

STUDY GUIDE

**Diploma
in Wines & Spirits**

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Introduction to the Study Guide

The Wine & Spirit Education Trust and the Weinakademie Österreich would like to welcome you to the Diploma course. This Study Guide is designed to help you handle your Diploma studies.

Approaching the theory examinations

During the course of your studies you will need to pass theory examinations, a coursework assignment as well as a final thesis. 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.

People from different backgrounds undertake the Diploma. Therefore this Study Guide also contains information about the different methods of assessment used.

Approaching the tasting examinations

During the course of your studies you will also need to pass tasting examinations using the 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 Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting takes a great deal of discipline. Therefore this Study Guide also includes a detailed explanation of how to use it.

... and finally

Whether you work in the industry or are a dedicated wine enthusiast, studying for the Diploma will deepen your knowledge of the world of wines and spirits, build your awareness of the global and domestic markets for these products and develop your ability to taste and assess quality as a professional. The Diploma is a challenging qualification which requires commitment and application but it is an opportunity to acquire expertise in a fascinating subject and one which we hope you will enjoy.

We wish you well in your studies!

Recommended study materials

Prior knowledge

Everything on the Diploma course - lectures, notes and examination - presupposes you have a sound grasp of the up-to-date WSET Level 3 Award in Wines or Advanced Course - Wines and Spirits International (Weinakademie Österreich) syllabus content. It may be worthwhile, in preparation for the course, to re-read the course materials of the mentioned pre-Diploma courses to refresh your knowledge. This kind of preparation will help you pinpoint areas of weakness in your knowledge prior to lectures and focus your preparation, this in turn will help you make the most of your lectures and allow the speaker to focus on the Diploma syllabus requirements rather than going over “old ground”.

Specifications

It is very important that you read through the Specifications. Any assessment will be restricted to the learning outcomes and the syllabus contained within the Specifications.

By reading the Specifications you will be able to differentiate between what you need to know and what is nice to know. For example, you will not have to study every AC within a particular region - only the ones listed in the Specifications.

The Specifications also contain the following:

- The aims and objectives of the qualification
- The Diploma structure
- The Unit assessment schedule
- The examination regulations

Required reading

The Oxford Companion to Wine (latest edition) edited by Jancis Robinson is the required reading for the Diploma Units 3, 5 and 6 to ensure consistency across the programme. In order to pass these Units it is necessary to work through the particular Study Material by using the Oxford Companion to Wine. For Unit 2 and 4 the Study Material itself is the required reading. You will also get a Study Material for Unit 1, but the information will not be sufficient to pass the written closed-book theory examination and the coursework assignment. There are no materials available for Unit 7 as the sources depend on the chosen topic.

All the materials mentioned above will be provided by Weinakademie Österreich.

Supplementary materials

In addition to the required reading we would encourage you to read widely around the subjects you are studying. This is the best way of keeping up to date with developments in the wine industry.

Internet: The internet is an invaluable resource. Some sites are listed below. This list is not comprehensive. 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 and journals: There are many different magazines/newspapers available, which may include important aspects and information. Some of them are listed below.

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 included here is modest. But it should give you an overview about available sources, if you want to have more detailed information in a particular topic.

General

- The World Atlas of Wine (2013), Hugh Johnson/Jancis Robinson; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- The Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia (2011), Tom Stevenson; publisher: Dorling Kindersley
- Wine (2014), André Dominé; publisher: h. f. ullmann Publishing
- Oz Clarke Wine Atlas (2015), Oz Clarke; Verlag: Books Company Lt
- Wine Grapes - A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, including their Origins and Flavours (2012), Jancis Robinson/Julia Harding/José Vouillamoz; publisher: Ecco
- Planet Wine (2004), Stuart Pigott; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Wine Report, Tom Stevenson; publisher: Dorling Kindersley
- Wine Behind the Label, David Moore/Philip Williamson

Website

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

Periodicals amongst others

- Wine Business International
- The Drinks Business
- Merum

Unit 2 - Wine Production

- Understanding Wine Technology (2010), David Bird; publisher: DBQA Publishing

- Grapes and Wines (2010), Oz Clarke/Margaret Rand; publisher: Sterling Publishing
- The Science of Wine (2015), Jamie Goode; publisher: University of California Press

Unit 3 - Light Wines of the World

France - general

- The new France (2006), Andrew Jefford/Jason Lowe; publisher: MITCH
- The Great Wines of France (2006), Clive Coates; publisher: MITCH
- Hachette Wine Guide; publisher: Cassell & Co

Websites

- <http://www.inao.gouv.fr/>

Bordeaux

- The Finest Wines of Bordeaux (2010), James Lawther MW; publisher: University of California Press
- Bordeaux: Medoc & Graves (2006), Stephen Brooke; publisher: MITCH
- Wines of Bordeaux (2006), David Peppercorn; publisher: MITCH

Websites

- <http://www.bordeaux.com/>
- <http://www.medoc.org/>

South-West France

Websites

- <http://www.fvbergerac.com/>
- <http://www.vins-gaillac.com/>

Burgundy

- The Finest Wines of Burgundy (2012), Bill Nanson; publisher: University of California Press
- Inside Burgundy (2010), Jasper Morris MW; publisher: Berry Bros & Rudd Press
- The Wines of Burgundy (2008), Clive Coates; publisher: University of California Press
- The Wines of Burgundy (2005), Serena Sutcliffe; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Burgundy (2006), Antony Hanson; publisher: MITCH

Websites

- <http://www.bourgogne-wines.com/>
- <http://www.beaujolais.com/>

Alsace

Website

- <http://www.alsacewine.com/>

Loire

Website

- <http://www.vinsdeloire.fr/>
- <http://www.vins-centre-loire.com/>

Rhône

- Wine of Northern Rhône (2005), John Livingstone-Learmonth; publisher: University of California Press

Website

- <http://www.vins-rhone.com/>

Southern France

Websites

- <http://www.vindepaysdoc.com/>
- <http://www.languedoc-wines.com/>
- <http://www.coteaux-languedoc.com/>
- <http://www.corsicanwines.com/>

Germany

- The Wines of Germany (2003), Stephen Brooke; publisher: Mitchell Beazley

Website

- <http://www.germanwines.de/>

Austria

Website

- <http://www.austrianwine.com/>

Hungary

- The Wines of Hungary (2003), Alex Lidell; publisher: Octopus

Romania

Website

- <http://www.wineromania.com/>

Italy

- Wines of Italy (2006), Michele Shah; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Barolo to Valpolicella: The Wines of Northern Italy (2006), Nicolas Belfrage; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Brunello to Zibibbo: The Wines of Tuscany, Central and Southern Italy (2006), Nicolas Belfrage; publisher: Mitchell Beazley

Websites

- <http://www.italianmade.com/>
- <http://www.chianticlassico.com/>
- <http://www.langhevini.it/>
- <http://www.consorziovalpolicella.it/>
- <http://www.consorziobrunellodimontalcino.it/>

Spain

- The Finest Wines of Rioja & Northwest Spain (2011), Jesus Barquin; publisher: Aurum Press
- The Wines of Spain (2006), Julian Jeffs; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Wines of Spain (2005), Jan Read; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- The Wines of Rioja (2005), John Radford; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- The new Spain (2006), John Radford; publisher: Mitchell Beazley

Websites

- <http://www.winesfromspain.com/>
- <http://www.riberadelduero.es/>
- <http://www.riojawine.com/>

Portugal

- The Wines and Vineyards of Portugal (2003), Richard Mayson; publisher: Mitchell Beazley

Websites

- <http://www.viniportugal.pt/>
- <http://www.ivv.min-agricultura.pt/>

Greece

- The Wines of Greece (2005, new in 2018), Konstantinos Lazarakis; publisher: Mitchell Beazley

Website

- <http://www.thegreekwine.com/>
- <http://www.newwinesofgreece.com/>

Bulgaria

Website

- <http://www.bulgarianwines.com/>

South Africa

- Wines of the New South Africa (2013), Tim James; publisher: University Press Group Ltd
- Platter's South African Wine; publisher: John Platter

Websites

- <http://www.wosa.co.za/>
- <http://www.sawis.co.za/>

North Africa

- Africa Uncorked (2004), John Platter/Erica Platter; publisher: Kylie Cathie

Australia

- Future Makers: Australian Wines for the 21st Century (2011), Max Allen; publisher: Hardie Grant Books

- James Halliday's Wine Atlas of Australia (2014), James Halliday; publisher: Hardie Grant Books

Websites

- <http://www.wineaustralia.com/>
- <http://www.wfa.org.au/>

New Zealand

Website

- <http://www.nzwine.com/>

America

- The Finest Wines of California (2011), Stephen Brook; publisher: Aurum Press
- The Wines of the Napa Valley (2005), Larry Walker; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- The Wines of Canada (2005), Michael Schreiner; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Wines of the Pacific Northwest (2001), Lisa Shara Hall; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- The Wines of South America (2003), Monty Waldin; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- The Wines of Argentina, Chile and Latin America (2003), Christopher Fielden; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- The Wines of Chile (2006), Peter Richards; publisher: Mitchell Beazley

Websites - California

- <http://www.wineinstitute.org/>
- <http://www.napavintners.com/>
- <http://www.scgga.org/>
- <http://www.carneros.com/>

Websites - USA others

- <http://www.oregonwine.org/>
- <http://www.washingtonwine.org/>
- <http://www.newyorkwines.org/>

Website - Canada

- <http://www.winesofcanada.com/>
- <http://www.winesofontario.org/>
- <http://www.winebc.com/>

Website - Chile

- <http://www.winesofchile.org/>

Website - Argentina

- <http://www.winesofargentina.org/>

Website - other South American countries

- <http://www.winesofbrasil.com/>
- <http://www.inavi.com.uy/>

Unit 4 - Spirits of the World

(For further links refer to the Unit 4 Study Material.)

Cognac

- Cognac (2013), Nicholas Faith; Publisher: Infinite Ideas Limited

Website

- <http://www.cognac.fr/>

Armagnac

Website

- <http://www.armagnac.fr/>

Spanish Brandy

Website

- <http://www.brandydejerez.es/>

Whisky

- The World Atlas of Whisky (2010), Dave Broom; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Malt Whisky (2011), Charles McLean; publisher: Mitchell Beazley
- Malt Whisky Companion (2010), Michael Jackson; publisher: Penguin UK
- Goodness Nose (2010), Richard Paterson/Gavin D. Smith; publisher: Neil Wilson Publishing (chapter on blending)

Websites

- <http://www.scotch-whisky.org.uk/>
- <http://straightbourbon.com/>
- <http://www.discus.org/>

Rum

- Rum (2003), Dave Broom/Jason Lowe; publisher: Abbeville Pr

Gin and Vodka

Website

- <http://www.ginvodka.org/>

Tequila and Mezcal

Website

- <http://www.crt.org.mx/>
- <http://www.crm.org.mx/>
- <http://www.delmaguery.com/>

Unit 5 - Sparkling Wines of the World

(For further links refer to the Unit 5 Study Material.)

- World Encyclopedia of Champagne and Sparkling Wine (2013), Tom Stevenson/Essi Avellan; publisher: Wine Appreciation Guild

Website

- <http://www.champagne.fr/>
- <http://www.crcava.es/>
- <http://www.prosecco.it/>
- <http://www.discoverproseccowine.it/>
- <http://www.astidocg.it/>
- <http://www.franciacorta.net/>

Unit 6 - Fortified Wines of the World

(For further links refer to the Unit 6 Study Material.)

Sherry

- The Big Book of Sherry Wines, Consejo Regulador DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry & Junta de Andalucía
- Sherry (2016), Julian Jeffs; publisher: Infinite Ideas Lt

Website

- <http://www.sherry.org/>

Port

- Port and the Douro (2012), Richard Mayson; publisher: Infinite Ideas Lt

Website

- <http://www.ivdp.pt/>

Madeira

- The Wines of Madeira: An Indispensable Guide to the Wines, Grapes and Producers (2010), Elliott Trevor; publisher: Trevor Elliott Publishing
- Madeira (2014), Alex Liddell; publisher: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd
- Madeira: The Islands and Their Wines (2016), Richard Mayson; publisher: Infinite Ideas Limited

Website

- <http://www.vinhomadeira.pt/>

VDN

- The Wines of the South of France: From Banyuls to Bellet (2003), Rosemary George; publisher: Octopus

Websites

- <http://www.languedoc-wines.com/>
- <http://www.roussillon-wines.com/>

Rutherglen Muscat

Websites

- <http://www.rutherglenc.com/>
- <http://www.winemakers.com.au/>

Study advice

Structured studying in the Diploma

When it comes to the Diploma simply learning a long list of facts is not going to be enough to be successful.

A question within the Unit 3 theory examination can be for example:

“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 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 Sauvignon is grown and repeat the process? The amount of unrelated facts you would need to remember would start to grow exponentially.

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 grape 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 (unstructured approach)

a mass of uncatalogued data

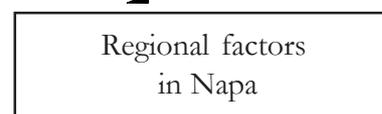
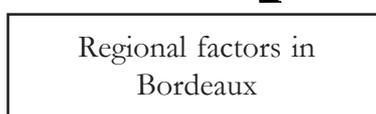


Becomes (structured approach)

common theme



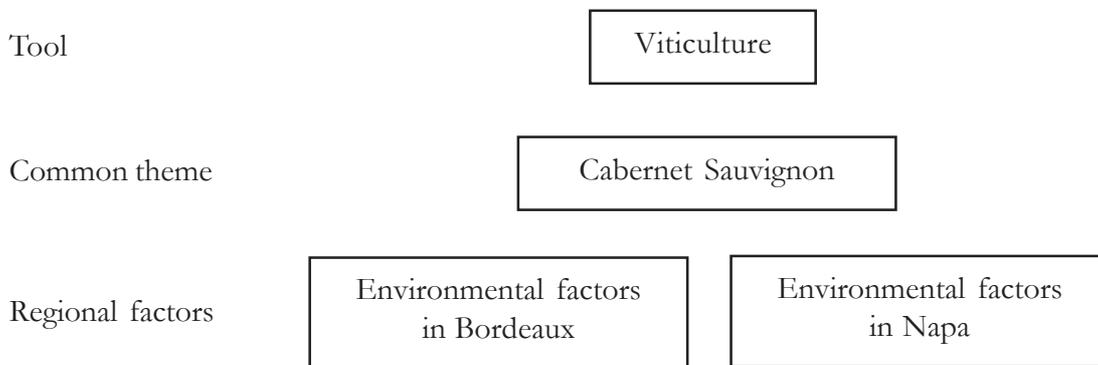
regional factors



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 “filing-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 Sauvignon 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 Sauvignon 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 topography
- 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 - The Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages and Unit 2 - Wine Production 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 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.

Again, 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.

Planning your studies

Given the amount of material you will need to cover for the Diploma, planning your studies is especially important. 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 having to cram before the exam

Before you get started you should read the latest version of the Diploma Specifications. This sets out in detail the learning outcomes for each Unit of the Diploma and therefore the standard of knowledge and application required to succeed in the examinations. Reading the Specifications carefully before you embark on your studies will help ensure that you cover the necessary material for each Unit in the correct level of detail. The Specifications also provide useful information about how the syllabus is weighted between Units, and lists important regulations which you should be familiar with when you come to take the Diploma examinations.

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

- 1) Reading and taking notes
- 2) Consolidating your knowledge
- 3) Tasting
- 4) Revising and practising exam technique

The key to success when studying for the Diploma qualification is not so much how much you can be taught, but how much you want to learn.

Reading and taking notes

Reading and taking notes is the first step in accumulating knowledge. There are many different ways of taking notes and which method you use will be a matter of personal preference. Some people use computers, others pen and paper. Some people write their notes while others highlight sections in a text.

Whichever way you choose to take notes, you should focus on extracting the key points from the learning material you are using. Too much detail can be overwhelming, so try to identify and link common themes between topics as building blocks to structure your learning.

By getting to grips with Unit 2 (Wine Production) at the start of your studies you can build a solid foundation of knowledge which can streamline the learning process for the other Units.

Consolidating your knowledge

Everyone takes on information at different rates. Some people can absorb a lot of detail quickly with minimal difficulty; others prefer to take more time. Consolidation involves reinforcing the knowledge you are acquiring as you study. There are several methods of doing this, active and passive.

By actively reviewing your theory notes, correcting errors and clarifying ambiguities as you cover each topic, you can produce a clear and concise set of notes that you can revise from confidently. By referring to the Specifications, you can also check whether or not you have all the details you need for that particular Unit. If you leave space in your consolidated notes, you can return to them and add any new information as necessary.

Another active method of consolidating your knowledge of a specific topic is to try to explain it to someone else. Their questions can focus the mind, helping you to make important connections between material from different Units which might not have been obvious when you first studied the topic.

In addition to consolidating your knowledge actively, you will find that as you read around topics you will pick up new information and examples passively. Keeping up with developments in the wine and spirit industries by reading the trade press can give context to what you are learning. This in turn can provide a fresh perspective and reinforce your understanding of the subject matter. For some people, information acquired in this way is as easy to recall in examination conditions as information that has been learned by heart.

The best approach to consolidating your theory knowledge is likely to be a combination of these active and passive methods.

Tasting

Consolidating your practical knowledge of the wines and spirits covered on the course is also important. You can achieve this by tasting widely, practising not only your tasting technique, but also how to write tasting notes in accordance with the Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting Wine and the Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting Spirits.

When you are tasting a wine you should think carefully about how its aromas, flavours and structural components relate to your theory studies, i.e. what you have learned about that style of wine and how and where it is made. Your theory knowledge of relevant grape growing and winemaking factors should help you understand why a wine tastes as it does. Tasting a particular style of wine repeatedly when you know how it is made can also create positive associations which reinforce your understanding. This two-way learning process - making connections between the theory and tasting components of the Diploma - is key to success.

Revising and practising exam technique

This is the point when you should get yourself “exam-fit”, i.e. ready to deploy the information that you have learned in an examination scenario. Revision should be the final push in your studies, when you fine-tune the knowledge you have acquired and commit topics to memory so that you can recall them easily.

In addition to re-reading your consolidated notes to ensure you have all of the necessary information front-of-mind, you should test yourself on topics by thinking about how you would answer specific questions. This is also helpful to identify any areas of weakness so you can fill in remaining gaps in your knowledge.

Practising writing your answers in timed conditions is very helpful at this point.

Diploma examinations

A variety of assessment methods are employed in the Diploma examinations. The Diploma examinations will assess your knowledge of the world of wines and spirits by testing both your ability to recall relevant facts correctly and how you apply those facts to the question. It is important to understand at the outset how you will be assessed so that you can maximise the effectiveness of your study technique. **So, please keep in mind that for passing Diploma examinations it is necessary to be familiar and to practise the different methods of assessment.**

The methods of assessment employed are:

- Coursework assignment
- Multiple-choice question examination
- Written closed-book theory examinations
- Written practical tasting examinations
- Thesis

Unit 1

The Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages

written closed-book theory examination and one coursework assignment

Unit 2

Wine Production

Multiple-choice examination paper of 100 questions

Unit 3

Light Wines of the World

written practical tasting paper of 12 wines
written closed-book theory paper of 5 questions

Unit 4

Spirits of the World

written practical tasting paper of 3 spirits and one theory question

Unit 5

Sparkling Wines of the World

written practical tasting paper of 3 sparkling wines and one theory question

Unit 6

Fortified Wines of the World

written practical tasting paper of 3 fortified wines and one theory question

Unit 7

Thesis

Thesis as well as a two-page abstract and a viva voce exam

Whichever form of question you are tackling in a Diploma examination, you should:

- **Manage** your time
- **Answer** the question as set
- **Plan** your answer
- **Write** clearly

Manage your time

Diploma examinations are challenging because you have to give detailed written answers to a series of questions in a short space of time. It is vital that you leave yourself enough time to answer every question which you are required to answer. If you do not, you are unlikely to pass, even if you perform well on those questions that you do answer.

To help ensure that you do not run out of time in the examinations, you should practise writing answers in timed conditions as part of your preparation. The examiners are not expecting you to cover every possible detail, instead they are looking for evidence that you can demonstrate full knowledge of the topic in the allotted time.

Unit 1 written closed-book theory examination

Duration: 75 minutes

The examination question is divided into multiple parts. 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 weighting of each part and use this as a guide to how you should plan your answer and divide up the writing time. The marks allocated to each part will vary from one case-study to another. 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 reading your answer

Unit 2

Duration: 90 minutes

Assessed by means of multiple-choice examination paper of 100 questions. 90 minutes are enough time to answer all the questions and check your responses as well.

Unit 3**Tasting examination**

Duration: 120 minutes with a short break in between

The tasting paper is held in two parts, each of one hour's duration, with a short break between each paper. Each part consists of 6 wines. Candidates are required to submit a detailed written analysis of 6 wines per paper (in total 12 wines) according to the Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting.

Theory examination

Duration: 180 minutes

5 questions in total must be answered (one question is compulsory and the remaining 4 are to be selected from a choice of 6). How you organise your time is totally up to you. But for passing the examination it is necessary to spend the same time for each question as all questions carry equal weighting. As a rule you should consider dividing your time up in the following way:

- 5 minutes selecting a question and planning your answer as well as checking your answer
- 30 minutes writing your answer
- 5 minutes as a buffer over the duration of the examination

Units 4, 5 and 6

Duration/Unit: 65 minutes each

Within each Unit you have to submit a detailed analysis of 3 products and to answer one theory question (consists of 3 subquestions). As both parts carry equal weighting (75 marks each) 30 minutes should be given to the theory and 30 minutes to the tasting. This means about 10 minutes per wine respectively topic within the theory part. But it is recommended to spend slightly more time on the theory part. The remaining 5 minutes could be used either for planning/structuring and/or checking your answer.

Answer the question as set

It is vital that you read the question carefully. Every question will contain key words that tell you what you should focus on in your answer. Even if you are accustomed to sitting written exams we recommend that you underline or highlight these key words in the question so that you can plan your answer accordingly. This can focus the mind and help to prevent you straying 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 subregions 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 VDNs you will get no marks for commenting on Muscat-based VDNs.

Plan your answer

Planning what you write in answer to an exam question is equally important. How you plan will depend on the type of question, but will most likely involve making some rough notes before you start to write out your answer.

Write clearly

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 would like to show you 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.

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.

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. This ensures that your answer is easier to read and understand.

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 English is not your first language, the examiners will take this into account when marking your script, you will not lose marks for errors in your written English provided that it is intelligible. No candidate will be penalised for poor spelling or grammar if the meaning is clear but you should take particular care to spell correctly any technical vocabulary (such as the names of grape varieties or soil types) and wine terms which appear in languages other than English. This is important whether or not English is your first language.

For the coursework assignment and the final thesis it is recommended to have them proofread by someone else.

Unit 1 - The Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages

For Unit 1 a **written closed-book theory examination** and a **coursework assignment** is required. Both parts carry equal marks and have to be passed individually to be awarded Unit 1.

Unit 1 written closed-book theory examination

Candidates will be issued with a Candidate Case Study Brief which they should download from the Weinakademie Österreich website: **www.weinakademie.at/english.php**. This will be posted 1 month before the date of the examination. Candidates have this time to research the topic in preparation for the examination, which will be the first time they will see the examination question itself. The examination question will be in multiple parts, all of which are compulsory.

Research

Research means to find something 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. It can be helpful to consider the following approach:

Preparation

Read the Candidate Case Study Brief carefully and identify the core issues that you are being asked to research. Then, before consulting any sources, write down what you 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. Thinking in very broad terms about the issue can help you gather your thoughts and structure your research project.

Preliminary research

You should consider reading as many different sources as possible, these include:

- The Oxford Companion to Wine
- Study Materials of the Diploma in Wines and Spirits
- Internet
- Wine trade magazines
- Books

Note: Your sources must be credible. When quoting or relying on someone else's work in support of an argument, you should satisfy yourself of the author's reputation: Can they be considered a reliable source for the information or analysis they are providing?

Analysis

Analysis involves evaluating the data that you have gathered from various sources and identifying key themes.

You should ask yourself whether you have enough information to answer the topic in question comprehensively. When you come to write your answer, you will need to be able to show an awareness of different points of view on the issue to demonstrate to the examiners that you have researched the topic fully. By this stage, you will also have started to form your own opinions on the core issues, so consider what evidence supports your view and what undermines it.

Secondary research

Secondary research involves filling in any gaps in your knowledge that you have identified. You can follow up leads using your original sources or speak to industry insiders or opinion formers to gain more insight. First-hand evidence from someone close to the issue can lend credibility to your work, though you should always take care to identify who you have spoken to and the sources you have consulted.

Schedule of the Unit 1 written closed-book theory examination

As already mentioned above you can download the Candidate Case Study Brief 1 month before the date of the examination. The Candidate Case Study Brief provides a lot of context surrounding the subject area. You should read this brief very carefully as it is designed to direct your research into specific areas. The question in the exam will be limited to the issues that are raised in the Candidate Case Study Brief. Below you can find an example of how such a Candidate Case Study Brief may look like:

Diploma in Wines & Spirits

Unit 1: The Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages

Candidate Case Study 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.”

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.

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.

GUIDANCE NOTES FOR CANDIDATES:

Strategy and structure of candidate responses

Candidates should conduct their research based on the information outlined in the case study above. The outcome of this research should be used during the examination to demonstrate that they have a solid understanding of the topic and have applied sound analysis of the data collected.

The examination takes place on ..., is of one hour and 15 minutes' duration and is to be completed without access to notes or other resources. Candidates must complete all sections of the question, which will be limited to the information contained within the constraints of the candidate brief above.

Responses must be presented in essay format with clear structure and presentation as described in the Study Guide. Candidates should, where possible, indicate within the body of their assignment which resources have been consulted during the research process.

Examiners will be looking for:

- Explicit evidence within the body of the essay of diverse and relevant research drawn from both trade and general press, course materials plus other sources as necessary.
- Evidence that the information and examples uncovered by research have been the subject of careful study and critical analysis before being deployed in the work submitted for assessment.
- Evidence of original thought.
- Good presentation, layout and clear thinking.
- Candidates must address all required sections of the question and gain an overall minimum mark 55% to quality for a pass grade.

In relation to the topic question there are three key issues that can be clearly identified:

- a) Generic promotional bodies for the wine industry, their mission statements and the role they play in promoting a country's wine
- b) Finances for generic promotional 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 Unit 1 written closed-book theory examination is different from a coursework 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 examination. 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 examination 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.

Tackling the examination

On the day of 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 questions that were asked on the Case Study example above were:

- 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)*

Your answer MUST be presented in the format of a written essay with clear structure and presentation. This means:

- **Short introduction**
- **Body of the essay:** Tackle each subsection in turn, using the weighting of the marks to indicate how much attention you should give each section. You should, where possible, indicate within the body of your answer which resources have been consulted during the research process.
- **Short concluding paragraph**

Within the examination 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. If you have researched the topic thoroughly, you will likely have more information than you can use. Planning is therefore essential to stay on-topic as you write.

There is no specific upper or lower word limit. However, given that the examination is of 75 minutes' duration you are expected to provide detailed and sophisticated arguments which can rarely be successfully made in a short answer. As a very rough guide, 5 sides written in average sized handwriting is the typical length of a good answer. The examination is to be completed without access to notes or other resources.

Unit 1 coursework assignment

Within your Diploma studies you have also to submit one coursework assignment. The assignment must be between 2,500-3,000 words long. Titles for the coursework assignment will be posted on the Weinakademie Österreich website (www.weinakademie.at/english.php) at the beginning of each academic year. The academic year starts on 1st August and ends on 31st July the following year. For each academic year two assignment titles are available, one compulsory assignment title for each submission date.

When writing a coursework assignment it is important that you always follow exactly the structure of the Candidate Assignment Brief of the particular topic!

Plagiarism, collusion and cheating

All information from external sources you use, must be referenced. 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. Do not lend your notes or assignment 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. The assignment is an individual piece of work, therefore make sure that it is your own work and not that of a group.

Penalties for plagiarism include being marked failed on the assignment or failed on the Unit or possible disqualification from future examinations. 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.

Writing the coursework assignment

Planning is also important when working on your coursework assignment. The coursework assignment should be planned and written as a whole and the subsections that the examiners require you to cover should be signposted clearly in your work.

There is a required word count for the coursework assignment. Your coursework assignment must be between 2,500 and 3,000 words long otherwise you will be penalised. An assignment that is less than 2,500 words will be failed and any words over 3,000 will not gain any marks. The word count does not include:

- Index
- List of tables/list of figures
- Headings
- Texts in tables, charts, etc.
- Footnotes
- Bibliography
- Appendix

You must not use tables/charts, footnotes, appendices, etc. to place information, which belong to the main body and are essential for its understanding. Is this the case it would be added to the word count.

When writing the assignment we recommend to tackle the work in four phases:

Phase 1 – Understanding the question and gathering material

Read through the Candidate Assignment Brief carefully and underline the key words.

Try to start your research early. This gives your thinking time to mature, and enables you to revise your first attempts.

It is rarely necessary to read a whole book from cover to cover in order to write an essay or report. You must read selectively, picking out that which is directly relevant to the topic in question. To do this you need to know what you are looking for and the following procedure is useful:

- a) Start by jotting down what you know about the topic in a brief itemised list. This will get your mind thinking about the question and provide a guide to areas you need to study further.
- b) List those topics that you think may be relevant to the assignment, even if you know nothing about them. These also give a guide to your reading. As you read you will inevitably discover new topics and areas. Make a list of these as you go, and follow them up later.
- c) Try to use a variety of sources. If the topic area is new to you, start with brief surveys, e.g. encyclopedia articles and introductory texts. Use these to discover the essential topics and then move on to more specialised books, research papers, journals, etc. as appropriate.
- d) Your Unit Study Materials and lecture notes may be relevant, but never merely regurgitate them. The coursework assignment is not designed to test factual knowledge in isolation. Look for sources that give opposing views and never follow one source too closely. Most important of all, **never plagiarise.**
- e) Keep a notebook or file cards for your notes. When taking notes do not rewrite the book - just jot down the vital points. Always record the source, because
- you may need to expand on your notes when you come to write your assignment, and
 - furthermore you need this information for referencing and the bibliography.

Phase 2 – Plan and write the first draft

The first step is to make a detailed plan of what you intend to cover. Having collated all the data from your research, formed your opinions and decided what to include, you should then write the first draft of your coursework assignment without worrying about the word count. You should try and adopt a clear, precise writing style, nevertheless with this first draft most people find that they write over 3,000 words.

Phase 3 – Review of first draft

After you have completed your first draft you should put it to one side for a few days before re-reading it.

When you do come back to it, this will make it easier to sense-check what you have written and identify what can or should be removed. As you read each paragraph, consider what point you are trying to make and ask yourself whether you can make that point more efficiently. It is easy to use too many linking words, adjectives and adverbs which can be edited out without changing the meaning of the point you are trying to make. Usually, this process will be sufficient to bring the word count down to under the 3,000 word limit.

If your word count is under 2,500 words then do not be tempted to pad it. If you are just adding adjectives and adverbs in order to reach 2,500 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.

At this stage you should be checking that you have referenced all the sources you have quoted correctly. References usually take the form of footnotes to the text in which you cite the work that you have quoted, summarised or otherwise relied on to make a point. The full detail of every work consulted and referenced in this way must be included in your bibliography.

Phase 4 – The final polish

Your coursework assignment must include the following:

- Assignment Cover Sheet - look at p. 39
- Index
- Bibliography

Furthermore your coursework assignment may include the following:

- List of tables/list of figures
- Appendix

Finally your coursework assignment should be proofread to root out any spelling mistakes or typographical errors.

Spelling and clear presentation

When writing the coursework assignment you will also gain marks for a good style (flair, fluency, coherence, etc.), presentation (spelling, grammar, legibility) and a professional layout. Therefore it is possible that you may be penalised for poor spelling or presentation.

You will only ever lose or gain a small number of marks but it is important to stress some key points:

- Your English must be good enough not to detract from the clarity and precision of your discussion, and, preferably, enhance it. Poor English, spelling mistakes or scruffy presentation will all detract from the impression given by your coursework assignment. You have plenty of time to check this. If English is not your first language, the examiners will take this into account when marking your assignment.

Nearly every student writes his/her coursework assignment on a computer. This has some clear advantages: Most notably, it is very easy for you to make minor or major amendments to your work without having to re-write the whole coursework assignment. You can also use a formatting system which enables you to produce a very professional printed layout. However, you will not lose marks if your coursework assignment is hand-written, provided your hand-writing is neat and legible and your work is structured.

- Clear presentation can be achieved by using different techniques such as bold headings, different point sizes, bullet points, etc. Whatever methods you use, they should be used consistently throughout your coursework assignment.

Referencing and bibliography

Referencing and a bibliography are required in your coursework assignment.

Referencing

When writing your coursework assignment you will use many different sources. Therefore referencing is important. A precise reference, that enables the reader to locate the material referred to exactly, is the hallmark of good quality work. References are required in your coursework assignment and you will be penalised if you do not use them.

Referencing is important because of the following:

- It is 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.
- It helps the reader to clearly distinguish between yours and other people's thoughts. For you this has an added benefit as it ensures there can be no accusation of plagiarism.

- It can be used to add a little context to your comments that is valid but which might otherwise detract from the flow of your argument. But please note again that you must not use footnotes to place information, which belong to the main body and are essential for its understanding.

Concerning referencing you should consider the following. It can be done by using footnotes or within the body of the text placing the references in brackets. The examiners do not require you to use one system over another. Nevertheless, it is recommended to use footnotes for referencing as it makes your assignment easier to read.

All information, ideas, facts, etc. you took from outside sources must be referenced. Direct references (e.g. statement of an expert) must be placed in quotation marks. Direct referencing should only be used very rarely. Most of the information in your assignment should be used analogously. For analogous referencing use “cf.” or “see”. Diagrams, tables, maps, etc. must also be labeled. The suffixes a, b, c, etc. are added to differentiate between publications by the same author/s in the same year (e.g. Robinson, J. (2015a), p. 132).

Example - referencing in brackets within the body of the text:

... (Robinson, J. (2015), p. 132) ...

Examples - referencing by using footnotes:

- *One author:*
¹cf. Robinson, J. (2015), p. 132 ⇨ for direct references you would leave „cf.”; this would also be the same for the following examples
- *Several authors:*
²cf. Johnson, H., Robinson, J. (2013), p. 50-52
- *No author, but an editor:*
³cf. ÖWM (2010), p. 117
- *Internet:*
⁴cf. Taittinger (2010), Online or Taittinger (2010), p. 22
- *Verbal communication, telephone call, e-mail, etc.:*
⁵cf. Szigeti, P. (2010), personal interview
⁶cf. Szigeti, P. (2010), e-mail communication

Bibliography

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

A bibliography complements your references and should be provided at the end of your coursework assignment. It is your proof that you have fully researched the subject. Any work that you have used in your coursework assignment must be included in the bibliography.

When writing the coursework assignment it is important that you use as many different sources as possible to have sufficient facts, arguments, examples, etc. available.

When presenting your bibliography you should consider the following pointers:

- Sort the sources either by type (e.g. books, magazines, internet) or subject.
- Sources should be listed alphabetically by author surname and should ideally include the following information:
 - author/s or editor/s
 - title of book/article, etc.
 - place of publication and publisher
 - date of publication
- For websites include the full URL and the last time you visited the site.
- Italics can be used to make the bibliography easier to read.

Some examples:

Books:

One author

Robinson, J. (2015): *The Oxford Companion to Wine*, Oxford, Oxford University Press

Several authors

Johnson, H., Robinson, J. (2013): *World Atlas of Wine*, Mitchell Beazley

No author, but an editor

ÖWM (Ed.) (2010): *Documentation Austrian Wine*, edition September 2010

Article in a magazine:

Harvey, S. (2011): *Selling wine - the hidden costs*. In: *Wine & Viticulture Journal*, Volume 26 Number 2/March-April 2011, p. 61-63

Website:

WSET, URL: <http://www.wset.co.uk>, 1 September 2015

Verbal communication, telephone call, e-mail, etc.:

Szigeti, P. (2010): *personal interview about quality standards of base wines for the sparkling wine production in Austria*, Sektkellerei Szigeti, personal interview on 10 September 2010 in Gols

Appendix

You can use appendices to record any interviews, which you did as part of your research, or any other referenced material that can not be accessed by the examiner. Appendices (and footnotes) are normally not included in the word count. But as for footnotes, appendices must not be used to place information, which belong to the main body and are essential for its understanding. Is this the case it would be added to the word count.

Personal commentary

Regardless of whether you are tackling the Unit 1 written closed-book theory examination or the Unit 1 coursework assignment you will be asked for a personal commentary. This involves evaluating the issues objectively and reaching an informed conclusion.

Note: The examiners are not just looking for you to summarise the points of view of others on a given topic, they are looking for evidence of your own critical thinking. This means that you have to be able to present a well-reasoned argument as to which perspective is, in your opinion, more valid. However the question is phrased, personal commentary is more than simply giving your opinion about something. You must be able to show a broad understanding of all of the issues, giving reasons to support your position. You should also present evidence as to why the opposing points of view are incorrect or unsound.

UNIT 1 COURSEWORK
ASSIGNMENT - COVER SHEET
 Level 4 Diploma in Wines and Spirits



CANDIDATE NUMBER:		APP NAME:	Weinakademie Österreich
ASSIGNMENT NUMBER: <i>Please circle as appropriate</i>	1 - November OR 2 - April	APP NUMBER:	803
ASSIGNMENT TITLE:			
ASSIGNMENT WORD COUNT:			
SUBMISSION DATE:			

I declare that the attached work is entirely my own, other than where sources have been properly referenced and acknowledged in accordance with the Coursework Assignment Guidelines set out in the Candidate Assessment Guide.

I understand that the WSET has a policy regarding all forms of cheating and that in the event that the work I am attributing to myself is found NOT to be entirely my own, I may be subject to penalties and/or disciplinary procedures as set out in the Candidate Assessment Guide.

SIGNED (candidate signature required):

.....

EXAMINER COMMENTS (for internal use only)

Theory examinations in Unit 3, 4, 5 and 6

Diploma examinations especially theory exams are very challenging. 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.

What is critical and analytic thinking?

Broadly speaking there are two kinds of questions used in the Diploma:

- Factual recall questions simply require you to state facts.
- Critical and analytic questions require you to go beyond simple factual recall to demonstrate your understanding of the syllabus by explaining not just “what” something is but “how” and “why”. This approach often involves linking cause and effect and/or considering the wider context to a particular topic. In some cases, you will also have to provide a personal commentary based on an objective evaluation of the facts.

The examiners are not just looking for evidence that you have acquired the necessary knowledge, but that you are able to interpret what you have learned and apply it in a focussed way to answer a specific question. This is the key to success at Diploma level.

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

Question 1) “What style of wine is red Châteauneuf-du-Pape?”

Here the examiner is just looking for 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 appear in the paragraph questions that are asked in Unit 3 and Unit 4-6 examinations.

Question 2) “Why is Châteauneuf-du-Pape a full-bodied, high-alcohol red wine with relatively soft tannins?”

Here the examiner is no longer just looking for 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 examination. When approaching paragraph questions in Unit 3 and Unit 4-6 examinations you can gain extra marks if you relate their factual observations to a wider cause and effect. But please note that this way of tackling paragraph questions is not always possible or relevant.

Question 3) “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 looking for two things.

First of all you would need to explain why alcohol levels are going up. This requires a similar approach to question 2.

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.

This type of question, which is typical in Unit 1, can also appear in Unit 3 examinations.

Question types

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

- paragraph questions (short-form questions)
- open-response questions
- essay questions

Paragraph questions (short-form questions)

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

- In Unit 3, a paragraph question will typically offer you a choice of 6 topics to write about. You will be expected to write a paragraph answer on 5 of these in 30 minutes.

- In Units 4, 5 and 6 the theory question is always a paragraph question and consists of 3 subquestions to be answered in 30 minutes.

The paragraph question requires you to write a concise answer summarising the main issues in a given topic.

To do well in a paragraph question you need to get as many facts down as possible in a short space of time, making sure that you can provide sufficient facts for all sections of the question. It is a good idea to start by saying what the item in the paragraph is. For example, a detailed page of text describing the six most important producers of Carmenère, and how the styles and prices of the wines differ, might gain many marks, but you would lose marks if you failed to show the examiner that you knew Carmenère was “a black grape variety, grown primarily in Chile”, with some further notes on the “typical characteristics of Carmenère” (colour, flavours, structure, etc.). Those basic marks are the easiest ones to get quickly.

Within the examinations you have 6-10 minutes per topic depending on the Unit. Timing is vitally important as you must answer all 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. Concerning 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.

Planning an answer

As with all question types, planning your answer is key to success. As paragraph questions typically require less information than open-response or essay questions, it may be sufficient to jot down key facts or observations that come to mind as soon as you read the question. These rough notes can form the basis of your answer and help ensure that you do not miss out key details.

Certain topics lend themselves to paragraph questions. Questions on grape varieties, wine regions and key producers often appear in this format. With this in mind, when you are preparing for the exam we recommend that you give some thought to the kind of detail you would include in each case. This can be a good way to structure your learning.

For example, if asked to write about a grape variety you would probably want to include information about its colour and varietal characteristics (tannin, acidity and flavour), how and where it is grown, any relevant production methods and how all of these factors influence the resulting style of wine.

For a producer question, you would want to cover historical background, key brands in their portfolio, principal markets and perhaps how they have responded to local challenges (e.g. land ownership or labour issues).

Managing your time is particularly important when answering this type of question; you must answer all parts of the question in order to score well.

Sample of a paragraph question

Paragraph questions could have a general approach, but it is also possible that a more narrow focus is required (e.g. Write a paragraph about the production of... or In relation to Burgundy, write a paragraph on...).

Sample of a paragraph question:

With reference to the Americas, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

- a) **Torrontés**
- b) **Central Valley, California**
- c) **Icewine**
- d) **Carmenère**
- e) **Yakima Valley**
- f) **Pierce's disease**

The sections on icewine and the Central Valley caused the least problems, although several candidates confused the latter with the Central Coast. Most candidates did not know where the Yakima Valley was, commonly confusing it with Willamette. Three candidates even put it in Australia, New Zealand and Uruguay - the first two clearly not reading the question properly as this clearly states "with reference to the Americas". Knowledge on Pierce's disease was extremely poor with most gaining less than a third of the marks available. There was general confusion over whether it was a virus or a fungus (it is a bacterial disease for which there is no cure). A large number of candidates confused this with the effects of phylloxera resulting in lots of irrelevant information. Torrontés (a grape variety) was sometimes confused with Torres (a wine producer) and some thought it was a wine region. The following is an example of how **not** to succeed at paragraph style questions:

e) Yakima Valley

"In Australia in Victoria region (south of New South Wales). In South East Australia, Yakima Valley by the Pyrenees region, is cool and has a sufficient amount of rain and has high altitudes for the growing of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for still and sparkling wines."

This candidate is seriously confused in terms of world geography. The only comment of any value here relates to the growing of Chardonnay. By comparison, the following candidate did not necessarily write much more, but what he/she did write, was far more relevant:

“Yakima Valley is a part of the larger Columbia region in inland Washington state. The entire region is sheltered from the cooling influence of the ocean by the Cascade Mountain range and the climate is hugely continental. As a result, summers are hot, arid and dry and winters are freezing cold. Riesling does well here as does Chardonnay. Some Sauvignon Blanc is also grown.”

This candidate could have picked up more marks by commenting on the increasing use of red grapes (best known for Merlot), commenting on the style of wines produced and quality levels (mostly high quality varietal wines but some cheaper table wines also produced).

Once again, examples of a bad and good response in relation to **c) Icewine:**

“Icewine - Canada - Niagara Falls area is known for its quality ice wines made in the style of the famous German icewines. This is a new development in North American wines.”

This is seriously inadequate. This should have been a very easy paragraph to cover. This candidate gives no indication of how the wines are produced, which grape varieties are used or what the wines actually taste like, whereas the following one did exactly this:

“Icewine is made from freshly crushed frozen grapes. The grapes are left on the vine late into the autumn and winter where they freeze at temperatures around -8° C. The grapes are picked while still frozen and pressed. The sugars have been concentrated by the freeze and the resulting wines are sweet, rare and much sought after. Some regions are more reliable at producing icewine than others, and prices reflect this. Notable producing countries include Canada (biggest producer), Germany (called Eiswein), Austria and Switzerland. The Swiss version is made from Réze grapes, stored in casks at high altitudes and refilled annually via a solera system. These wines are called Vin du Glacier and are a speciality of the Valais. Canada’s climate in Ontario is particularly suitable and reliable making it the leading producer in the world.”

There is one other reason for selecting this script as an example. Whilst the information on Canadian icewine is detailed and relevant, this candidate also wasted time and effort including lots of irrelevant information that attracted no marks at all. As the question specifically says “with reference to the Americas”, the three lines relating to production in Germany, Austria and particularly Switzerland are totally superfluous. It would have been far more useful to have included reference to grape varieties used (Riesling and Vidal), and the areas most successful at producing this style of wine (Niagara Peninsula and Okanagan Valley). It is very tempting to tell the examiner “everything you know”, but if it has not been specifically asked for, it will not gain you any marks.

Open-response questions

These questions appear in the Unit 3 examination and require you to write a fuller response in answer to a specific question, rather than simply state facts about a given topic.

Planning an answer

There are three distinct parts to the planning process. These are:

- Identify what is being asked.
- Identify the key points to include.
- Identify relevant examples that will support each point.

It is not possible to suggest a strategy for answering such questions. But if you have chosen to follow the study approach that has been outlined at the beginning these steps will be easy to execute. You will be able to link up the various “filing-cabinets” using your mental map. The examples of answer templates in the section of paragraph questions may also be useful when answering open-response questions.

Sample of a open-response question

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.

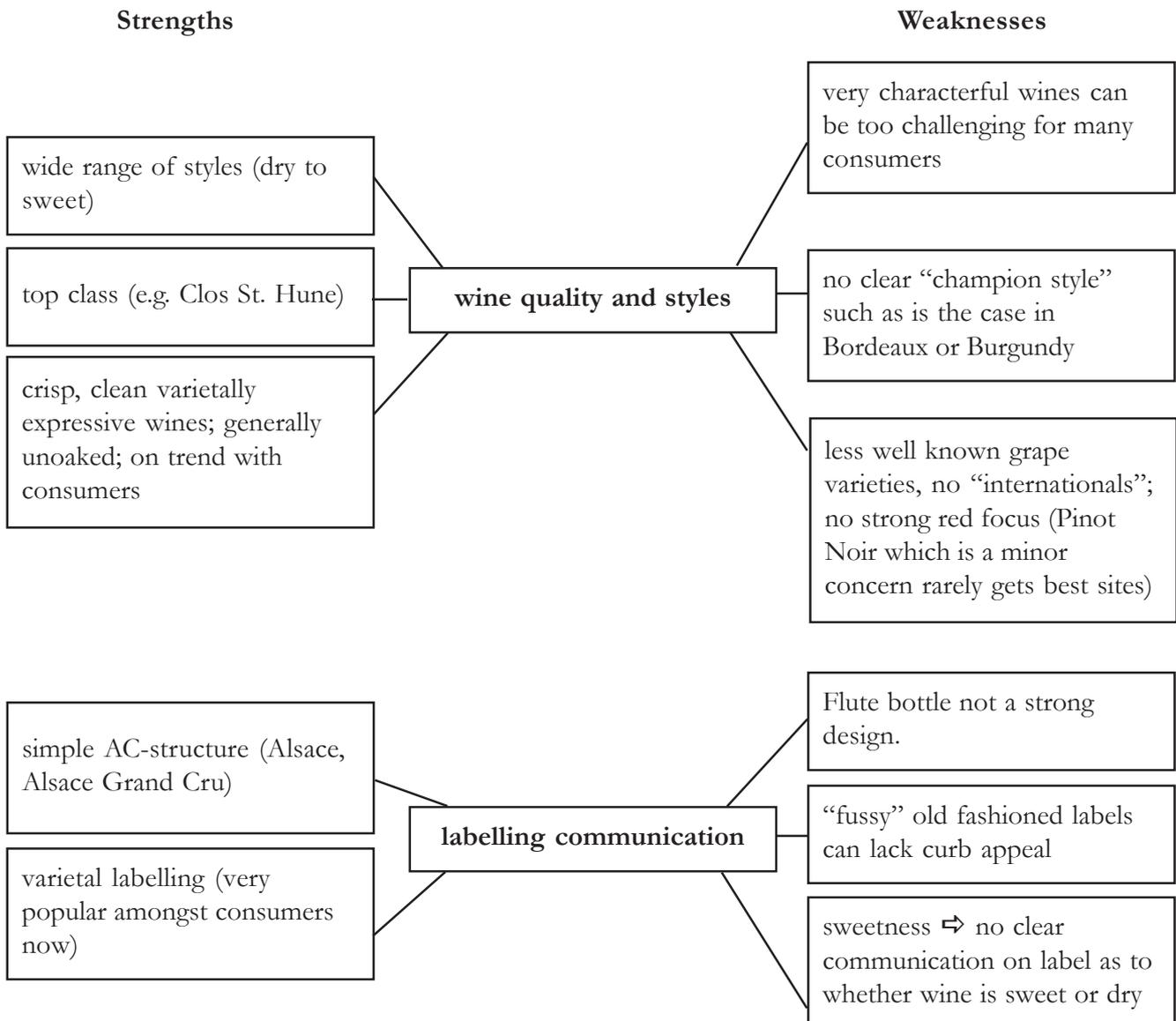
- Point of view of the consumer - there is no need to focus on general information about viticulture and vinification in Alsace
- Strengths and weaknesses - they have equal weighting so they will need to be given equal prominence
- Alsace

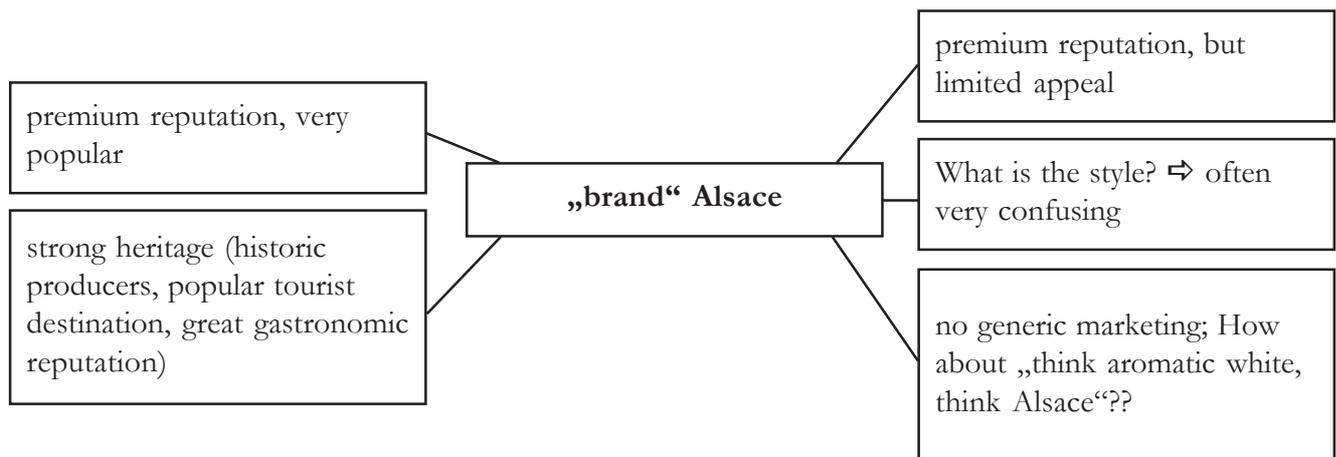
Identify the key points: This question asks you to focus on the consumer so you could start by listing what the factors are that influence consumers to have a positive or a negative view of a wine region. Issues you might consider are:

- wine quality and styles
- labelling communication
- image of „brand” Alsace

Identify relevant 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 are important for the consumer then you need to be sure you can back this up. Maybe the grape varieties and variation these create 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 you may find 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. Again this is not definitive and there are other points that would also be valid.





Writing an 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?

Introduction and conclusion: For open-response questions these paragraphs are not essential. However, they do add a clarity to your answers which will invariably benefit from their inclusion.

- **Introduction:** The best introductions are short and get to the point quickly. 3-5 sentences will normally be more than enough. When you decide in favour of an introduction it 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.

- **Conclusion:** Also this paragraph only needs to be very short and offer a brief summary of the key points. If asked, you might include a brief personal commentary.

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 when answering such questions.

How to write a paragraph: 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.

How to order your paragraphs: In 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.

Essay questions

For many students this is the question type that causes most concern, often because of misplaced fears about the style of writing that is required. In fact, there are many similarities between open-response questions and essay questions. The 3-stage planning process, the importance of planning your time and the approach to writing your answer are exactly the same for essay questions as they are for open-response questions.

The principal difference between these two question types is that essays require you to offer a personal commentary on a particular topic. This is an opportunity not just to demonstrate your knowledge of the subject, but also to weigh up both sides of an argument and present an informed conclusion. Here the examiner is not looking simply for facts to demonstrate your knowledge, but your ability to think critically about a topic and articulate your reasoning.

Let us consider the following essay question as an example:

Discuss the progress that has been made in Sicily in moving from bulk wine production to making quality wines with distinct varietal and geographical character.

(An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question.)

Planning an answer

The approach to planning an essay is exactly the same as that recommended for open-response questions: identify what is being asked, identify the key points to cover and identify the examples you will use to illustrate your answer.

Unlike an open-response answer, a successful essay always contains 3 separate sections: an introduction, the main body of the answer and a conclusion. Using the above question as an example, let us look at each section in turn:

In the **introduction** you should define any terms that are open to interpretation in the question and set the context for your answer, perhaps touching on why this topic is of relevance in the wine industry:

Here, for example, you could open by saying that Sicily is one of the most significant wine producing regions in Italy, with a long history of bulk wine production and that it is now reinventing itself as a fine wine producer. Two or three sentences are sufficient, so this should not take up too much of your time.

The **main body** of your answer should incorporate all of the information you wish to include in answer to the question, using examples to demonstrate your understanding:

Here it would be sensible to start with the historical background, explaining how Sicily came to be an important bulk producer and why that is changing, if you believe it is. You could then consider how there has been a shift to the production of wines with varietal and geographical character. This might involve naming some of the indigenous grape varieties which have come to prominence recently, as well as identifying newly designated wine regions and producers who are championing terroir-driven wines.

The **conclusion** is a final paragraph in which you should summarise the key points that you have made and offer a personal opinion:

Here the question invites you to discuss the progress that has been made so you could finish with a statement as to whether you believe enough progress has been made or whether Sicily still has some way to go. Does the future of wine production in Sicily lie with bulk production or new-wave wines? Given the commercial importance of bulk wines, is a move to terroir-driven wines in fact desirable? There is no right or wrong answer, but the examiner will be looking for evidence that you have weighed up the arguments and formed a view which is substantiated by the points you have made in the main body of your answer.

Sample of an essay question

Below another example of an essay question.

Explain why retail prices for New Zealand wines are high. Despite this, how has the New Zealand wine industry expanded its markets?
(An essay format is **COMPULSORY** for this question.)

Despite the warning that this question specifically required an essay format answer, some candidates still chose to ignore this instruction. They were penalised in the marking process as a result.

Many scripts were simply too short. In the time available for each question, the examiner expects about two sides of A4 paper, yet many scripts were barely one side or even less, resulting in an inadequate answer.

Whilst the actual content between the introduction and conclusion forms most of the marks for this style of question, candidates should not underestimate the importance of the introductory and concluding sections when adopting an essay format. In some instances, the examiner is able to allocate bonus marks for style and clarity, particularly if the candidate is able to show that they have a good understanding of the focus of this question. In this case, it was important to establish some key points at the outset, such as that the current average price of New Zealand wine in its major export market (the UK) is around £6/bottle, compared to a UK average of £3.50. Similar patterns occur in the USA and (to a lesser extent) Australia, as well as other markets where New Zealand wines have made a smaller impact (Scandinavia, Germany). With New Zealand only accounting for around 0.3% of the world's wine production, and with only around 420 wineries in operation, how have they managed to achieve this impressive statistic in terms of bottle price?

Far too many candidates approached this question in very general terms. Viticulture and vinification were often dealt with in one sentence, without any detail of what is involved. Only one candidate seemed to understand the correlation between the high price of the wine and the small amounts often produced, and the amounts of money spent in terms of viti/vini. Some candidates concentrated too much on individual wines (and Cloudy Bay in particular) and only a couple appreciated the significance of the effect of pests and diseases to the equation. In addition, several had severe misconceptions about the climate, with one believing it to be “the best in the world for wine making.” There was also a common misconception that all New Zealand had to do to solve its problems was to plant more vines and increase its output, without any thought for the consequences. The following candidate was the highest grade for this question, and even this had plenty of room for improvement:

“This small country, at least a three hour flight from its nearest neighbour, ranks very near the bottom (about no 15) in terms of volume of production as a country, yet it commands the highest average per bottle sale price and comes very near the top (around no 7) in terms of value of sales, certainly in the UK. Before the Kivis really launched into international markets with great success, they ironed out many quality issues such as which grape variety to plant where and how to get the best from the vine. In the 1950s and 60s (and ever since the Dalmatians first emigrated to the “green and pleasant land”) the vineyards were mainly full of the German, cool climate crossing Müller-Thurgau. This was because, given New Zealand’s cool climate, wine producers looked to other cool climate countries for advice.”

Müller-Thurgau never produced exciting, long lasting wine in New Zealand, added to which, the rich soils of the country made the vine particularly vigorous and the taste of the wine even more neutral. During the 70s, other varieties were experimented with and canopy management expertise was very much developed and researched. Consequently the great marriage between New Zealand and Sauvignon Blanc was born, as it was discovered that vigorous pruning and the right exposure of the grapes to sunlight, (to lower yields and help physiological ripeness), produced an exciting, fresh, clean and pungent wine. Cloudy Bay was the first internationally successful brand. This same approach was applied to Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Riesling. The two highest selling varieties, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, show distinct varietal character but in a way that is fairly unique. The pungency of fresh, grassy and gooseberry Sauvignon and the rich concentration of Pinot, whilst still showing cool climate characteristics, have enabled producers to command high retail prices. In conjunction with this, New Zealand is only able to produce relatively small quantities of wine as a country, so the (approx.) 900,000hl are much in demand each year. The simple reason for the high retail prices for New Zealand wine is that demand far exceeds supply. Wither Hills in Marlborough has run out of Sauvignon Blanc for the last two vintages and has had to release the new vintage in June following harvest. They are planting more Sauvignon Blanc in an effort to meet demand.

Producers in New Zealand are represented by a very efficient, pro-active and business like organisation; the New Zealand Wine Growers Guild. This trade body has helped increase the profile of New Zealand wines immensely. Further, the country as a whole has a very positive image across the world and this can only be a benefit when it comes to securing shelf space in a European supermarket. Tourists to the country will be welcomed at the cellar door of most wineries in New Zealand. Guided vineyard tours are available as well as the opportunity to taste and buy.

New Zealand has several large brands such as Montana and Villa Maria. Although they may buy many of their grapes in, they still have control in the vineyard to ensure continued quality. The boutique wines such as Neudorf of Nelson can ride on the back of the good image of larger brands whilst offering a “nice” alternative.

The sheer good quality of the wine that comes out of New Zealand means that, as a country, producers are able to successfully enter new markets and continue to expand and up-sell existing ones. As long as the focus stays on quality, even at high quantity, this success should continue.”

This makes a number of valid points, but tends to be rather long winded and lacks the edge of a really outstanding answer. It could have focussed a little more on establishing why retail prices are so high. Although it makes the point that this is driven by supply and demand, it does not really get to the bottom of why supply is limited (climate and weather, diseases, pests, low yields because of the effect of all of these). Other issues to be explored, relate to production costs and how these influence retail price such as manpower, which is expensive and in short supply, high costs of vinification (state of the art stainless steel and imported French oak barriques).

In terms of examining how the New Zealand wine trade has managed to expand its markets, this essay again makes some important points - the quality of the wines, the reliability of the key brands, the focussed, united export strategy with government support, but some of these could have been expanded on. For example, the fact that they make very little in the way of “cheap, bulk wines”. In fact, the domestic market tends to drink Australian wine to fill this gap. Some statistics would have supported the argument relating to the success of the New Zealand Wine Growers Guild and other marketing strategies.

Tasting examinations in Unit 3, 4, 5 and 6

Developing the ability to taste wines and spirits as a professional is a key learning outcome of the WSET Level 4 Diploma in Wines and Spirits. This skill is taught and assessed using the WSET Level 4 Systematic Approach to Tasting Wines and the WSET Level 4 Systematic Approach to Tasting Spirits. The SATs are supported by the WSET Level 4 “Wine-Lexicon” and the WSET Level 4 “Spirits-Lexicon”, respectively.

The Diploma tasting examinations are designed to test your ability to describe a wine or spirit accurately “blind” using the SAT methodology and then apply this information to evaluate its key features. Tasting wines and spirits accurately blind is challenging and requires a broad base of tasting experience built up over an extended period of time.

In relation to tasting examinations you must be able to:

- 1. Identify the key features of wines and spirits accurately, using the appropriate SAT terminology**
The examiners recognise that different tasters have different levels of sensitivity to a wine’s/spirit’s structural components such as sugar, they expect that through a combination of practice and coaching you will have calibrated your palate against those of other expert tasters. This should mean that you are able to classify the levels of a wine’s/spirit’s structural components using the applicable SAT terms relative to the world of wines and spirits generally.
- 2. Apply your knowledge of the key features of a given wine to reach conclusions about its quality, readiness for drinking/potential for ageing, origin, grape variety/ies, style within the category and/or method of production.**
- 3. Apply your knowledge of the key features of a given spirit to reach conclusions about its quality, origin, raw material, style within the category and/or method of production.**

As you will be expected to describe and evaluate wines and spirits in accordance with the SATs it is essential that you get into the habit of describing wines and spirits using these resources.

In all Units 3, 4, 5 and 6 examinations wines/spirits 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 1-3 are all made from the SAME grape variety”, or “Wines 1-3 are from the same country of origin” or even more specifically “Wines 1-3 are 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.

Unit 3

You will have to taste and comment on 12 wines in total. The Unit 3 tasting examination is of 2 hours’ duration and is divided into 4 flights of 3 wines, with a short break after the first 6 wines. You have one hour for each block of six wines. Your grade is based on their total score across the 12 wines. You must gain an overall minimum mark of 55% to qualify for a Pass grade within the Unit 3 tasting examination.

For Unit 3, the theory and tasting paper are treated separately: if you pass the 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 the tasting (or vice versa) does not even out as an overall Pass: both parts must be passed separately.

The wines used in the examination can come from anywhere within the Unit 3 syllabus, and **are not limited to the “recommended tasting samples” listed in the Unit 3 Study Material.**

The Unit 3 tasting paper is divided into 4 flights:

Tasting paper 1

(1 hour)

Question 1: Describing (in accordance with the SAT) 3 wines from the same or predominantly the same grape variety, which also has to be identified in a concluding section. You also always have to give reasons.

Question 2: Describing (in accordance with the SAT) 3 wines from the same region or country or which otherwise share a common link (e.g. in relation to aspects in the vineyard or cellar), which also has to be identified in a concluding section. You also always have to give reasons.

Tasting paper 2

(1 hour)

Question 3: Describing (in accordance with the SAT) 3 wines from the same region or country but at different quality levels. This is a chance for you to show you can correctly identify and evaluate quality levels in considerable detail.

Question 4: Describing (in accordance with the SAT) a “mixed bag” of 3 wines which are unrelated (blind tasting). The wines can be selected from different areas of the world as studied in Unit 3.

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

Unit 4, 5 and 6

The Unit 4, 5 and 6 examinations each consists of 2 parts, a tasting paper of 3 products and 1 theory question. 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 (min. 55%).

The most common format is the “mixed bag”, but it is also possible to present candidates with a trio of wines/spirits with a (stated or unstated) common link, or even 3 products from the same origin but differing in style and/or quality.

As with Unit 3, **the products used in the tasting exams are not limited to the “recommended tasting samples” listed in the Unit 4, 5 and 6 Study Materials.**

Diploma Systematic Approach to Tasting (SAT)

The SAT is designed to be thorough, systematic and logical in its approach and it provides a structured way of writing a complete, detailed description of a product.

The SAT is divided into 2 parts: a descriptive part and an evaluative part. Furthermore it is supported by a “Lexicon” of descriptive words covering aroma and flavour terms and terms for describing additional observations in relation to the structural components.

The **descriptive part** of the SAT should be a purely objective description of a wine/spirit, and covers how the wine/spirit presents itself in appearance, to your nose, and on your palate (including the impressions that linger after spitting/swallowing). The two following skills should be assessed:

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

The **evaluative part** requires you to use evidence from the descriptive part to draw conclusions about the wine/spirit. The most important of the conclusion-drawing skills are:

- presenting a well-argued quality assessment
- judging the level of readiness for drinking/potential for ageing incl. reasons

In the tasting examination you may also be asked to identify further aspects such as country and/or region of origin, grape variety(ies)/raw material, style within the category, method of production. You also have to give reasons, when required.

General points for using the SAT

The SAT consists of 2 columns, a left hand column with categories such as Clarity/brightness, Intensity, Colour, Other observations, and a right hand column with specific tasting terms to use. Furthermore the SAT is supported by a **“Lexicon”** of descriptive words covering aroma and flavour terms and terms for describing additional observations in relation to the structural components.

Where terms in the right hand column of the SAT are separated by **hyphens** (e.g. lemon-green - lemon - gold - amber - brown), you should select ONE of the terms to describe the wine/spirit. 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.

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). You should treat all of these as **3-point scales** that are further subdivided. Medium(+) e.g. 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 many 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 3-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”.

It can be tempting for candidates to over-use **medium (including -/+)**. 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 3-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 -/+). However, many of the products used in Diploma examinations 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 you think the acid is a remarkable feature, but your awareness of wines with even higher acidity is making you 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.

Where terms in the right hand column are preceded by “e.g.”, you can use one, more or none of the terms depending on what should be mentioned about a particular product. In relation to aroma and flavour characteristics always give specific descriptors and not only clusters. Use the words mentioned in the “Lexicon”.

Write full sentences, not bullet points. Keep them short and simple. Full sentences does not require many more words (or much more time) but make your tasting notes easier to read. You can use the same sentence structure for all of your tasting notes, and doing so may even help you avoid missing structural components.

Appearance

A maximum of 2 respectively 3 marks can be awarded for assessing the appearance:

	valid for Unit 3, 4, 5 and 6
Clarity/brightness	0 marks
Intensity	1 mark
Colour	1 mark
Other observations	0 resp. 1 (Unit 4: for anise-flavoured spirits) mark/s
TOTAL	2 resp. 3 (Unit 4: for anise-flavoured spirits) marks

“The wine is medium lemon” for example could get all 2 marks if the description is correct.

Clarity/brightness

No marks are awarded for noting that a wine/spirit is clear and bright, because all products shown in Diploma examinations will present as clear.

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.

Colour

Concerning the category “Colour” it is important that you use a more detailed description (e.g. lemon-green instead of just yellow, ruby instead of just red). Compare always also the colour in the core with the colour at the rim. 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.

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 “tawny”. “Brown” should be used for wines where no redness in the colour remains.

Most rosés are described as “salmon”, which lies between “pink” (equivalent to “purple” in red wines) or “orange” (equivalent to “garnet” in red wines). Furthermore “onion-skin” (equivalent to “tawny” in red wines) is available.

For spirits the colours have been arranged in two lines. The first line broadly reflects the changes that can happen to a spirit during maturation in oak. The second line is a list of colours that commonly occur in spirits that have acquired their colour from natural or manufactured colourings. When assessing the colour for spirits you have to choose the colour in the SAT that best describes the colour of the spirit in question. It does not matter if a spirit has its colour from oak maturation or from natural or manufactured colourings.

Other observations

In relation to appearance further impressions (e.g. legs/tears, deposit, pétillance, bubbles) could be observed, but no marks will be awarded with the exception of anise-flavoured spirits. Here 1 mark can be reached for Other observations as the candidate should also notice an effect called “louching” (the liquid becomes milky and opaque when water is added).

Nose

A maximum of 6 respectively 7 marks can be awarded for assessing the nose:

	valid for Unit 3, 4, 5 and 6
Condition	0 marks
Intensity	1 mark
Aroma characteristics	max. 5 marks
Maturation	0 resp. 1 (Unit 4 only) mark
TOTAL	6 resp. 7 (Unit 4 only) marks

Condition

As with “Clarity/brightness”, no marks are awarded for describing a wine/spirit as clean, because all Diploma products will have been checked before an exam. (Assessing faults is a skill that is not assessed in the Diploma examination. Nevertheless, it is important that you are aware of the common wine faults (e.g. TCA, reduction, oxidation, volatile acidity, Brettanomyces, out of condition).)

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).

Concerning spirits the scope ranges from “neutral” (e.g. unflavoured Vodka), “light”, “medium” to “pronounced”.

Aroma characteristics

For wine there are 3 main types of aroma:

- primary aromas
- secondary aromas
- tertiary aromas

Before going into great detail regarding the exact nature of the aromas present, try to group them into the 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. Most of the time thinking more general at the beginning to define an aroma may help, e.g. first: fruit or spice, second: which kind of fruit?, which kind of spice?.

Please note: Give always specific descriptors and not only clusters (e.g. strawberry instead of red fruit) otherwise you **WILL NOT** get any marks. Use the words mentioned in the “Lexicon”.

Primary aromas are those associated with the grape and the alcoholic fermentation. They are the aromas that originate in compounds found in the grapes such as fruity, floral and herbaceous aromas and fermentation aromas (e.g. the banana and kirsch aromas generated by carbonic maceration in red wines).

Secondary aromas are those associated with post-fermentation winemaking. The most obvious of these are aromas extracted from oak (e.g. vanilla, toast). Secondary characteristics also include creamy, buttery flavours from malolactic fermentation or the yeasty and biscuity aromas that can develop in sparkling wines as a result of lees contact.

Tertiary aromas are those associated with maturation. These characteristics 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 can add tertiary aromas such as coffee, toffee, caramel and chocolate. Alternatively, the ageing process could be protected from the action of oxygen, for example due to a long period in bottle. This can add tertiary aromas such as petrol, toast, honey and mushroom. In both instances, the ageing process changes the primary aromas, especially the fruit aromas. They become less fresh and can take on a dried or cooked character. At this point, care must be taken because dried fruit and cooked fruit aromas can be present in youthful wines that have been made from dried grapes or from grapes grown in a hot climate.

For the 5 marks available for describing the aroma characteristics, you should not think in terms of 1 mark for each named aroma. The marks are awarded on the basis of how complete and appropriate the candidate’s list of aroma descriptors is. The awarding of the marks takes place according to aroma clusters:

- For some wines that are very simple in style, there are not 5 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 5 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.

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

- Use valid descriptors from as many types (e.g. primary, secondary and/or tertiary) and clusters (e.g. “stone fruit”, “MLF”, “bottle age (white)”, etc.) as you feel apply to the wine.
The starting point should be to think in general terms about the aroma clusters that it displays, for example, “citrus fruit”, “black fruit”, “herbaceous”, “oak”, etc. Having done this, the next step is to identify specific descriptors for each cluster that you think is present, e.g. “lemon”, “blackberry”, “tomato leaf”, “vanilla”, etc. These descriptors should form the basis of your tasting note. It can also help to ask yourself a series of questions to ensure you do not overlook important characteristics. If a wine displays simple primary fruit, then a short list of fruit or descriptors from one or two clusters may be sufficient. Consider whether the fruit character is “fresh” (suggesting early harvesting or cool ripening conditions) or “jammy”/“cooked” (suggesting later harvesting or hotter ripening conditions).
The marks for aroma characteristics will be allocated across all relevant types and clusters.
- Use the “Lexicon” vocabulary.
- Give specific descriptors, not clusters. In the tasting examinations, marks are awarded for specific descriptors, not clusters. This means that for a wine with stone fruit characteristics you would have to use terms such as “peach”, “apricot” or “nectarine”. Just writing “stone fruit” in isolation would not gain any marks. Some find it helpful to introduce specific descriptors with the applicable cluster. This can help focus the mind when it comes to selecting appropriate descriptors. For example, a good description for a Cabernet Sauvignon with black fruit and oak aromas might be: “ripe black fruit (*blackcurrant, black cherry, black plum*) and oak aromas (*vanilla, toast*)”. You could gain the 5 marks available just by giving the descriptors (e.g. “blackcurrant”, “black cherry”, etc.), but introducing them with the name of the applicable cluster (e.g. “black fruit”) may help you select the most suitable words.

Examples:

Wines with primary aromas only

If the wine only has primary aromas, then all 5 marks will be allocated for this. If this is the case you should still decide whether the wine is very simple or whether the primary aromas are complex. If the wine is simple then you should state this in your note. It is a more accurate description of a wine if you recognise this and write “this wine has simple, neutral green fruit (pear, apple, gooseberry)” rather than list a large number of descriptors that are in effect describing the same simple aroma. In a complex wine there may be more than one type of primary aroma cluster (e.g. the tropical passionfruit aromas and herbaceous green aromas in some high quality Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc). In this example the primary aromas would be divided into 2 clusters each with its own allocation of marks. It would be both highly subjective and rather arbitrary if we were to say only 3 marks can be awarded for fruit aromas and 2 for the herbaceous aromas. Therefore, the allocation of marks will be arranged more flexibly. For example:

- up to 3 marks for fruit aromas (e.g. lychee, melon, passion fruit)
- up to 3 marks for herbaceous aromas (e.g. green bell pepper, tomato leaf, asparagus, blackcurrant leaf)

As only a maximum of 5 marks can be reached, this means that the marks could be awarded in the following combinations:

- up to 3 marks for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 2 marks for mentioning herbaceous aromas
- OR
- up to 2 marks for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 3 marks for mentioning herbaceous aromas

Either of the combinations above would provide an accurate description of the wine and allows you to gain full marks.

Wines with primary and secondary aromas

In this case the marks will be divided between the primary and secondary aroma clusters. A similar approach will be taken when allocating the marks. A maximum number of marks will be allocated to each individual cluster in such a way that a number of combinations of descriptors will get full marks. For example, the marks for a Cabernet Sauvignon with black fruit and subtle oak aromas might be allocated as follows:

- up to 4 marks for fruit aromas (e.g. blackcurrant, blackberry, bramble, black plum)
- up to 2 marks for oak aromas (e.g. toast, cedar, smoke)

As only a maximum of 5 marks can be reached, this means that the marks could be awarded in the following combinations:

- up to 3 marks for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 2 marks for mentioning oak aromas

OR

- up to 4 marks for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 1 mark for mentioning oak aromas

In this instance the oak character is subtle and the marks are weighted in favour of black fruit descriptors. If the oak was more obvious then a maximum of 3 marks might be allocated for each cluster.

It is of course possible that an oaked Cabernet Sauvignon might have 2 primary aroma clusters, 1 for black fruit and 1 for herbaceousness. In this case the marking key will reflect this complexity with a similar degree of flexibility:

- up to 3 marks for fruit aromas
- up to 2 marks for herbaceous aromas
- up to 2 marks for oak aromas

As only a maximum of 5 marks can be reached, this means that the marks could be awarded in the following combinations:

- up to 3 marks for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 1 mark for mentioning herbaceous aromas and up to 1 mark for mentioning oak aromas

OR

- up to 2 marks for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 2 marks for mentioning herbaceous aromas and up to 1 mark for mentioning oak aromas

OR

- up to 2 marks for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 1 mark for mentioning herbaceous aromas and up to 2 marks for mentioning oak aromas

OR

- up to 1 mark for mentioning fruit aromas and up to 2 marks for mentioning herbaceous aromas and up to 2 marks for mentioning oak aromas

You have to mention aromas out of all clusters to gain full marks.

Wines with primary, secondary and tertiary aromas

If a wine is showing oak and development (e.g. Rioja Reserva), then the marks might be allocated as follows:

- up to 2 marks for fruit aroma (e.g. redcurrant, red cherry, orange peel)
- up to 2 marks for oak aromas (e.g. vanilla, toast, coconut)
- up to 3 marks for bottle age aromas (e.g. leather, earth, mushroom, game)

The allocation of marks for each cluster will depend on how important the particular component is in the particular wine. Again you have to mention aromas out of all clusters to gain full marks.

In relation to spirits the marks for “Aroma characteristics” are also awarded on the basis of how complete and appropriate the candidate’s list of aroma descriptors is. As for simple wines it will be difficult for neutral/simple spirits too to find 5 aromas. In that case again it makes more sense to note the simplicity of the particular spirit followed by a general evaluation of the product. Please also do not forget to mention possible changes of aroma characteristics/character of a spirit when adding water. In relation to spirits there is also a “Lexicon” that covers aroma (and flavour) terms, which should be used when describing the aroma characteristics.

Maturation (ONLY relevant in Unit 4)

If a spirit is “unaged”, it may seem a little harsh and spicity on the nose and will have no evidence of the aromas derived from oak such as vanilla, cream and toast. Some spirits that appear to be unaged (in that they are colourless) have in fact been rested in wood for a short period and had any colour removed by filtration. The signs of these can be very subtle indeed. Conversely, some inexpensive spirits have a deep colour, much of which has come from added caramel. The absence of integrated oak aromas on the nose can indicate that the spirit has not gained much of its colour from maturation. It is likely to be a blend made with a significant percentage of “unaged” or “short aged” spirits.

For spirits that have undergone an ageing process their development can variously be described as “short aged”, “matured” and “very aged”. “Short aged” spirits will have only been aged long enough to acquire oak aromas without leading to much development of flavour due to the passing of time. “Matured” spirits are ones where the oak aromas are integrated into the aroma profile, and some savoury aromas derived from ageing are also present.

Some spirits that have undergone a particularly long ageing process can be described as “very aged”. They will have developed aromas reminiscent of mushrooms, decaying leaves, wood polish and concentrated dried fruits, or fruitcake. These aromas are sometimes described as “rancio”. Importantly, how short is “short” and how long is “long” depends greatly on the ageing conditions (especially temperature and temperature variation). For example, in hot, widely fluctuating conditions (such as in Kentucky), very aged aromas can start to appear after 4-5 years, whereas a Whisky aged in Scotland for a similar period could well only be at the “short ageing” stage.

Palate

The allocation of marks is as follows:

	Still wines/sparkling wines/fortified wines white/rosé	Still wines/sparkling wines/fortified wines red
Sweetness	1 mark	1 mark
Acidity	1 mark	1 mark
Tannin (level)	0 marks	1 mark
Tannin (nature)	0 marks	1 mark
Alcohol	1 mark	1 mark
Body	1 mark	1 mark
Flavour intensity	1 mark	1 mark
Flavour characteristics	3 - 4 marks } max. 4	3 - 4 marks } max. 4
Other observations	0 - 1 marks } marks	0 - 1 marks } marks
Finish	1 mark	1 mark
TOTAL	10 marks	12 marks

	Spirits
Sweetness	1 mark
Alcohol	1 mark
Body	1 mark
Flavour intensity	1 mark
Flavour characteristics	2 - 3 marks } max. 3
Other observations	0 - 1 mark } marks
Finish (length)	1 mark
Finish (nature)	1 mark
TOTAL	9 marks

In relation to wine 1 mark will be awarded by making an accurate observation for “Sweetness”, “Acidity”, “Alcohol”, “Body”, “Flavour intensity”, and “Finish”. The marks for “Flavour characteristics” and “Other observations” are linked and a maximum of 4 marks can be awarded. You can get 4 marks by just covering flavour characteristics (Please note that you won’t get 1 mark for each named aroma, but the marks are awarded on the basis of how complete and appropriate the candidate’s list of aroma descriptors is.

The awarding of the marks takes place according to flavour clusters as it is on the nose. You would only gain the 4 marks for flavour characteristics if you mention flavours from all identified flavour clusters.). However, if you do not gain 4 marks this way you can get 1 mark for a relevant comment under “Other observations”. For red wines (incl. sparkling wines and fortified wines) there is an extra structural element that you must comment on which is tannin. Marks are only allocated for an accurate observation for that element.

Please note: If you make a significant error when assessing the structural components “Sweetness”, “Acidity”, “Body”, “Alcohol”, “Tannin” or “Flavour intensity” then the total number of marks available on the palate may be reduced by 1 mark. For example, the examiners might conclude that a particular Rutherglen Muscat is so “luscious” that a failure to describe it as at least “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 this particular Rutherglen Muscat as “off-dry”, “medium-dry” or “medium-sweet” would not only miss the mark available for sweetness but incur an additional one-mark penalty. Conversely, a candidate who described a luscious wine as “sweet” would likely miss out on the mark available for sweetness but not incur a penalty. This is because mistaking a luscious wine for sweet is, in the scheme of blind tasting, not as serious an error as mistaking it for off-dry.

In relation to spirits 1 mark can be awarded by making an accurate observation for “Sweetness”, “Alcohol”, “Body”, “Flavour intensity”, “Finish (length)”, and “Finish (nature)”. In relation to “Flavour characteristics” and “Other observations” you can gain a maximum of 3 marks. Marks for “Other observations” are capped at one. As for wine you won’t get 1 mark for each named aroma, but the marks are awarded on the basis of how complete and appropriate the candidate’s list of aroma descriptors is. There will be NO caps will ever be applied to the marks allocated on structural elements for spirits when making a significant error when assessing them.

Sweetness

Sweetness is mainly the taste of sugar present in the wine. The “Sweetness” has to be assessed by using one of the following terms: “dry”, “off-dry”, “medium-dry”, “medium-sweet”, “sweet”, “luscious”.

A “dry” wine either has no residual sugar or has levels that are so low they cannot be detected on the palate. If the wine has a very small amount of detectable sugar, the wine is described as “off-dry”.

“Medium-dry” to “medium-sweet” covers wines with a distinct presence of sugar. “Sweet” covers wines where the presence of sugar has become the prominent feature of the wine. There are a few very sweet wines which can be 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.

Labelling terms for sweetness are 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 32-50g/l, should be described as either “medium-sweet” or “sweet” depending on the level of sugar.

In relation to spirits, this is an indicator of how much sugar a spirit contains. However, some flavourings, in particular liquorice, also taste sweet. Spirits contain no sugar when they are first distilled. All sugars are either added or are created from the breakdown of wood during cask ageing. Most spirits are therefore “dry”, but a few can be described as “off-dry” (e.g. some Rums or Bourbons). Producers are permitted to add levels of sugar to some spirits. In most cases this cannot be tasted and is done to soften the spirit on the palate. However, for some spirits, such as Pastis, the levels can be very high. Such spirits can be described as “sweet”.

Acidity

Acidity gives wines their freshness. 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.

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. Wines with low acidity will feel broad, soft or even flabby. Conversely, wines with high acidity will be notably crisp, zesty and mouthwatering.

High levels of sweetness can lessen your perception of acidity. This means that the acidity in a sweet wine will appear less obvious than the acidity in a dry wine. However, whatever the level of sugar, the mouthwatering effect caused by the acidity remains and this is always a reliable guide when it comes to judging the level of acidity.

(Alcohol can also 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 examination, judge sparkling and fortified wines using the same scale as red, white or rosé wines (as appropriate).

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.

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 need not be mentioned for white wines and rosé wines. For 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 for robust styles of rosé use it in the assessment of quality section when discussing the wine's overall component balance.

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 for example 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. 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 or are they smooth? Generally, ripe tannins are also fine textured and unripe tannins feel rougher.

Alcohol

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.

Currently a wine with “medium(-/+)” alcohol would have a level of about 11-13.9% abv. Within this range, 11-11.9% abv. would be “medium(-)” and 13-13.9% abv. would be “medium(+)”. Anything below 11% abv. would be considered “low”, and anything above 14% abv. would be considered “high”.

For fortified wines where alcohol levels start at 15% abv., the medium level would be 17 to 19% abv.

In relation to spirits you have to evaluate if the alcohol is “soft”, “smooth”, “warming” or “harsh”. Ethanol gives a sensation of weight or oiliness, contributing to the body. Young spirits and those distilled in ways that retain a lot of *congeners* can be “harsh”. In most spirits, the alcohol effect is best described as “warming”, providing a glow, and stimulating the pain receptors a little, but not in a way that is unpleasant to most people. In some spirits there are particularly low levels of impurities from distillation, or the impurities that would lead to harshness have mostly been removed through a period of ageing. These can be described as “smooth”. Very aged spirits and very pure, clean spirits can have very “soft”, well-integrated alcohol.

Body

Body is the perception of a wine’s weight on the palate, its fullness. It is not a single component, but an overall impression created by all the structural components working together. For most wines, alcohol is the main factor contributing to body. Sugar and grape 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. For wines that are e.g. sweet, but high in acid and low in alcohol, 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.

In relation to spirits this is the sensation of a spirit's richness, weight or viscosity on the palate and is a combination of the effects of alcohol, sugar and flavour compounds (and, occasionally, wood tannins). For spirits the body can be described as either "light", "medium" or "full".

Flavour intensity

You also always have to assess the flavour intensity of a product on the palate.

Flavour characteristics/Other observations

You also have to mention flavour characteristics on the palate. 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.

Under "Other observations" there are two aspects you may wish to comment on: texture (Can be best described as a wine's mouthfeel, an overall sensation produced by the interplay of a wine's viscosity, acidity and astringency (tannin). In sparkling wines, mousse is often an important constituent of texture.) and pétillance (Refers to dissolved carbon dioxide which give still wines a discernible spritz on the palate. If still wines show CO₂ it is sufficient to write the word "pétillance".) 1 mark may be allocated to one of these aspects if the examiners consider it a prominent feature of the wine.

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 you can achieve full marks by giving:

- 4 valid descriptors for “Flavour characteristics” and no for “Other observations” (texture or pétillance)
- 3 valid descriptors for “Flavour characteristics” and 1 correct observation about texture or pétillance

In relation to spirits it is also possible that aromas that were not apparent on the nose will appear on the palate as some *congeners* become volatile due to the heat in the mouth. We recommend that you keep the spirit in the mouth for a few seconds to fully appreciate any differences that might emerge. Also for spirits the description must be complete and appropriate to gain full marks. As for wine it is not a must to mention something in the category “Other observations”, but if it is meaningful you should do it to produce an exhaustive tasting note. You may comment on any textural elements of the spirit, such as tannin. 1 mark may be allocated to one of these aspects if the examiners consider it a prominent feature of the spirit.

For spirits there is a total of 3 marks available for “Flavour characteristics” and “Other observations” combined. This means that where the examiners have allocated a mark to “Other observations” you can achieve full marks by giving:

- 3 valid descriptors for “Flavour characteristics” and no for “Other observations” (e.g. tannin, texture)
- 2 valid descriptors for “Flavour characteristics” and 1 correct observation in the category “Other observations”

Finish

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

How long the sensations linger is an important indicator of quality.

If pleasant flavours disappear within a few seconds, the finish should be described as “short”. For a very fine wine for example the flavours can last for a minute or more, and the finish is described as “long”. Although tasters can objectively agree which of two products 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.

In relation to spirits the finish has two elements: how long the pleasant sensations last for (length) and how complex they are (nature). When assessing spirits it is important to record these two observations separately as flavours can develop and change significantly even after the spirit is swallowed or has been spat out:

Length: This refers to how long the pleasant sensations (rather than just the alcohol burn, cloying sweetness or oaky astringency) linger in the mouth after the spirit has been swallowed or spat out. Length can be an indicator of quality. The length can be described as “short”, “medium” or “long”.

Nature: This is used to refer to the flavour characteristics of the finish and, in particular, how complex they are. Some spirits are designed not to have a lingering aftertaste, and the remaining flavours are pure, clean and quite “simple”. The majority of spirits show “some complexity”: They show a few different flavours (typically some from the base material, and some from oak or ageing processes). A few very high-quality spirits are “very complex”: They show a succession of flavours, one after the other, and the finish is really where a great deal of the pleasure to be gained from that spirit lies.

Conclusions

The remaining marks are allocated for Conclusions. In the Conclusions you may be asked the following:

Unit 3, 5 and 6

- Assessment of quality and giving reasons
- Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing and giving reasons
- Country and/or region of origin and giving reasons, when required
- Grape variety/ies and giving reasons, when required
- Style within the category and giving reasons, when required (for sparkling and fortified wines only)
- Method of production and giving reasons, when required (for sparkling and fortified wines only)

Unit 4

- Assessment of quality and giving reasons
- Country and/or region of origin and giving reasons, when required
- Raw material and giving reasons, when required
- Style within the category and giving reasons, when required
- Method of production and giving reasons, when required

Please note: You will not be asked to identify the price category or estimate the age of a wine (in years).

You must always 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.

Quality

An assessment of quality is the overall impression of where the wine/spirit sits relative to others you have tasted based on the sum of its structural components (acidity, tannin, alcohol, etc.) and its flavour and aroma characteristics. There are many criteria for judging the quality of a product.

In the Diploma tasting examinations, we use a qualitative (descriptive) scale for assessing the quality level, ranging from “poor” to “outstanding”. Where you are asked to assess quality you must select first of all one of the applicable SAT quality categories. Then you also always have to give reasons to explain to the examiner why you have selected this category. The Wine SAT lists some considerations when assessing the quality of a wine: e.g. balance/integration, intensity, finish, complexity, mousse, varietal definition, potential for ageing. Not all of these considerations will be relevant for every wine, nor is this list intended to be exhaustive. The Spirit SAT lists some considerations when assessing the quality of a spirit: e.g. balance, finish, intensity, complexity, oak character.

Quality assessment - wine

A “good” wine typically has well balanced fruit, sugar, acid and tannin. It is free of faults, and shows some complexity and concentration, as well as expressing something of its grape variety/ies or region of origin. If a wine is 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 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 will show some elements of concentration, length, complexity and/or expressiveness that lifted out of being merely “good”. An “outstanding” wine should be almost entirely free of criticism. It will be perfectly balanced, concentrated and very expressive with high levels of complexity or purity depending on the style.

Having selected a quality category, you will always have to provide arguments to support your assessment of quality, using the quality considerations outlined in the SAT. How much detail is required will depend on the number of marks allocated, but you should always aim to explain why a wine fits the chosen quality category by reference to its positive and negative characteristics, i.e. how well it scores on the quality criteria.

As a rough guide:

- If a wine is “outstanding”, you should be able to provide several distinct, positive reasons why the wine is in that top category.
- If a wine is “poor”, you should be able to provide several separate negative reasons why it is in such a low quality category.
- Where a wine is “acceptable”, “good” or “very good”, you should be able to give several positive reasons why it is better than the category below and one or two negative reasons why it is not good enough for the category above.

Quality considerations

When giving reasons, the following can be assessed:

Balance/integration

A wine’s overall balance and/or integration is perhaps the most reliable indicator of quality and one which underpins other quality criteria. In high quality wines an impression of sweetness on the palate (in the form of fruit character and/or residual sugar) is balanced by an impression of sourness (in the form of acidity or tannic astringency). With too little fruit character or residual sugar, a wine will seem angular, austere and thin. With too little acid or tannin a wine will seem flabby or unstructured. It can help to ask yourself whether a particular feature of the wine stands out on the palate. Is it a positive characteristic, enhancing your overall impression of the wine? Perhaps the acidity is marked but this complements the depth of fruit, freshening the palate. Alternatively, it could be a negative attribute - perhaps the alcohol dominates, resulting in a hot, burning finish. Both of these are examples of the kind of observations you should include in your assessment of quality, justifying why you think a wine belongs to a particular quality category.

When discussing how well balanced a wine is in the examinations you must do so with reference to its structural components. It is not sufficient to say a wine is simply “balanced” or ‘integrated’; you have to explain how the balance or integration is achieved (i.e. what is balanced/integrated with what) and how this contributes to the overall quality level.

Whereas in the first part of the SAT you have to describe the structural components of a wine using the entries for the relevant scale (e.g. “high” acidity), the Conclusions section is an opportunity to use additional words to demonstrate your understanding of the wine in front of you. These can be helpful when the level of the structural component is particularly high or low. For example, a wine’s acidity could be crisp, tart or zesty, its alcohol warming or spiry, its texture fine and crisp or thick and viscous. Feel free to use these or alternative words to enhance your assessment of quality; they can help you explain more vividly how the structural components of a wine fit together and lend credibility to your answer.

In addition to the balance of fruit/sweetness vs. acidity, alcohol and tannin, you should also think about how aromas and flavours and other factors such as texture interplay with these structural elements. If the wine has high levels of oak aromas or flavours, does this complement the wine's fruit character or does it mask it? If you feel that a sparkling wine's texture is noteworthy, is the mousse smooth and well-integrated or frothy and short-lived? Again, this is an opportunity to use descriptive words to communicate your understanding of the wine.

Intensity/finish

Intensity is the wine's concentration or depth of aroma or flavour. The more concentrated and expressive a wine is on the nose and palate, the higher its quality level. A wine that has weak or dilute flavours is seldom high in quality but bear in mind that above a certain level concentration of a particular aroma or flavour can make a wine seem out of balance.

Intensity is closely linked to finish; a wine with a pleasant, long finish is likely to have high levels of concentration. Conversely, a short or simple finish is an indicator that a wine lacks intensity. Finish or the length of a wine is an important factor in assessing quality. You will already have identified the nature of the wine's finish under Palate (e.g. "medium(+)" or "long"), so you should expand on this when assessing quality, describing what - if any - flavours persist in the mouth after you have spat the wine out. Again, consider balance - is the overall impression one of harmony or is the wine disjointed, with one element overly dominant on the finish?

Complexity, varietal definition and typicality of style

Complexity is a desirable feature in a wine and one which can result from fruit character alone or from a combination of primary, secondary and tertiary aromas and flavours. Not all high quality wines are complex, sometimes varietal definition is what makes a wine great, and oak or tertiary characteristics might detract from the high quality. As with "balanced", only use the word "complex" with context. It is not enough to say whether a wine is complex or not, you have to explain what provides the complexity.

In some wines varietal definition - how clearly a wine expresses varietal character - will be an important consideration, particularly for wines made from aromatic grape varieties such as Riesling and Muscat. If a wine exhibits distinctive aromas and flavours associated with a particular grape variety, it is more likely to be a high quality example of its type than one that does not.

A great wine will also show typicity of style, expressing some of the character of its origin. This may be the result of the grape varieties used and/or the location where they are grown. When the identity of the wine is unknown to you, it can be helpful to think about whether the aromas and flavours are generic or well-defined. The more focussed and precise these individual characteristics are, the higher the likely quality level. A loosely structured wine with diffuse aromas and flavours which are hard to pinpoint with specific descriptors is likely to be of inferior quality.

Potential for ageing

Whether a wine has potential for ageing is relevant for some wines. If a wine has sufficient concentration, acidity (and tannin) to age successfully, this generally implies that it is of higher quality than other wines of its type which lack these attributes.

Quality assessment - spirits

In relation to quality assessment of spirits the key question is: Is it a good example of its type? If so, it should be basically balanced, free of faults, and have enough characteristics to make it recognisably a member of its category. In this case the spirit could be described as “good”. If a spirit lacks distinguishing characteristics, or is unbalanced, it could be described as merely “acceptable” or even “poor” (depending on the degree of lack of balance, and lack of expressiveness). Spirits that have a particularly fine balance, or some extra level of complexity or expressiveness (especially noticeable in the finish), can be described as “very good”. If they have all of these things to a high level, they can be assessed as “outstanding”.

As for wine, after having selected a quality category, you will always have to provide arguments to support your assessment of quality, using the quality considerations outlined in the SAT. How much detail is required will depend on the number of marks allocated.

Quality considerations

When giving reasons, the following can be assessed:

Balance

One flavour (such as peat, juniper or anise) that dominates at the expense of everything else will make a spirit seem boring and one-dimensional. Harsh, aggressive alcohol or excessive sweetness, bitterness or astringency can also make a spirit taste unpleasant. However, unlike wine, it is worth considering how the spirit is supposed to be used. Aggressive alcohol may indicate poor quality in a spirit that is supposed to be sipped neat (or with just a splash of water), but may give a cocktail component some useful “bite”.

Finish, intensity and complexity/expressiveness

A balanced, pleasant finish where complex flavours linger for several seconds is often an indicator of a high quality spirit. Lesser spirits often have one or two simple flavours, and quickly become boring and disappear almost instantly, leaving no lingering impression. They may also be unattractive or unbalanced.

The greatest spirits generally have many different flavours which are intense and persist on the palate. These can come from high quality base materials, or from complex flavours created during distillation or ageing, or from the infusion or maceration of fruits, herbs and spices. Oak influence during maturation can also add complexity to a spirit, provided that it is integrated with the spirit's other components.

However, some spirits (e.g. unflavoured Vodka) are intended to have a short, simple finish. For these spirits it is better to consider their expressiveness. The best spirits are expressive in that they show a clearly defined character, whether from their raw material or from the fermentation, distillation or ageing process. This could be the fine silkiness and purity of a potato-based Vodka, the pungent agave-derived flavours of a Tequila 100% agave, the finesse and floral complexity of a Grande Champagne Cognac, or the chlorophyll-green louche of an Absinthe.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing (ONLY relevant in Unit 3, 5 and 6)

Where you are asked to assess readiness for drinking/potential for ageing you must select one of the applicable Wine SAT categories. If just 1 mark is allocated, you need only select the appropriate Wine SAT category. Where more than 1 mark is allocated, however, you will need to provide reasons for your choice why the wine fits that category and make a judgement about how long the wine will remain in that category. The more marks are available the more detailed your reasons should be.

The Wine SAT lists some of the factors you could include in your answer: e.g. concentration, acidity, tannin, development of aroma and flavour characteristics.

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 a wine is mainly fruity (i.e. primary in character), 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 that it will improve with age. If a wine tastes 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 “too old”.

If a wine has a very firm structure of acid or tannin, and 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. As wines age their aromas and flavours tend to develop from fruity and floral (primary) towards more savoury, earthy and spicy characters (tertiary), and any tannins soften. The alcohol levels will not change, and the acid and sugar levels will change very little. With this in mind, you can make a tentative prediction of how the wine will develop from now on, and whether or not it will improve.

If you think that a wine is drinking pleurably now but will improve positively in the next few years than you can place it in “can drink now, but has potential for ageing”. If you believe that a wine will be so much better in a few years’ time that it would be a pity to drink it now, then you should classify it as “too young”. This does not mean the wine is undrinkable, but rather that there is significant scope for further improvement.

If a wine has already undergone ageing (evidenced by a predominance of tertiary characteristics), but is close to the end of its drinkable life (in that any further changes are unlikely to be positive) then you should classify it as “drink now: not suitable for ageing or further ageing”. The same category would apply if the wine is in decline, i.e. the changes that have occurred are beginning to undermine its quality. If you think the wine has declined so far that the negative changes have come to dominate the wine then it is “too old”.

Please note: Where a wine is “can drink now but has potential for ageing”, you do not need to give a time frame for how long the wine will improve. It will be sufficient to describe how the aromas and flavours will change over time and why, commenting on the structural components that will keep the wine in condition as it ages.

The wine in context

In relation to the following categories generally speaking a heading carries 1 or 2 marks; if you identify the category in question correctly you will gain the mark/s. Furthermore you may be asked to give reasons, for which further marks will be allocated.

Identifying the country and/or region of origin

In order to identify an origin correctly, you need skill, knowledge and luck. Your tasting skills can be used very effectively to identify the kind of product you have.

Even if you successfully identify, for example, an aromatic white as being from a premium quality cool climate old world region, there will be several possibilities. For this reason, where origin takes the form of a common link question requiring reasoning, you will gain marks for logical reasoning even if you get the origin wrong.

When considering where a wine is from, it can be helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

- Does the wine seem to come from a hot region (riper primary aroma and flavours, fuller body, higher alcohol, lower acid, riper tannins), or a cool region (fresher fruit, lighter body, higher acid, and perhaps more astringent tannins)?
- Does the wine seem European or New World in style? For some varieties, such as Chardonnay, the differences can be small. For others, such as Pinot Noir, New World wines generally have more generous fruit and the structural elements (acidity and tannin) are less prominent. European examples tend to be more savoury in character, with more prominent acidity 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.

Where you have to select a country and/or region of origin for a flight of wines and give reasons, you should briefly discuss what characteristics the wines have in common and how they are consistent with the origin you have suggested. Levels of structural components (e.g. acidity, alcohol), particular aroma and flavour characteristics, evidence of production techniques (e.g. use of oak or oxidation), evidence of grape growing conditions (hot, cool or somewhere in between) might all be relevant here. You should also consider how the wines differ and how these characteristics make a particular wine in the flight typical - or not - of where it is from.

When you are asked to give a region of origin, you should try to be as specific as possible (e.g. “Haut-Médoc” or “Napa” will be preferable to “Bordeaux” or “California”).

Identifying the grape variety/ies

As for origin, in order to identify a grape variety/ies correctly, you need skill, knowledge and luck. Your tasting skills can be used very effectively to identify the kind of product you have.

The first question to ask is whether the wine/s show any prominent varietal character. For white wines, it can be helpful to group varieties into those that are intensely aromatic (e.g. Muscat, Viognier, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc), and those that are more neutral (e.g. Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Garganega, Trebbiano). Within these groups, further clues can be found in the nature of the aromas (are they fruity/floral or herbaceous?), the wine’s sweetness and acidity level, and whether or not the wine shows oak. It can be helpful to group black varieties into thick-skinned grapes that give deeply coloured wines (e.g. Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Malbec, Carmenère) and thinner-skinned varieties that generally give paler-coloured wines (e.g. Pinot Noir, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese, Grenache). Within these two groups, 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 you do have to give reasons for your choice of grape variety/ies for a flight of wines, you should - as with origin - discuss how any characteristics shared by the wines point to a common grape variety/ies. Many of the considerations will be similar, e.g. structural components, evidence of production techniques and evidence of grape growing conditions. Again, it can be constructive to highlight any differences in the wines and what makes a particular wine in the flight typical of the grape variety you feel is represented.

Style within the category (ONLY relevant in Unit 5 and 6)

You may be asked to identify a sparkling or fortified wine’s style within its category. You should aim to identify both the style and category of the wine in question:

Unit 5

For the purposes of the Unit 5 examination, “Champagne” or “Cava” are examples of categories and “Vintage” or “Non-Vintage” styles within these categories.

Unit 6

For the purposes of the Unit 6 examination, “Sherry”, “Port”, “Madeira” and “Vin Doux Naturel” are examples of categories, each comprising different styles: For Sherry, these styles would include “Fino”, “Amontillado”, “Oloroso” and “Cream”; for Port, “Ruby”, “Reserve Ruby”, “Tawny” (with a statement of age as appropriate), “LBV”, “Vintage”, etc.; and for a VDN, “Banyuls” or “Maury”, etc; for Madeira the examiners would expect you to give the age or equivalent designation (e.g. “10 year-old” or “Special Reserve”).

In some cases, this may be followed by a more directed question (e.g. “What evidence in your tasting note supports this conclusion?”) where you can gain further marks.

Method of production (ONLY relevant in Unit 5 and 6)

You may be asked to identify a sparkling or fortified wine’s method of production. In some cases, this may be followed by a more directed question (e.g. “What evidence in your tasting note supports this conclusion?”) where you can gain further marks.

Unit 5

For sparkling wines, the key theme is likely to be whether the wine is traditional or tank method. For a Prosecco, for example, you could note that the absence of bready/biscuit notes discounts autolysis, indicating a tank method wine.

Unit 6

For fortified wines, the key theme is likely to be how the wine has been matured. For a dry Amontillado, for example, you could note that the yeasty, savoury aromas and flavours indicates preliminary ageing under flor but the amber colour and tertiary characteristics indicate extended oxidative ageing thereafter.

The spirit in context

In relation to the following categories generally speaking a heading carries 1 or 2 marks; if you identify the category in question correctly you will gain the mark/s. Furthermore you may be asked to give reasons, for which further marks will be allocated.

Identifying the country and/or region of origin

The first step here is to identify the category of spirit and consider which countries/regions make spirits of that type. You should then consider the style of spirit and what particular features lead you to a particular origin.

This is likely to be a combination of flavour characteristics and evidence of maturation techniques which make the spirit a distinctive example of its type.

Identifying the raw material

Being able to identify the raw material of a spirit comes with experience. By tasting spirits category by category (i.e. sampling different examples of spirits from the same raw material alongside each other) you can start to build up a memory bank of the key aroma/flavour signatures that mark out different raw materials, grapes or other fruits, grains, agave, sugar cane, etc. It is important to try aged and unaged examples of the same spirit to understand how the aroma and flavour profile of spirits made from the same raw material evolve with time.

Style within the category

The first step here is to identify the category of spirit to which the sample belongs: Is the spirit a “Brandy”, “Whisky”, “Vodka”, “Gin”, “Tequila”, “Rum”, etc.? Then you can consider the different styles within these categories: e.g. “Cognac” or “Brandy de Jerez” for “Brandy”; “Single Malt Whisky” or “Bourbon” for “Whisky”, “Golden Rum” or “Dark Rum” for “Rum”, “London (Dry) Gin” for “Gin”. Then, on the basis of your tasting note for the sample, you should be able to reach a conclusion as to the style represented. You may or may not be asked to give reasons. Where you are asked for reasons, you should comment on the structural components and aroma and flavour profile and why they fit the style you have suggested.

Cognac, Armagnac and Tequila use specific labelling terms to denote quality by reference to maturation times. These include “VS”/“VSOP”/“XO” for Cognac and Armagnac and “reposado” and “añejo” for Tequila. Where you have identified a spirit as Cognac, Armagnac or Tequila and are asked to identify the style within the category you should include the appropriate labelling term in your answer.

Method of production

Method of production questions can cover different aspects of a spirit’s production process, from fermentation of the raw material, to distillation and maturation. You also have to give reasons, when required.

Examples of good tasting notes (wine)

Entry-level Italian Pinot Grigio

Appearance:

The wine is pale lemon.

Nose:

The wine has light intensity and aromas of very simple, neutral fruit (pear, apple, grapefruit).

Palate:

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

Detailed assessment of quality:

Acceptable quality. The wine is clean and correct, and there is a balance between the medium(-) acid structure and the rather neutral fruit. The lack of flavour and short finish indicate a wine of fairly basic quality. Also, the wine is very 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 or further 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 medium lemon.

Nose:

The wine has medium intensity and aromas of fresh stone fruits (peach, apricot), with some green fruit (pear) and banana and hints of sweet spice (ginger).

Palate:

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

Detailed assessment of quality:

Very good quality. The wine shows a very well-defined and 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 complexity (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 it is not unpleasant. The wine is not complex or concentrated enough to be considered outstanding, but is a very good, expressive example.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing:

Drink now: not suitable for ageing or further ageing. The wine has enough substance (from the fruit concentration and the acid 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.

Wine no 1

Entry-level 1-year old Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon

Appearance:

The wine is deep purple.

Nose:

The wine has pronounced intensity and aromas of ripe and slightly jammy black fruit (blackcurrant, blackberry), distinct herbaceous notes (eucalyptus, green pepper) and a hint of oak (vanilla, toast).

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 and flavours of ripe jammy black fruits (blackcurrant, blackberry), eucalyptus and spicy oak (vanilla). The finish is medium(-).

Detailed assessment of quality:

Good quality. The wine 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 fruit is 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 lacks the substance of a very good Cabernet Sauvignon. This makes it good, rather than very good.

Readiness for drinking/potential for ageing:

Drink now: not suitable for ageing or further ageing. The wine has a lot of fruit intensity, and some tannin 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.

Wine no 2

High quality 10-years old Haut-Medoc Cru Bourgeois

Appearance:

The wine is medium garnet.

Nose:

The wine has medium intensity and aromas of black fruit (blackcurrant, black cherry), some herbaceousness (mint), a hint of oak (vanilla) and obvious tertiary aromas (earth, cedar, tobacco).

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 and flavours of blackcurrant, earth, vanilla. The finish is medium(+).

Detailed assessment of quality:

Very good quality. Although not especially concentrated, the wine is very elegant, showing a freshness despite its age, and a liveliness from fresh acidity. There is enough flavour to balance this acid but overall 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 ageing or 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.

Wine no 3

Very high quality 5-years old Napa Cabernet Sauvignon

Appearance:

The wine is deep ruby.

Nose:

The wine has pronounced intensity and aromas of ripe black fruit (black cherry, blackberry), pronounced high quality oak (toast, vanilla, cloves) and some tertiary characters beginning to appear (black olive, earth).

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 and flavours of black cherry and toast. The finish is long.

Detailed assessment of quality:

Outstanding quality. 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 highly concentrated fruit which is able to absorb the high level of oak. The balance of fruit and oak, and the high level of extract mean that even at this stage of its life, it is showing a lot of complexity reflecting high quality fruit and oak which follow through onto the long finish. The depth of structure and concentration support the alcohol which is integrated despite being high. 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 concentrated fruit and high tannins are in balance now, but the wine has a lot of extract, indicating it is capable of further evolution before it reaches its peak.

Grape variety for wines 1-3:

Cabernet Sauvignon

Reasons for your choice of grape variety:

The deep colour (wines 1 and 3) indicates a thick-skinned grape variety. The high quality (wines 2 and 3 in particular) indicates a classic grape variety. Herbaceous characters (wines 1 and 2) make a Bordeaux variety more likely than Syrah/Shiraz, as does the fresh acidity of 2. The well-defined black fruit character (wines 1, 2 and 3) and high level of tannin (wine 3) makes Cabernet Sauvignon more likely than Merlot.

Examples of good tasting notes (spirit)

Unflavoured Vodka

Appearance:

The spirit is water-white and colourless.

Nose:

The spirit has neutral intensity and simple aromas of grain, husk, flour and citrus. It is unaged.

Palate:

The spirit is dry, with smooth alcohol, light body, neutral flavour intensity and simple flavours (grain, citrus). It has smooth texture and a short simple finish.

Assessment of quality:

Good quality. The alcohol is well integrated and the overall texture is smooth with no harsh edges. Although the flavours are neutral, the spirit shows some of the character of the base material (grain) which means that this is better than acceptable. However these flavours lack the definition of a better example which stops this from being very good or outstanding.

VSOP Cognac

Appearance:

The spirit is pale gold.

Nose:

The spirit has medium intensity and aromas of flowers, dried fruits (raisin, sultana, citrus peel) and spicy oak (vanilla, toast). It is matured.

Palate:

The spirit is off-dry, with smooth alcohol, medium body, medium flavour intensity and flavours of flowers, dried fruit and oak. It has smooth texture and a medium length with some complexity on the finish which has a sweet edge to it.

Assessment of quality:

Very good quality. The flavours strike a fine balance between the delicate but complex flavours of the raw material (grapes) and oak maturation although they are lacking a little depth and concentration. The flavours are well integrated with the smooth alcohol and mouthfeel of the spirit. Whilst the sweetness contributes to this it is slightly cloying on the finish. This prevents this spirit from being outstanding.

Very aged Rum

Appearance:

The spirit is deep amber.

Nose:

The spirit has pronounced intensity and aromas of tropical fruits (ripe bananas, melon, mango), dried figs, oak (vanilla, cinnamon) and aged aromas (caramel, toffee, black treacle). It is very aged.

Palate:

The spirit is off-dry, with smooth alcohol, full body, pronounced flavour intensity and complex flavours of tropical fruit, oak and caramel, toffee with savouriness/rancio. It has silky smooth texture and very complex finish which reveals layers of flavours throughout its very long length.

Assessment of quality:

Outstanding quality. The lifted fruity ester aromas combine with the savouriness of long maturation resulting in an incredible depth and complexity of flavour that is obvious from the first sip and builds across the palate to the finish. The balance struck between the sweetness and the almost bitter savoury quality ensure that the spirit is never cloying and combined with the smoothly integrated alcohol it gives a structure that seamlessly supports these flavours.

Unit 7 - Thesis

Please read again the section about Unit 1 coursework assignment before starting with your Unit 7.

Before you start with your thesis you have to submit a project outline, which has to be approved by Weinakademie Österreich.

The project outline can be submitted when you have passed the following:

- Unit 2
- Unit 3 written closed-book theory examination
- Unit 1 coursework assignment

This demonstrates your understanding about the principles of wine production, your knowledge about the wines and wine countries of the world and your experience in writing an assignment.

Select a topic

You select your topic.

Your thesis must be no less than 4,000 and no more than 5,000 words. The rules concerning word count are the same as for the coursework assignment.

The thesis roughly equates to a “mini-dissertation”, a structured report on a certain project. Selecting a subject is not always easy. As with any piece of research work, you are choosing to research something without knowing what the outcome will be or how wide the scope is it may cover. There are some general rules, which will help you to select a topic:

- Choose something manageable - nothing too large scale or excessively time consuming. Ask yourself if you can complete the project within the number of words allowed and the time you have available.
- Choose something in which you are interested. This will motivate you and give you an incentive to study. This is your opportunity to specialise and play to your strengths.
- Choose a topic that could enhance your career prospects. You may wish to undertake a work based project with the support of your employer, which would result in you making recommendations to improve services or products.

- Choose something which does not overlap too much with recent coursework assignments. If there are too many similarities your topic will be rejected at the project outline stage.
- Choose a topic that allows discussion, as it will not be enough to write, for example, everything you know about a particular region, you must include analysis and structured argument in your thesis. Therefore your topic must allow you to identify and solve problems, develop ideas, make recommendations.

Before you choose a topic study all the approved topics on the website of Weinakademie Österreich (<http://www.weinakademie.at/english.php>). Recent topics are blocked for a certain time.

Submission of a project outline

Before deciding on a topic you should have done some basic research into your subject area and you should have a good idea of what your thesis will need to cover.

The chosen topic has to be approved by Weinakademie Österreich, before you start writing it.

For the submission of a project outline you have to use the Unit 7 proposal form, which consists of the following:

- proposed title
- objective of the thesis
- structure
- proposed sources

The examiner will review your concept to ensure:

- that the topic is appropriate and meets the criteria set out in the Specifications.
- that your reference materials are adequate for the topic and go beyond basic reading.

The examiner will either approve your outline proposal or return it to you with action requirements. You may be allowed to re-submit your chosen topic. If the chosen topic does not meet the criteria for Unit 7, you have to submit a new proposal.

Getting started ...

When you have had your concept approved, you can start. How you go about this will depend very much on your topic. A good way to begin, however, is to do some good background research into your subject area. This will give ideas and resources for future work, and get you immersed in the subject. Use as many different types of sources as possible - e.g. internet, newspapers/magazines, interviews - whatever you find to be relevant and of use.

- Always keep your eyes open for material.
- Whenever you read something or take notes on a source, always take down full bibliographic details. This will save you time later when compiling your references and bibliography. Using an index card system is useful for this.
- Focus your reading once you have a general background picture of the subject - make sure everything you read is for a purpose, not just for the sake of “doing something”.
- Start writing as soon as possible. There is no rule which says you must first do all your research, then spend three weeks writing it up.

Writing skills

Some useful tips:

- Use rather short than long sentences.
- Do not use too much punctuation. Think about that there is more than comma and dot.
- Be objective - be impersonal.

Project structure

The information in the section about the Unit 1 coursework assignment are of use here too. The following checklist should give you some support again:

Introduction

- A clear statement of your subject.
- An explanation of why the research is worthwhile.
- An outline of methods used.
- An indication of the limitations of the project.
- A summary of the chapters/sections to follow.

Main body

The following could help if you use chapters or sections:

- Each one should answer a major question.
- Each one should contain lots of answers to smaller questions.
- Use sub-headings to guide the reader.
- Develop points carefully, step by step.
- Each one should make sense, if it were to read on its own.

Conclusion

- Discussion of extent to which you have achieved your aims.
- Summary of questions that remain unresolved.
- Recommendations

Acknowledgement

(not included in word count)

- A paragraph or two thanking those who helped.

Appendix

(not included in word count)

- Important material you have referred to in your thesis (e.g. interviews) could go in as an appendix.
- You may wish to add large documents or illustrative materials.

Bibliography

(not included in word count)

- Set out all sources used.
- Everything referred to in the text must be cited in the bibliography.
- Use the referencing system mentioned in the section about the Unit 1 coursework assignment.

Submission

You can submit your thesis, when you have passed Units 1-6.

The finished thesis (via post AND via e-mail) as well as the 2-page abstract (via e-mail) must arrive at Weinakademie Österreich on a set date.

Finally ...

When you start with your thesis, please do not forget that this is only one part of the Diploma. It is also important to study for the other Units.

Good luck!