

WSET Level 4 Diploma in Wines Guide to Tasting Examinations

Developing the ability to taste wines and spirits as a professional is a key learning outcome of the WSET® Level 4 Diploma in Wines (here referred to as the '**Diploma**'). This skill is taught and assessed using the WSET Level 4 Systematic Approach to Tasting Wines® (the '**Wine SAT**'). The SAT is supported by the WSET Level 4 Wine-Lexicon (the '**Wine-Lexicon**').

THE TASTING EXAMINATIONS

The Diploma tasting examinations are designed to test your ability to taste and evaluate a wine accurately 'blind' using the SAT methodology.

Tasting is assessed for Units D3 Wines of the World, D4 Sparkling Wines and D5 Fortified Wines with samples presented in flights of three wines. Each flight of three wines has a mark allocation of 100 marks.

The tasting examinations are allocated 45 minutes for each flight of three wines.

The wines used in the examination can be any of the wines from any of the regions listed in the Specification and the WSET Diploma in Wines study materials for the Unit being examined. The examinations are not limited to the Recommended Tasting Samples. Any combination of white, red, or rosé wines is possible.

You may be asked to answer any of the following questions or combinations of questions for an individual wine or flight of wines:

identify the **country and/or region of origin**;

identify the **grape variety(ies)**;

identify the **common link**;

identify the wine's **method of production**; and/or

identify the wine's **style within its category** (for D4 or D5 only);

In addition to identifying what is asked for you may also be required to give reasons for your identification or describe a method of production.

As with any examination it is important that you answer the question as set.

The Allocations of Marks in a Tasting Examination

Appearance (2 marks)	
Intensity	1 mark
Colour	1 mark
Nose (6 marks)	
Intensity	1 mark
Aromas	5 marks
<p>The 5 marks available for aroma characteristics will be allocated to specific clusters from any or all of the three aroma types: primary, secondary and tertiary. This is to ensure that those candidates who identify all of the key components of a wine's aroma profile are rewarded above those who miss something out.</p> <p>The aroma needs to be specific and not a general cluster heading. For example, '<i>this wine has green and citrus fruit</i>' will gain no marks whereas '<i>this wine has pear, apple, lemon and grapefruit characteristics</i>' could possibly gain 4 marks.</p> <p>Typically one valid descriptor will get one mark, depending on how the marks have been allocated between clusters. Set out below are examples of how the marks could be allocated.</p> <p>(i) Wines with primary aromas only. If the wine only has primary aromas, then all 5 marks will be allocated to primary descriptors.</p> <p>Producing a note for a simple wine that reflects the brevity of identifiable aromas in wine is one of the most challenging. Students are rewarded for recognising the simplicity of a wine. If the wine is simple it may be that only one or two aroma clusters apply. In this case, you should acknowledge the wine's simplicity in your description, e.g. '<i>this wine has simple apple, pear, lemon and grapefruit characteristics</i>'. Assuming the four primary descriptors given are valid for the wine in question, this answer would score 5 marks, with one mark allocated for 'simple'. Please note that simple wines may also show some secondary characteristics '<i>this wine has simple red cherry and strawberry fruit with vanilla and coconut aromas from oak</i>'.</p> <p>(ii) Wines with primary and secondary aromas. Where a wine shows primary and secondary aromas, the 5 marks will be split between the most obvious primary and secondary aroma clusters. The breakdown of marks will vary depending on the style of wine.</p>	

(iii) Wines with primary, secondary and tertiary aromas. Where a wine shows primary, secondary and tertiary characteristics the 5 marks will be split between clusters from all three types.

Palate (10 marks for white and rosé wines and 12 marks for red wines)

Capping of marks

In some cases, a structural component of a wine may be considered so essential to its character that getting it wrong carries an additional penalty. To describe Rutherglen Muscat as anything other than 'sweet' would constitute a fundamental error. In such a case, the examiners may, at their discretion, reduce the total number of marks available for Palate by one. This means that a candidate who described Rutherglen Muscat as 'off-dry' would not only miss the mark available for sweetness but incur an additional one-mark penalty.

Sweetness	1 mark
Acidity	1 mark
Tannin <i>(red wines only)</i>	1 mark for level of tannins 1 mark for nature of tannins
Alcohol	1 mark
Body	1 mark
Flavour intensity	1 mark
Flavour characteristics	There is a total of 4 marks available for ' Flavour characteristics ' and ' Other observations ' combined. This means that where the examiners have allocated a mark to texture or pétillance, for example, you can achieve full marks by giving: four valid descriptors for 'Flavour characteristics' and no observation about texture or pétillance; or three valid descriptors for 'Flavour characteristics' and one correct observation about texture or pétillance. Marks will be allocated to clusters as set out in the aroma section above.
Other observations	
Finish	1 mark

The remaining marks will be allocated to conclusions and identification questions.	
Conclusions	
Quality assessment	6 marks
Suitability for bottle ageing	3 marks
<p>The 6 marks that are allocated for 'quality assessment' require the candidate to select correctly from the options in the SAT, and support this with arguments that justify their quality assessment and draw accurately on relevant features of the wine. The candidate is recommended to consider balance, length, intensity, complexity and expressiveness/typicality, but candidates can also mention other aspects if they consider them relevant. Note</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not sufficient for candidates to say 'the wine is balanced' or 'the wine is complex', etc. To make their argument persuasive and link it to the wine, the candidate should provide details of how balance, complexity etc are achieved. For example, 'the fruity aromas and flavours are balanced by the refreshing high acidity', 'complexity comes from the oak and tertiary development'. • Unless arguing that the wine is outstanding, the candidate's argument should justify why they have not put the wine in a higher quality category. Similarly, unless they are arguing that it is poor in quality, they should justify why they have not put it in a lower quality category. <p>The 3 marks that are available for 'suitability for bottle ageing' require the candidate to select correctly for the two options in the SAT (suitable for bottle ageing, not suitable for bottle ageing) and the candidate will need further comment in order to get the 3 marks (e.g. for a Madeira, the correct answer will be '<i>not suitable for bottle ageing</i>', but the student might go on to say that '<i>the oxidative character, alcohol level of 19% and high acidity will allow the wine to hold indefinitely</i>').</p>	
The mark allocations for identification questions can vary from wine to wine and may be allocated to one wine or require a comparison of two or more wines in the flight. Examples include but are not restricted to:	
Grape variety/varieties	<p>The questions asked may vary in structure but will be based on these four identification topics. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'explain how maturation defines the style of this wine'. (D4 and D5 only) • 'what evidence in your note supports this conclusion?' (following a style question). <p>If two or three wines have a common variety or origin, then an example of a question referring to multiple wines could be</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Identify the region' (5 marks) • 'Give reasons for your choice' (5 marks) <p>(Or similarly with country or grape variety).</p>
Country and/ or region of origin	
Method of production	
Style within the category (Sparkling and Fortified wines)	

D3 Wines of the World

In the Unit D3 tasting examination you will taste and evaluate 12 wines in total. These are divided into four flights of three wines, with two flights on Tasting Paper 1 and two flights on Tasting Paper 2. You have 1½ hours to complete each six-wine paper and there is a break between the two papers.

For each wine you will be expected to write a comprehensive tasting note in accordance with the Wine SAT, draw conclusions about the sample and/or samples in that flight and give reasons for the conclusions.

Your grade for the D3 tasting examination is based on your aggregate score across the 12 wines.

The tasting examination and the theory examination are treated as separate components of the D3 assessment. This means that you need to pass the tasting examination and the theory examination to achieve an overall pass for D3. If you pass one examination but not the other you will only need to retake the examination you have failed.

Unit 3 – Light Wines of the World		
Tasting Paper 1 (1½ hours)	Question 1	Three wines from the same or predominantly the same grape variety.
	Question 2	Three wines from the same country
Tasting Paper 2 (1½ hours)	Question 3	Three wines from the same region
	Question 4	Three wines which are unrelated. Candidates are typically asked to identify the grape variety/(ies) for each sample and/or origin.

D4 Sparkling Wines and D5 Fortified Wines

The examinations for these Units contain two parts:

- a tasting of a flight of three wines
- a multiple-part open-response theory paper.

You have 1½ hours to complete both parts of the examination.

Unlike D3, your final grade for D4 and D5 is based on your aggregate mark for the tasting and the theory parts. However, a candidate must achieve at least 45% in each part of the paper.

This means that a good score on one question can make up for a marginal fail on the other, resulting in an overall pass for the Unit.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE TASTING EXAMINATIONS

Tasting wines accurately is challenging and requires a broad base of tasting experience built up over an extended period. All students join the Diploma with some tasting experience from their WSET Level 3 in Wines or WSET Level 3 in Wines and Spirits. Tasting ability is a skill that can be learned and perfected like any other, so preparation over the course of your Diploma studies is essential.

The first step to success is to understand what is required. By the time you sit your first tasting examination you must be able to:

Identify the key features of wines accurately, using the appropriate SAT terminology.

The examiners recognise that different tasters have different levels of sensitivity to a wine's structural components such as sugar, acidity, tannin or body. However, they expect that through a combination of practice and instruction you will have calibrated your palate against those of your Educators. This should mean that you are able to identify the levels of a wine's structural components using the applicable SAT terms (e.g. 'high', 'medium' or 'low', etc.), relative to the world of wines generally. The process of calibration using the Diploma SAT will be a continuation of what you have learnt at Level 3.

Apply your knowledge of the key features of a given wine to reach conclusions about its quality and suitability for bottle ageing.

Apply your knowledge of the key features of a given wine to identify the origin, grape variety/varieties, common link, style within a category, production method if asked for.

Explain the reasons for your conclusion or identification.