**How to Discern Wine Quality**

Wine producers constantly brag about the quality ratings that their wines receive from critics, because a high wine rating — implying high quality — translates into increased sales for a wine. But quality wines come in all colors, degrees of sweetness and dryness, and flavor profiles.

Just because a wine is high quality doesn’t mean that you will actually enjoy it. Personal taste is more relevant than quality in choosing a wine. A good wine is, above all, a wine that you like enough to drink — because the whole purpose of a wine is to give pleasure to those who drink it.

A wine’s quality is not absolute: how great a wine is or isn’t depends on who is doing the judging. The combined opinion of a group of trained, experienced palates (also known as wine experts) is usually considered a definitive judgment of a wine’s quality.

The standards of performance that wine experts use to judge wine quality include the following:

* **Balance:** The relationship of four components — sweetness, acidity, tannin, and alcohol — to one another. A wine is balanced when nothing sticks out as you taste it, like harsh tannin or too much sweetness. Most wines are balanced to most people.
* **Length:** Used to describe a wine that gives an impression of going all the way on the palate — you can taste it across the full length of your tongue — rather than stopping short halfway. Many wines today are very up front on the palate — they make a big impression as soon as you taste them — but they don’t go the distance in your mouth. They are *short*. Generally, high alcohol or excess tannin is to blame. Length is a sure sign of high quality.
* **Depth:** This is another subjective, unmeasurable attribute of a high-quality wine. We say a wine has *depth* when it seems to have a dimension of verticality — that is, it does not taste flat and one-dimensional in your mouth. A “flat” wine can never be great.
* **Complexity:** There’s nothing wrong with a simple, straightforward wine, especially if you enjoy it. But a wine that keeps revealing different things about itself, always showing you a new flavor or impression — a wine that has *complexity* — is usually considered better quality. Some experts use the term *complexity* specifically to indicate that a wine has a multiplicity of aromas and flavors, while others use it in a more holistic (but less precise) sense, to refer to the total impression a wine gives you.
* **Finish:** The impression a wine leaves in the back of your mouth and in your throat after you have swallowed it is its *finish* or *aftertaste.* In a good wine, you can still perceive the wine’s flavors — such as fruitiness or spiciness — at that point. Some wines may finish *hot,* because of high alcohol, or *bitter,* because of tannin — both shortcomings. Or a wine may have nothing much at all to say for itself after you swallow.
* **Typicity:** In order to judge whether a wine is true to its type, you have to know how that type is supposed to taste. So you have to know the textbook characteristics of wines made from the major grape varieties and wines of the world’s classic wine regions. For example, the Cabernet Sauvignon grape typically has an aroma and flavor of blackcurrants, and the French white wine called Pouilly-Fumé typically has a slight gunflint aroma.

Tannin makes wine taste dry. As a characteristic of wine, tannin adds both bitterness and astringency as well as complexity. Wine tannins are **most commonly found in red wine**, although white wines have tannin from being aged in wooden barrels.

#### What Are Grape Tannins?

Grape tannin comes from the skins, seeds and stems of a wine grape. For this reason, red wines tend to have higher tannins than white wines because the extended contact of the grapes to the juice gives the tannin time to dissolve in the [alcohol and water in the wine](http://winefolly.com/update/calories-in-wine/).

**Dig into the features**

# Acidity

The relationship between acidity and balance looks something like this:

> Sweet Taste (sugars + alcohols) <= => **Acid Taste (acids)** + Bitter Taste (phenols)

The best wines strike a perfect balance between these three components. Acidity’s role in this dynamic is undeniably important.

# Fixed Acidity

Acidity is a fundamental property of wine, imparting sourness and resistance to microbial infection. Doug Nierman, 2004

Chemically the acids influence titrable acidity which affects taste and pH which affects  color, stability to oxidation, and consequantly the overall lifespan of a wine.

Traditionally total acidity is divided into two groups, namely the volatile acids (see separate description)  and the nonvolatile or fixed acids.

The predominant fixed acids found in wines are tartaric, malic, citric, and succinic.

Their respective levels found in wine can vary greatly but in general one would expect to see 1,000 to 4,000 mg/L tartaric acid, 0 to 8,000 mg/L malic acid, 0 to 500 mg/L citric acid, and 500 to 2,000 mg/L succinic acid.

# Volatile Acidity

Volatile acidity refers to the steam distillable acids present in wine, primarily acetic acid but also lactic, formic, butyric, and propionic acids.  The average level of acetic acid in a new dry table wine is less than 400 mg/L, though levels may range from undetectable up to 3g/L.

#### ****pH****

Fixed acidity is measured as total acidity minus volatile acidity. Generally, [pH](http://www.calwineries.com/learn/wine-chemistry/acidity/ph) is a quantitative assessment of fixed acidity.

**Residual Sugar**

In laymen’s terms, how much sugar is left in the wine after fermentation is complete. The amount of residual sugar tells you how sweet the wine is going to be.

**Sulfur dioxide** plays two important roles. Firstly, it is an anti-microbial agent, and as such is used to help curtail the growth of undesirable fault producing yeasts and bacteria. Secondly, it acts as an antioxidant, safeguarding the wine's fruit integrity and protecting it against browning.

When SO2 is greatly in excess, it can also produce a pungent aroma in white wines, considered by most to be a fault. The aroma is best described as that of a match that has just been struck. Many people have trouble smelling the sulfurous aroma of SO2, but instead perceive it as a irritation of the membranes of the nose. High SO2 can also render the palate of the wine harsh, metallic and frequently bitter.

