Wine Study Guide: Tasting Method

1. Sight
   a. Clarity – will tell you if wine is filtered or not
   b. Brightness – the capacity to reflect light
   c. Color – provides clues as to a wine’s age, storage conditions or grape variety
      i. General rules
         1. White and blush wines grow darker with age
         2. Red wines grow lighter with age (from purple to garnet)
         3. Pigments and tannins in red wines precipitate into sediment with age
      ii. Secondary colors
         1. White Wines
            a. Light straw or yellow is most common color for dry wines
            b. Medium yellow through light gold indicate sweeter wines, golden hues may reflect some bottle aging
            c. Green tint – young or cool climate wines
            d. Light yellow-green indicates young wines from cool regions
            e. The green comes from residual chlorophyll and is rare in wines from warmer areas
            f. Darker colors within normal range for white wines is associate with oak barrel aging and or later harvested fruit that can produce wines of higher sugar content, or in dry wines, higher alcohol content
         2. Red Wines
            a. Orange, yellow and brown shades indicate older red wines as they age in the bottle
            b. Purple hue is associated with young red wines, young bottled red wines will be red with a purple tint
            c. Light red color indicates lighter bodied red wines such as Pinot Noir or Gamay Beaujolais
            d. Medium red is typical, taking on a tawny or garnet hue as they age in the bottle.
      iii. Color notes
         1. Colorless wines –
            a. Very low color in white wine can indicate that the fruit was immature or that the wine was bleached by too much sulfur dioxide. If the latter was the case, the wine will smell like matches
            d. Concentration – the depth of the color

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e. Rim Variation
   i. The difference in color between wine at the center of the glass and wine at the rim of the glass
   ii. The older the wine, the more rim variation
f. Sediment
   i. The tannins and pigment that precipitate out of wine as it ages
   ii. Can also be found in young unfiltered red wines
g. Tartrates
   i. Excess tartaric acid present in all wines
   ii. Often removed through filtration or cold stabilization
h. Viscosity – Legs/tears
   i. Indicate alcohol or presence of residual sugar in wine
      1. Thin legs, sheeting – low alcohol and little or no residual sugar
      2. Thick legs, slow moving – higher alcohol, presence of residual sugar
   ii. Staining in the tears in red wines – indicate richness and concentration, and higher alcohol
   iii. This can be influenced by the shape and cleanliness of the glass

2. Nose
   a. Flaws
      i. TCA – Corkiness from tainted corks, smells musty and like wet moldy cardboard
      ii. Oxidation and Heat Damage – dull fruit, cooked fruit, secondary and tertiary aromas and flavors (leather), vegetal notes, flat finish
      iii. Volatile Acidity – vinegar aromas (autobacter) or varnish/fingernail polish aromas (ethyl acetate)
      iv. Excess sulfur dioxide – SO2 – smells like matchstick or wet wool
      v. Brettanomyces – leather, band aid, mouse cage, fecal or urine notes, but some tasters like these in certain proportions.
   b. Intensity of smells
   c. Age
      i. Young bright aromas or signs of age
d. FEW (Fruit, Earth, Wood)
   i. Fruit
   ii. Non-fruit
      1. Flowers, Spices, Herbs, botrytis, other...
   iii. Earth (more common in old world wines)
      1. Minerality in whites (slate, wet rock, etc...)
      2. Dirt, damp earth, mushroom in reds

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iv. Wood
1. Determined by presence of baking spices and vanilla
2. Old (subtle) vs. New Oak (stronger oak aromas)
3. French (baking spices, vanilla) vs. American Oak (dill, coconut)
4. Large vs. Barrique

v. Varietal Aromas
1. Chardonnay – hazelnut, apple, cheese rind, pineapple, butter, fig, peach, citrus
   a. If Oak aged, will have vanilla
   b. Typical style – dry wine of rich complexity and intensity
2. Sauvignon Blanc – grapefruit, grass, gooseberry, jalapeno, bell pepper, asparagus, green olive, herbs, smoky
   a. Sancerre – Tarragon
   b. New Zealand – passion fruit
3. Gewurztraminer – Lychee, rose, potpourri, grapefruit pith, candied ginger, spicy floral, honey, jasmine tea
4. Viognier – honeysuckle, vanilla, citrus blossom, fruit loops, mango
5. Muscat – orange candy, rose, intense floral fruity aroma
6. Pinot Grigio – lemon rind, melon, peanut shell, flat beer
7. Riesling – apricot, peach, petrol, honey
   a. Young Aussie – lime zest
8. Albarino – peach, orange oil, juicy fruit gum
9. Gruner veltliner – white pepper, lentils, watercress, radish
10. Chenin Blanc – bruised apple, honey, chamomile, wasabi, tangerine, wet wool, pears, melons or peaches
11. Pinot Noir – Black cherry, strawberry, cranberry, violets, tomato leaf, cola bean, spicy, green tea, violets, truffles, fresh berry, berry jam
12. Gamay – strawberry, bubblegum, violets, banana (sometimes intensely fruity)
13. Cabernet Sauvignon – berry, black currant, cassis, herbaceous or vegetative (green pepper, green bean, olives), mint, black pepper, tobacco
   a. Typical styles – rich, complex, highly tannic wines
14. Merlot – plum, blackberry, chocolate, fern leaf, fruit and floral, red cherry
15. Cabernet Franc – black currant, red currant, green bell pepper, jalapeno, marijuana
16. Nebbiolo – dried red fruits, tar, rose, licorice, truffle, mushrooms

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17. Tempranillo – tart red raspberry, tobacco, sweet and sour, dill weed, bay leaf, ripe strawberries
18. Grenache – dehydrated strawberries, raspberry, black pepper, raisins, powdered sugar, grenadine
19. Sangiovese – sour red cherry, licorice root, fennel, black tea, leafy underbrush
20. Malbec – blueberry, coffee bean, ripe plum
21. Zinfandel – cranberry, blueberry jam, black berry pie, peppercorn, peach yogurt, black pepper, raisins
22. Syrah – intense blackberry, cassis, black pepper, violets, smoke, tar, raspberry, blueberry, black pepper, smoked meat, leather
   a. High tannins, dark, dense

3. Palate
   a. Sweetness/Dryness
   b. Body – the weight of the wine, sensed in the middle of the tongue
      i. From the amount of alcohol, glycerin and grape solids in the wine
   c. Confirm FEW
      i. Fruit – any changes?
      ii. Confirm non-fruits
      iii. Confirm minerality/earth
      iv. Confirm wood
   d. Structural Elements
      i. Alcohol – sensed as heat in the nose, throat and chest
         1. Higher alcohol leads to higher body
      ii. Acidity – focus on the salivary glands and the finish (how much are you salivating?) This should be balanced with sweetness
      iii. Tannin – sensed as bitterness or astringency (drying effect in the mouth)
         1. Smooth wines have low tannins
   e. Finish – the feeling/taste of the COMPLETE wine lingering after swallowed, not just one or two aspects
      i. The longer the finish the better the quality
      ii. The quality of the finish can be described as astringent, bitter, silky, etc...
   f. Complexity – the number of aromas or flavors in the wine and how they interact, mark of wine quality
4. Initial Conclusion – know markers for classic grape varieties and styles
   a. Old World vs. New World
      i. Acidity levels
      ii. Earthiness (old world wines are earthy, new world are fruitier)
iii. Use of Wood

b. Cool, Moderate or Warm Climate
   i. Acidity Level –
   ii. Alcohol Level
   iii. Color Extraction in red wines
   iv. Low acid = warm climate
       High Acid = cool climate

c. Grape Variety or Blend
   i. Know markers

d. General age range
   i. Color
   ii. Rim Variation
   iii. Youth vs. Vinosity
   iv. Quality of texture and finish

5. Final Conclusion
   a. Grave Variety or Blend
   b. Country
   c. Region
   d. Appellation
   e. Quality level if appropriate
   f. Vintage