style of Italian Pinot Gris and is not unpleasant. The wine is not complex or concentrated enough to be considered outstanding, but is a very good, expressive wine.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing:
Drink now: not suitable for ageing. The wine has enough substance (from the fruit concentration and the acid and tannin structure) to last 2-3 years, but it is unlikely the flavours will develop into anything more interesting than the attractive fresh fruit that it currently displays.

Entry Level 1-year old Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon:

Appearance:
Clear and bright, deep purple, with tears

Nose:
Clean, with pronounced intensity of ripe and slightly jammy black fruit (blackcurrant, blackberry), distinct herbaceous notes (eucalyptus, green pepper) and a hint of oak (toast). The wine is youthful.

Palate:
The wine is dry, with medium acidity, a medium level of soft tannins. It has medium(+) body and medium(+) alcohol, with medium flavour intensity of ripe jammy black fruits (blackcurrant, black berry), eucalyptus and spicy oak. The finish is medium (-).

Detailed Quality Assessment:
Good quality. The wine is clean and has a good balance between fruit and tannin, with oak not too dominant. It is also a very clear expression of Cabernet Sauvignon –with typical black fruit and herbal aromas, though the fruits are a little over-ripe and jammy/confected in nature. However, the wine is not very complex, and although the nose promises a lot of flavour, the palate is quite light and lacking the substance of a really great Cabernet Sauvignon. This makes it good, rather than very good.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing:
Drink now: not suitable for ageing. The wine has a lot of fruit intensity, and some tannins structure, which will help give it a shelf life of 2-3 years, but it will be in decline over this period as the fruit fades.

High quality 5 year old Napa Cabernet Sauvignon:

Appearance:
Clear and bright, deep ruby, with tears

Nose:
Clean, with pronounced intensity of ripe black fruit (black cherry, blackberry), pronounced high quality oak (toast, vanilla, sweet spices) and some tertiary characters beginning to appear (black olive, earth). The wine is developing.

Palate:
The wine is dry, with medium(+) acidity, a high level of soft, velvety tannins. It has full body and warming high alcohol, with pronounced flavour intensity of black cherry and toast. The finish is long.

Detailed Quality Assessment:
Outstanding. The wine is an exceptionally precise expression of Cabernet Sauvignon character, with ripe yet fresh black fruits, firm yet very fine tannins and refreshing acidity. The wine has massive concentration and the concentrated fruit is able to absorb the high level of oak. The balance of fruit and oak, and the high level of extract indicate this is a wine with a long future, but even at this stage, it is showing a lot of complexity reflecting high quality fruit and oak. Perhaps the alcohol is a little on the warm side, and not totally integrated in the finish, but this is part of the wine's style, and does not stop the wine being an outstanding example of a premium New World Cabernet Sauvignon.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing:
Can drink now, but has potential for ageing. The fruit and tannins are in balance now, but the wine has a lot of extract, indicating it is capable of further evolution over at least 3-5 years before it reaches its peak.

Medium quality 10 year old Haut Medoc Cru Bourgeois:

Appearance:
Clear and bright, medium garnet, with tears

Nose:
Clean, with medium intensity aromas of black fruits (blackcurrant, black cherry), obvious tertiary aromas (earth, cedar, tobacco), some herbaceousness (mint) and a hint of oak (vanilla). The wine is fully developed.

Palate:
The wine is dry, with medium(+) acidity, a medium level of soft, fine tannins. It has medium body and alcohol, with medium flavour intensity of blackcurrant, earth, tobacco. The finish is medium(+).

Detailed Quality Assessment:
Very Good. Although not especially concentrated, the wine is very elegant, showing a freshness of fruit despite its age, and a liveliness from fresh acidity. It lacks the concentration to be outstanding, but is a very classic, savoury and elegant style of Bordeaux, showing a great deal of complexity from bottle age.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing:
Can drink now: not suitable for further ageing. The wine is fully developed, and showing a lot of tertiary cedar/earth character. It is in slow decline, and although it will last 3-5 years before the fruit fades totally, there is nothing to gain from keeping it any longer.

Common Link: Grape Variety

Cabernet Sauvignon

Reasons for this Choice:
The deep colour (wines 1 and 2) indicates a thick skinned grape variety

the high quality (wines 2 and 3) indicate a classic grape variety.

Herbaceous characters (1 and 3) make a Bordeaux variety more likely than Syrah/Shiraz, as does the fresh acidity of 3.

The Pronounced and well defined black fruit in 1 and 2 makes Cabernet Sauvignon more likely than Merlot.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is there a difference between a line with hyphens and one with commas?

YES. For lines where the entries are separated by hyphens you must select one and only one of these options.

For lines starting with "*e.g.*" where the entries are separated with commas the list of options are examples of what you might wish to comment on. You may not need to comment on each option for every wine.

How do the scales work?

Where scales are used they are based on a standard 3 point scale which is further subdivided in two different ways.

5 point scales – medium has been divided into three

6 point scale – each of the points has been divided into two. This applies for sweetness only.

What do I need to do to get a mark for 'Appearance: Other observations'?

From August 2012 to August 2013, the point for other observations can be gained by writing "showing tears" or, when considering sparkling wines, "bubbles".

How should I approach 'Aroma Characteristics'?

Always think in aroma clusters. Decide what the component elements that make up the overall aroma of the wine are and make sure you communicate this to the examiner. Resist the temptation to just write a long list of descriptive words which offer little or no insight.

How should I approach 'Flavour Characteristics'?

There are fewer marks available for this line than Aroma characteristics. Cherry-pick descriptors, making sure that you cover all the clusters you have identified on the nose.

How should I use the line 'Palate: Other observations'?

Other observations should be used sparingly to add an extra dimension to a tasting note where your observations of the aroma/flavour characteristics and the structural elements are not enough to fully communicate the character of the wine. Always use them in conjunction with the required vocabulary for structural observations.

Are all concluding sections the same?

NO. The examiners can ask you to focus your comments on a number of different topics. Do not assume that all concluding sections will be the same and make sure you answer the question that has been set.

How should I respond if asked to estimate how long a wine should age for or give a wine's age?

If you are asked to comment on potential for ageing use a tight range. We suggest 'up to 1 year', '1-2 years', '2-3 years', '3-5 years', '5-8 years', '7-10 years', or 'more than ten years'.

When asked to give a wine's age you should be specific. Answer with a number not a range or a vintage.