

WSET L4 Diploma Tasting Guidance

Contents

1. The Format of the Tasting Examinations	1
2. How to Prepare for the Tasting Examinations	2
3. Writing a Tasting Note using the Systematic Approach to Tasting	4
4. Evaluating Wines and Writing Conclusions	12
5. Answering Identification Questions	16
6. The Marking of Conclusion and Identification Sections	18
7. Examples of Tasting Notes and Conclusions	19
8. Examples of Identification Questions	25

1. The Format of the Tasting Examinations

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

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

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

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

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

D3 WINES OF THE WORLD TASTING EXAMINATION

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

Tasting Paper 1

Question 1 Three wines from the same or predominantly the same grape variety.

Question 2 Three wines from the same country.

Tasting Paper 2

Question 3 Three wines from the same region.

Question 4 Three wines which are unrelated.

For each wine, you will be expected to write a comprehensive tasting note in accordance with the SAT, draw conclusions about the sample giving reasons for the conclusions, and answer some questions about the identity of the wine, with reasons given as specified. For Questions 1-3, there will be an identification for the flight, in which you will need to identify the common grape variety, country or region, giving reasons for your choice .

D4 SPARKLING WINES AND D5 FORTIFIED WINES EXAMINATIONS

The examinations for these Units contain two parts:

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

1½ hours is allocated to complete both parts of the examination.

The tasting flight may or may not have a common theme (e.g. same country). If there is a common theme it will be stated on the exam paper.

2. How to Prepare for the Tasting Examinations

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

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

- **Identify the key features of wines accurately, using the appropriate SAT terminology.** The examiners recognise that different tasters have different levels of sensitivity to a wine's structural components such as sugar, acidity, tannin or body. However, they expect that through a combination of practice and instruction you will have calibrated your palate against those of your Educators. This should mean that you are able to identify the levels of a wine's structural components using the applicable SAT terms (e.g. 'high', 'medium' or 'low', etc.), relative to the world of wines generally. The process of calibration, using the Diploma SAT, will be a continuation of what you have learnt at Level 3.
- **Apply your knowledge of the key features of a given wine to reach conclusions** about its quality and suitability for bottle ageing.
- **Apply your knowledge of the key features of a given wine to identify** the origin, grape variety/varieties, style within a category, or production method as requested.
- **Explain the reasons** for your conclusion or identification.

STUDY SKILLS

In this section we make some suggestions as to how to approach your tasting studies.

Learn the SAT

As you will be expected to describe and evaluate wines in accordance with the SAT both in the classroom and in the Diploma tasting examinations, it is essential that you get into the habit of describing wines using this framework as soon as possible. You will not be allowed to take the SAT into the examinations, so you must be able to recall every heading of the SAT for which marks are available. The more often you taste wines using the SAT, the easier this will be.

The SAT has been designed to prompt you to consider all of the relevant aspects of a wine in turn, and so can help maximise your mark-scoring potential in an examination situation (where marks are allocated to the various SAT headings). Candidates that tend to perform poorly in the tasting examinations often fail to follow the SAT methodically, omitting to mention certain key components. Full guidance on how to use the SAT follows in Chapter 3 Writing a Tasting Note using the Systematic Approach to Tasting.

Taste as Widely as Possible

The starting point when tasting wines for the Diploma should be the Recommended Tasting Samples listed in the Specification. You should aim to taste sufficient examples of the Recommended Tasting Samples to understand the range of wines represented.

When you are tasting a wine in an 'open label' setting (i.e. not blind), you should think carefully about how its aromas, flavours and structural components relate to your theory studies. 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 create positive associations which reinforce your understanding and improve your ability to identify key characteristics.

Exam Technique

Many of the principles of good exam technique discussed in the Theory Guidance document are equally applicable to the tasting assessments. In the tasting examinations you need to:

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

Exam technique is especially important for the tasting papers because blind tasting is challenging even without the pressure of an exam environment. It is easy to become distracted by the samples, or panic when you do not recognise a wine (even though you can easily pass without correctly identifying any wine you are required to identify). Practising writing answers in timed conditions is essential and you should also read the most recent Examiners' Report. This document contains useful examples of candidates' answers to previous exam questions and tips on how to avoid common mistakes.

You should allocate a fixed amount of time to tasting and writing your answers for each sample based on the total time available for the examination. You should aim to spend no more than fifteen minutes on each sample. Note that the mark allocations for the identification questions may vary from flight to flight and paper to paper. For each sample, you should prioritise those headings which carry the most marks.

You must read the question carefully. The question paper will introduce the three samples in a flight and may contain important information about the wines which can help you evaluate them correctly.

You should try to gain as much experience of tasting using the SAT in exam conditions as possible. Many students find it helpful for friends or colleagues to set them flights of wines 'blind' in exam conditions. It can also be constructive to taste wines in an open label environment, discussing them with other Diploma students. Explaining to someone else why you think a wine is or is not a good example can reinforce your understanding of the key structural elements, aromas and flavours that make a wine what it is.

3. Writing a Tasting Note using the Systematic Approach to Tasting

In this chapter we will explain how to describe a wine's Appearance, Nose and Palate using the Wine SAT. You should read this and the following chapters with a copy of the SAT to hand.

PREPARING FOR TASTING

An ideal tasting environment will have good lighting for judging the wine's appearance. It will be free of strong odours to avoid interference with the wine's aromas. It will also have sufficient space for you to lay out your wine glasses and make notes. Spittoons or spit cups should be available.

To prepare yourself to assess wines you need to make sure that you have a clean palate, free from the lingering flavours of toothpaste or strongly flavoured foods. You also need to be considerate of others so avoid wearing perfumes, aftershaves or other strongly scented products as these will interfere with the wine aromas.

You will also need suitable glassware. It should be odourless, colourless, transparent and free of any residues, such as detergent or dishwasher salts, or dirt left from unclean glass-polishing cloths. The ISO glass is suitable for evaluating wines. The two important features are the rounded bowl, which aids with swirling the wine to release aromas, and the inward-sloping walls, which capture these aromas at the top of the glass. There are many other glasses that are suitable for tasting, but they all share these two features and are small enough to use with a tasting sample of wine, rather than requiring a larger sample.

When pouring your samples, you should try to ensure you consistently pour the same volume into each glass. We suggest a 5 cL (1.7 US fl. Oz.) sample. This should be sufficient to assess the appearance, nose and palate of the wine, but small enough that you are able to swirl the sample in the base of the bowl without spilling it.

APPEARANCE

Intensity

Intensity is how much colour the wine has. The level of intensity can be assessed by holding the glass at a 45° angle and looking through the liquid from above to see how far the colour extends from the core, the deepest part of the bowl, to the rim where there is the shallowest depth of wine. For red wines, it can also be assessed by looking down through an upright glass. In this instance, look at the point where the stem of the glass is attached to the bowl and assess how easily the stem can be seen.

All white wines appear colourless right at the rim when the glass is held at a 45° angle. A white wine that has a broad watery rim should be described as 'pale'; if the pigment reaches almost to the rim it should be described as 'deep'. For red wines, hold the glass at an angle and look at the rim; if the wine is lightly pigmented from the rim to the core, it can be described as 'pale'. In this instance, when looking through an upright glass, it should be easy to clearly see the stem of the glass. If the wine is intensely pigmented right up to the rim, it should be described as 'deep'; looking down through the wine in the bowl, it should be impossible to see the stem.

Sparkling, sweet and fortified wines should be assessed using the same scale. An Amontillado Sherry is likely to be 'deep' in colour, even though an older Oloroso, a PX or a Rutherglen Muscat would show as even deeper.

Colour

When assessing colour, white wines can be placed on a scale that runs from 'lemon' to 'brown'. The most common colour for white wines is 'lemon'. 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'.

Red wines can be placed on a scale that runs from 'purple' through to 'tawny'. 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'.

Rosé wines have their own set of colour descriptions. 'Pink' describes wines that have a very pure pink colour. If a pink-coloured wine shows a hint of orange, then it can be described as 'pink-orange'. 'Orange' can be used to

describe a rosé in which orange is the dominant colour.

NOSE

A large part of the pleasure to be gained from tasting wine comes from the aromas. The differences in character and the clarity of the aromas account for much of the difference between basic-quality and very fine wines.

To assess the nose, you should swirl the liquid to release the aromas into the glass. Then, place your nose over the rim of the glass and take a short sniff, noting the intensity and the detailed characteristics of the aromas you find. Some aromas are very delicate, and you may gain some insight into the wine by taking a quick sniff before swirling.

Aroma Intensity

As a general rule, if the aromas are immediately apparent when you insert your nose into the glass then they are 'pronounced'. If, even after swirling, you find the aromas to be faint and hard to detect, the intensity is 'light'. Otherwise, it falls into the 'medium' category; 'medium (-)', 'medium' or 'medium (+)'.

For all components that are rated on a scale from low (or light) to pronounced (or high or full), it is worth bearing in mind that 'low', 'medium' and 'pronounced' are equal ranges in a three-point scale. Your first decision should be whether the component is low, medium or pronounced, remembering that 'low' and 'pronounced' are ranges and hence should not be reserved only for the very least and most intense wines. If you feel the component is in the medium range, then you should then think whether it is towards the higher or lower ends of that range, in which case it is 'medium (+)' or 'medium (-)' respectively, or whether it sits in the middle of that range, in which case it is just 'medium'.

Aroma Characteristics

Describing a wine's aroma can be a challenging task. The Wine-Lexicon has been designed to help with this part of writing a tasting note by offering a structured approach to aroma identification and description.

There are three main types of aromas: primary aromas, secondary aromas and tertiary aromas. The Wine-Lexicon is broken down into sections to reflect this. Each aroma type is subdivided into individual clusters, for example, 'Citrus fruit', 'Black fruit' and 'Herbaceous', which each include a number of descriptors, such as 'grapefruit', 'lemon', 'lime', etc. If you work through the aromas systematically and ask yourself questions about the kind of aromas you are smelling, you will be less likely to miss something important. Note that not every wine has primary, secondary and tertiary aromas.

Primary Aromas

These are the aromas that come from the grapes or are created during the fermentation process.

A simple wine may show a very limited number of primary aromas, often all within the same cluster. A more complex wine may display many more primary aromas in a range of clusters. The vast majority of wines display fruity aromas, but you should always consider whether a wine purely has fruit aromas or whether aromas from the floral, herbaceous or other primary clusters are present to write a comprehensive tasting note.

Secondary Aromas

These aromas are created by post-fermentation winemaking. The most obvious of these are aromas extracted from oak, such as vanilla and smoke.

Secondary aromas also include cream and butter characteristics from malolactic conversion, the toasted-bread and biscuit/graham cracker aromas that can develop as a result of autolysis in sparkling wines and the smell of acetaldehyde that is typical of flor-aged wines.

Tertiary Aromas

These aromas have their origin in the ageing processes. The ageing process could be mildly oxidative (caused by the action of oxygen), for example, due to a long period in oak. Further, some fortified wines can deliberately be heavily oxidised during the maturation process, for example, by leaving ullage in oak barrels. Oxidative ageing can add tertiary aromas such as coffee or caramel. 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, honey or mushroom.

In all instances, the ageing process changes the primary aromas. In particular, fruit aromas become less fresh and can take on a dried-fruit character.

PALATE

There are many different components to be considered on the palate and it is often necessary to take more than one sip of wine in order to assess it fully.

Sweetness

Sweetness is the taste of sugars present in the wine. A 'dry' wine has no sugar or has levels that are so low that they cannot be detected by the tongue. If the wine has a tiny amount of detectable sugar, the wine is described as 'off-dry'.

At the other end of the scale, 'sweet' covers wines where the presence of sugar has become the prominent feature of the wine. This rather broad category covers most classic sweet or 'dessert' wines such as Sauternes and Port.

'Medium-dry' and 'medium-sweet' sit in the middle of the scale and can be used for wines with a distinct presence of sugar. It can be helpful to think about whether the wine you are tasting is more similar in style to a dry wine, in which case it is 'medium-dry' or whether it is more similar to a sweet wine, in which case it is 'medium-sweet'.

Labelling terms for sweetness are legally controlled in the EU and the categories for still and sparkling wines are different. The tasting examinations are focussed on your ability to perceive sweetness in broad terms so you should not concern yourself with the legal definitions or give an estimate of sugar content in g/L. For example, whether a Brut Champagne, which can have a residual sugar level up to 12 g/L (or technically 15g/L given there is a 3g/L tolerance), should be described as either 'dry' or 'off-dry' depends on how it appears to you on the palate, and whether you can perceive a small amount of detectable sugar.

Acidity

All wines contain acid and, when tasting wines, you are judging how much acidity they have. Even wines with low acidity still have some noticeable acidity and high-acid wines are not as high in acidity as some acidic foods such as vinegar.

Acid is detected on the tongue, where it causes a tingling sensation and makes your mouth water. The higher the level of acid in the wine, the more your mouth waters and the longer it waters for.

When considering the acidity in a wine there are two points to remember. First, high levels of sugar and acid can mask each other. In a sweet wine, the high acidity is not the single predominant feature; rather, it serves to balance with the high sugar levels. Therefore, the acidity in a sweet wine appears less obvious compared with the acidity in a dry high-acid wine such as a Chablis. However, whatever the level of sugar, the mouth-watering effect caused by acidity remains and this is always a reliable guide when it comes to judging the level of acidity. Second, alcohol can create a burning sensation that feels similar to acidity. Again, consider the mouth-watering effect to see whether this is due to acidity or alcohol for any particular wine.

Tannin

Tannins are an important structural component in red wines. They are mostly extracted from the skins of the grapes during fermentation. Tannins bind to your saliva and cause your mouth to dry up and feel rough. They can sometimes also have a bitter taste that lingers at the back of your mouth.

Tannin levels can be easy to misread because not all tannins have the same effect. Unripe tannins tend to be more astringent, whereas ripe tannins contribute more to textural richness. It takes experience to be able to conclude that a basic-quality Cabernet Sauvignon made from just-ripe grapes has a medium level of tannins, despite them being very astringent and harsh, whereas a high-quality Shiraz from a hot region may have very high levels of velvet-textured ripe tannins but not be astringent.

Descriptions of tannin nature tend to fall into one of two types. You could describe the ripeness of the tannin: under-ripe tannins often taste bitter, green or stalky whereas ripe tannins taste rich and rounded, adding to the wine's body and mouthfeel. Alternatively, you could describe the grain or texture of the tannins. Are they rough or are they smooth? Generally, ripe tannins are fine-textured whereas unripe tannins feel rougher.

For the nature of the tannin, you may use one or more of the words listed on the Wine SAT (e.g. 'ripe', 'soft', 'green', 'coarse', etc., as applicable) or use other words as appropriate. Remember, the examiner has to be able to understand what you mean before they can consider whether a descriptor you have given is valid and award you the mark. With this in mind, care should be taken not to write down multiple contradictory descriptors.

Alcohol

Alcohol contributes to the 'body' of a wine. High levels of alcohol can make a wine seem heavier in the mouth. At low levels, the wine can seem a bit watery, unless there is another component such as sugar to give the wine body.

At high levels, alcohol triggers pain receptors, giving a hot, burning sensation, especially after spitting or swallowing.

When using the SAT, alcohol levels in wine are judged using the three-point scale, with the following ranges given as guidance:

- low: below 11% abv
- medium: 11–13.9% abv
- high: 14% abv and above.

The alcohol levels for fortified wines are also split into three:

- low: 15–16.4% abv
- medium: 16.5–18.4% abv
- high: 18.5% abv and above.

As with sweetness, the tasting examinations are focussed on your ability to assess the level of alcohol in broad terms. If the wine has a sufficient concentration of flavours (not weak or dilute) and is generally in balance, but the alcohol feels warming, you should note the alcohol as high, even if (in a seen tasting) the label states 13.5% abv.

Body

Body is an overall impression of how the wine feels in the mouth using the sense of touch rather than taste. Body is not a single component: it is created by the structural components (sugar, acidity, tannin and alcohol) in a wine working together. For most wines, alcohol is the main factor contributing to body. Sugar adds to the body; high acidity makes a wine feel lighter in body. Generally, high levels of ripe tannin make a wine feel fuller-bodied, but low levels of unripe tannin can make it seem harsher, thinner and therefore lighter in body.

Flavour Intensity

When judging the intensity of flavours, you are judging how powerful they are. Generally, a wine will have the same flavour intensity as aroma intensity on the nose. However, the warming of the wine in your mouth can make some characteristics more apparent than they were on the nose. Some spice characteristics tend to be more prominent on the palate. Floral characteristics are sometimes less prominent on the palate than they appear on the nose. Taking these factors into consideration a wine may be lighter or more pronounced in intensity on the palate.

Flavour Characteristics

Generally, flavours on the palate should be the same as aromas detected on the nose. In addition to checking that you have found them, you should also note down any additional characteristics you may have detected due to the wine warming in the mouth.

Other Observations

At Diploma, you can be awarded a mark for making a relevant observation about the palate of the wine (that has not previously been covered by the scales of the SAT). More information on the circumstances in which you may be awarded this mark, is given below in Writing Your Tasting Notes in the Exams.

There are two main aspects of a wine's palate that you may wish to comment on under this heading: texture and, in the case of still wines, pétillance. Other observations outside of these two aspects may be relevant depending on the wine sample.

Texture is closely related to body and can best be described as a wine's mouthfeel, an overall sensation produced by the interplay of a wine's viscosity, acidity and astringency (tannin). Higher acid/less ripe wines tend to be lighter in body, so they tend to be more crisp in texture. Richer, riper, fuller-bodied styles with lower acidity tend to be more dense on the palate, with a softer, creamier texture. If you feel the texture of a wine is particularly noteworthy, you should give a descriptor. Examples of words you could use are listed on the SAT, but – as with aroma and flavour descriptors – you are free to use alternative words if you wish.

In sparkling wines, mousse (the feel of the wine's bubbles) is often an important constituent of texture. Some wines have a very frothy, creamy mousse which fades quickly on the palate; others – particularly those that have undergone maturation – have a fine-beaded, persistent mousse which lingers on the finish. If you taste a wine in the D4 examination and feel that the mousse makes a particular contribution to the overall mouthfeel or texture, you should give an appropriate descriptor of your choice. Mousse will also be a relevant consideration when assessing quality for sparkling wines.

Pétillance refers to dissolved carbon dioxide which gives still wines a discernible spritz on the palate. It is commonly found in young white wines where carbon dioxide is either retained from the fermentation or topped up at bottling. Not all still wines will show this characteristic but where it is present it may add desirable freshness and texture. If you observe this characteristic, it is sufficient to simply write the word 'pétillance'.

Finish

The finish is the collection of sensations after you have swallowed or spat the wine out. How long the sensations linger is an important indicator of quality, but when assessing the length of the finish you should only count the persistence of the desirable sensations. A wine with a very long lingering bitterness could be described as having a bitter aftertaste, but if the fruit impressions disappear quickly, the finish should be described as 'short'. Generally, if the pleasant flavours disappear and a structural component such as acid is the lingering flavour on the palate, the finish is 'short'. When the flavours last as long or beyond the structural components, the finish is described as 'long'.

WRITING YOUR TASTING NOTES IN THE EXAMS

As well as memorising the various scales of the SAT and gaining sufficient tasting practice, it is also essential to know how marks are allocated and awarded in order to maximise your chances of success in the exams.

It is important that you follow the guidance below:

Structural Components

1. The component being assessed and its level on the SAT scale must be clear. For example, a tasting note such as 'medium (-), medium, medium (-), low' would not gain any marks as the components being assessed are not clear.

2. Only one entry from each scale will be accepted; do not give a range. For example,

- Medium (+) acidity would gain 1 mark.
- Medium to medium (+) acidity would gain no mark as more than one entry from the scale is present.

3. SAT terminology must be used to describe all components of the wine. The only exceptions are the 'nature' of the tannins, any 'other observations', and 'aromas' and 'flavours', in which you can use descriptors outside of those suggested. (This is noted by the word 'e.g.' on these scales on the SAT.)

Aromas and Flavours

1. 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 examiners will have allocated the marks available for aroma and flavour characteristics across all relevant types and clusters. At Level 3, you needed to ensure that you identified each type of aromas (primary, secondary or tertiary) that were present in the wine. At Level 4, you also need to ensure that you identify descriptors across the relevant clusters in a wine.

This means, for example, that simply writing five valid descriptors from one type or cluster will be unlikely to get you the full five marks available for aroma characteristics (unless the wine is a very simple example of its style; see below). You should consider the range of flavours both within a type and across types. For example, within primary aromas, it is easy to focus on fruit, but you should also consider whether there are any floral, herbal or herbaceous characteristics. Equally, if a wine is showing notable aromas and flavours from oak, you are unlikely to get the full five marks if you only write down primary characteristics. Note that a cluster or type will only have marks allocated to it if it is deemed that the aromas and flavours of that type or cluster are a notable feature of the wine.

Remember, clusters and their descriptors are grouped into primary, secondary and tertiary types on the Wine-Lexicon to encourage you to think about how different aromas and flavours coincide with different stages of a wine's development. In some cases, flexibility will be required. For example, you may decide that a youthful wine with mainly primary aromas and flavours also shows a 'tar' or 'kerosene' character more commonly associated with the tertiary type. If this is the case, you should write down the descriptor you feel applies regardless; this characteristic could be the product of the grape variety used, its origin or a particular winemaking technique rather than an indicator of maturation. If the descriptor is valid, it will be credited by the examiner.

If a wine displays simple primary fruit, then a short list of fruit or descriptors from one or two clusters may be sufficient. You should use the term 'simple' as one of your descriptors for these types of wine. As with the Level 3 Award in Wines, marks will be allocated for noting simplicity in such wines.

Consider whether the fruit character is 'fresh' (suggesting early harvesting or cool ripening conditions) or 'jammy' or 'cooked' (suggesting later harvesting or hotter ripening conditions). Again, if you feel any of these additional words apply to wines in the examinations, write them down. These observations can be particularly useful when thinking about grape variety or region of origin in the Conclusions section of your answer.

2. Use the Wine-Lexicon vocabulary. The examiners compile the marking keys for the examination wines with reference to the Wine-Lexicon. This means that the Wine-Lexicon should be your primary source of descriptors for aroma and flavour characteristics in the examinations. The Wine-Lexicon is not, however, exhaustive and the marking key may also include words beyond those listed in the Wine-Lexicon. You may, therefore, also use additional words to describe the aroma and flavour of wines in the examinations, provided the words you use will be understood by the examiner and are considered valid for the wine in question.

3. 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 candidates 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: 'Medium (+) intensity of 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.

Capping of Marks

In some cases, a structural component of a wine may be considered so essential to its character that getting it wrong carries an additional penalty. To describe Rutherglen Muscat as anything other than 'sweet' would

constitute a fundamental error. In such a case, the examiners may, at their discretion, reduce the total number of marks available for Palate by one. This means that a candidate who described Rutherglen Muscat as 'off-dry' would not only miss the mark available for sweetness but incur an additional one-mark penalty.

Your marks may also be capped if you write down aroma or flavour characteristics that are obviously not in the wine. The examiners are relatively lenient on this point, but if, for example, it appears that a student is writing 'simple' for every wine whether it is very basic or very complex, a penalty may be applied where the term 'simple' is not appropriate. As another example, a penalty may be applied for inappropriate comments on autolysis in some sparkling wines such as Asti.

Mark Allocation for Tasting Notes

Appearance (2 marks)	
Intensity	1 mark
Colour	1 mark

Nose (6 marks)	
Intensity	1 mark
Aromas	5 marks

Palate (10 marks for white and rosé wines and 12 marks for red wines)	
Sweetness	1 mark
Acidity	1 mark
Tannin (red wines only)	1 mark for level of tannins
	1 mark for nature of tannins
	There are no marks available for tannin for white or rosé wines in the examinations. The same goes for some fortified wines made with red-skinned grapes where tannins can rarely be perceived (e.g. Rutherglen Muscat). It is possible for any of these wines to sometimes have very low levels of tannin, e.g. some white wines made with skin contact can have a waxy bitterness, some oaky whites can be slightly astringent due to the high impact of the oak and some rosés can have been kept on the skins long enough for tannins to be detectable. In these scenarios, you could mention the tannin as an 'Other observation' or use it in the assessment of quality section of your answer when discussing the wine's overall component balance.
Alcohol	1 mark
Body	1 mark
Flavour intensity	1 mark
Flavour characteristics	There is a total of 4 marks available for 'Flavour characteristics' and 'Other observations' combined. This means that where the examiners have allocated a mark to texture or pétillance, for example, you can achieve full marks by giving either four valid descriptors for 'Flavour characteristics' and no observation about texture or pétillance; or three valid descriptors for 'Flavour characteristics' and one correct observation about texture or pétillance. Marks will be allocated to clusters and types as set out above. Note that the examiners will only allocate a mark to other observations if they feel there is something notable to mention; this may not be the case in all wines.
Other observations	
Finish	1 mark

As a general point, bullet points are acceptable when writing your tasting notes, however, sentences should be used for the Conclusions section and when giving reasons in Identification questions, as you will need to explain your reasoning.

4. Evaluating Wines and Writing Conclusions

Evaluating wine quality and suitability for ageing in a reasoned manner are key skills for any wine professional, and hence a significant proportion marks are dedicated to these two elements of the SAT. An assessment of quality and suitability for bottle ageing will be required for all wines in the D3, D4 and D5 examinations, and will always carry the same amount of marks, as specified below:

Conclusions	
Quality assessment	6 marks
Suitability for bottle ageing	3 marks

The 6 marks that are allocated for '**quality assessment**' require you to select correctly from the options in the SAT, and support this with reasons that justify your quality assessment. One mark will be awarded for a correct assessment of quality and a maximum of five marks are available for your reasoning.

The 3 marks that are available for '**suitability for bottle ageing**' require you to select correctly from the two options in the SAT (suitable for bottle ageing, not suitable for bottle ageing) and give reasons for your assessment. One mark will be awarded for correctly assessing whether the wine is suitable for bottle ageing or not, and a maximum of two marks are available for your reasoning.

QUALITY

Wine professionals use many different scales to assess quality, with numerical scores particularly common. At the WSET we use a qualitative (descriptive) scale ranging from 'poor' to 'outstanding'.

To write a quality assessment, you will be required to:

- Identify the applicable positive and negative attributes of the wine.
- Evaluate the evidence and draw a conclusion on the quality of the wine.

The quality expectations are set within the type of wine (still, sparkling, fortified), not within the region, grape variety or precise style. For example, a Sancerre that is 'very good' should be of comparable quality to a Napa Chardonnay that is 'very good'; the majority of points for both wines would be positive, even if the attributes of the wines are different.

The below criteria are generally considered key indicators of wine quality:

- balance/integration
- texture
- intensity and identifiable characteristics
- length and nature of finish
- complexity and/or potential to gain complexity
- typicity and varietal definition

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 unbalanced, 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. 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.

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?

Similarly, in sparkling wines, consider the balance of any autolytic characteristics with the fruit concentration.

Again, this is an opportunity to use descriptive words to communicate your understanding of the wine.

Texture

Texture describes how the wine feels in the mouth. In many cases, texture may purely be an observation, rather than a quality factor. However, rough, very astringent tannins, either from the grapes or from oak, would likely be considered a negative attribute of a wine. Conversely, tannins being soft and fine-grained despite being high in level could be a positive attribute.

A waxy or viscous texture may add a certain textural complexity in white wines, providing that there is enough acidity for the wine to also be refreshing. As stated above, whether a texture is considered positive or negative will depend on its balance within the wine overall.

Mousse can be mentioned as part of the quality assessment for D4. A soft, long-lasting mousse can be stated as a positive attribute, whereas less integrated, harsh bubbles that fade quickly on the palate can be a negative attribute.

Intensity and Identifiable Characteristics

A wine that has weak, dilute flavours is seldom good quality, but beyond a certain level, more intensity does not necessarily mean higher quality. When discussing quality some people also refer to a wine's intensity as its 'concentration'.

You should also consider whether the aromas and flavours are well-defined and identifiable. Being able to easily pick out precise aroma and flavour descriptors would generally suggest higher quality than in cases where you struggle to get beyond the cluster heading (e.g. undistinguishable red fruit).

Finish

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', etc.), 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 and Potential to Gain Complexity

Complexity is a desirable feature in a wine and one that 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 the purity of flavours is what makes a wine great, and oak or tertiary characteristics might detract from the high quality.

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 should be noted as a positive attribute. For example, you may argue that the wine is lacking in some complexity at the moment (giving evidence from the glass for this statement), but has the concentration and acidity to age and gain more complexity with time.

Typicity and Varietal Definition

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. In some wines, particularly those made from aromatic grape varieties like Riesling and Muscat, varietal definition – how clearly a wine expresses varietal

character – may be an important consideration. 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.

Assessment of Quality

When putting a wine into a quality level, think about how positively the wines can be assessed against the criteria stated above.

A **'good'** wine typically has balanced fruit, sugar, acid, alcohol and tannin. It is free of faults and likely shows some complexity, concentration or identifiable characteristics. For a wine to be 'good', you should have an even balance of positive and negative comments about it.

If the wine is obviously lacking in some combination of the key considerations of quality that were detailed above, then it is **'acceptable'** (depending on the severity of the problems that are identified and if it has any redeeming features) or even **'poor'** (if your comments are mostly or entirely negative).

On the other hand, wines that are balanced and have some extra level of complexity, intensity or length, can be described as **'very good'**. In a very good wine, you will still feel that there is something lacking, otherwise it would be rated as 'outstanding'. An **'outstanding'** wine does not have to be perfect in every way, but if you are left without any important negatives, then the wine should be described as 'outstanding'.

Giving Reasons for your Quality Assessment

You will always be required to provide an argument to support your assessment of quality, using the quality considerations outlined above. If you wrongly judge the assessment of quality, you can still gain some marks if some of your observations about the wine are correct and/or your reasoning is logical.

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. If a wine is 'outstanding', you should be able to provide several distinct, positive reasons why the wine is in that top category. Conversely, if a wine is 'poor' you should be able to provide several 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 positive reasons why it is better than the category below and/or negative reasons why it is not good enough for the category above.

Your reasoning should be detailed and specific to the wine. It is not enough to say that 'the wine is balanced'; you need to identify which key elements of the wine are balanced, and this will not be the same for all wines. Equally, saying that the wine is 'complex' is also vague, and it would be better to show how the wine is complex, for example, by detailing some of the diverse aroma and flavour compounds that the wine displays.

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 spicity, 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. Your evaluation should not simply repeat your description. However, do bear in mind that your meaning must always be clear to the examiners and accurately represent what is in the glass in front of you.

SUITABILITY FOR AGEING

The SAT gives two options for bottle ageing, 'suitable for bottle ageing' and 'not suitable for bottle ageing'. In the context of the SAT and Diploma examinations, 'suitable for bottle ageing' means that the wine will improve through ageing. For example, it may gain more complexity through bottle ageing in a way that would be desirable for the style of the wine.

If you think the wine will 'hold' or 'keep', but not improve, you should select 'not suitable for bottle ageing'. Likewise, if you feel that the wine will deteriorate through bottle ageing, you should select 'not suitable for bottle ageing'. This could apply to youthful wines that have no capacity to improve in bottle, or to fully developed wines that have reached their peak and now will only keep or deteriorate.

Three marks are always given for bottle ageing. This includes one mark for selecting the correct answer, and two marks for your reasoning. Within your reasoning you should be clear as to what you expect will happen to the wine with further bottle ageing, allowing you to clarify whether you think this is a wine that will keep for a number of years or will deteriorate relatively quickly. Giving some indication of the time over which you think this will happen is not necessary, but may help you to describe the path that you think the wine will take more easily.

You should also give reasons for your answer. With time the aromas and flavours of the wine will develop from primary characteristics to tertiary characteristics, and tannins may soften. The alcohol levels will not change, and the acid and sugar levels will change very little.

You should therefore consider whether the wine:

- has aromas and flavours that you think will develop in a positive way
- has a suitable concentration of aromas and flavours; they are not dilute or weak
- is in balance. Some components, such as tannins, may become more integrated with time, however, many fundamental issues with balance are unlikely to improve with time.
- has appropriate levels of acidity and/or tannins to give the wine structure in the future.

There are some wines where the suitability for bottle ageing could be argued either way. In such cases, the examiners will give appropriate credit for valid and logical reasoning whether you have selected suitable or not suitable for bottle ageing.

5. Answering Identification Questions

Any of the following questions or combinations of questions may be asked for an individual wine or flight of wines:

- identify the grape variety/ies;
- identify the country and/or region of origin;
- identify the wine's method of production; and/or
- identify the wine's style within its category (for D5 only);

In addition to identifying what is asked for you may also be required to give reasons for your identification. If this is the case, it will be clear from the wording of the question, for example, 'Identify the grape variety/varieties, giving reasons for your choice'. As with the elements in Conclusions, if your identification is wrong, you can still gain some marks for correct observations and logical reasoning.

The number of marks available for identification questions will vary but will always be clearly stated on the exam paper.

When answering identification questions, it can be helpful to have a structure or check list of considerations in mind, like you would for quality assessments. This check list can help you both in your identification and in cases where you need to give reasons for your answer.

The following are suggestions for each type of identification question.

Grape Variety/ies

- Varietal characteristics – Are there any components of the wine that lead you to certain grape varieties? Considerations may include particular aromas or flavours, the intensity of the aromas (is this an aromatic grape variety?), high or low levels of certain structural components e.g. high acidity or tannins.
- Climatic influences – Does the ripeness of the fruit or any of the structural components in the wine suggest a cool or warm climate? Does this reflect the typical regions where this grape variety may grow?
- Winemaking – Is the winemaking typical or logical for the grape variety? Some grape varieties are more likely to be matured in new oak than others; some are more likely to go through carbonic maceration etc.
- Styles of wine - Is the style of wine or range of styles in a flight logical for the grape variety? For example, some grape varieties, e.g. Riesling, are more often used in the production of sweet wines than others, e.g. Chardonnay.
- Quality levels - Is the quality level or range of quality levels in a flight logical for the grape variety? Although most grape varieties can be made in a full range of quality levels, and hence this is more likely to be supporting rather than leading evidence, some grape varieties may be less commonly associated with producing either 'poor' or 'outstanding' wines.

Country or Region of Origin

- Grape variety/varieties – can you identify the grape variety(ies) that the wine is made from? What countries or regions commonly grow that grape variety or, in a flight, that range of varieties?
- Climate – does the ripeness of the fruit or any of the structural components in the wine suggest a cool or warm climate?
- Winemaking – is the winemaking typical or logical for the country or region? This might be evidence that is consistent with your choice rather than directly leading you to a particular country or region. However, some practices, such as ageing under flor, are not common to many regions, and could be strong evidence.

- Styles of wine – Is the style of wine or range of styles in a flight logical for the country or region? Again, some styles of wine are more unusual, for example, sparkling red wines, and would definitely limit the viable options.
- Quality levels – Is the quality level or range of quality levels in a flight logical for the country or region? For example, if a region has a reputation for producing wines of “very good” or ‘outstanding’ quality, it is very unlikely that the examiners will have selected an ‘acceptable’ wine from that region.
- Bottle ageing – If the wine is showing tertiary characteristics, it is likely that it is made from a grape variety(ies) that is suitable for ageing. For example, within white wines, Chardonnay or Riesling would be more likely than Ugni Blanc or Piquepoul.

Method of Production

A method of production question is likely only to be asked when there is evidence from the wine as to how it may have been made.

In some cases, you may be asked to identify the method of production. For example, for sparkling wines in D4, this may involve identifying whether the wine is made by traditional method or tank method.

In others, you may be asked to comment on key steps within the method of production or give details on a particular aspect of the production of the wine, for example, maturation. If the question does not state a particular aspect of production, then you should consider ‘production’ to be from the start of harvest through to post-bottling maturation. Hence, observations about, for example, the climate of the region or canopy management techniques are not required.

Your reasoning for the method of production should reflect what you have tasted from the wine in your glass. For example, flavours of marmalade and honey together with a sweet palate may suggest that the wine has been made by selecting botrytised grapes during a hand harvest. The spirity nature and high level of alcohol in Port would indicate the practice of fortification with *aguardente* (non-neutral spirit). You will, of course, not be able to comment on every stage in the production, as some production choices will not have an identifiable influence on wine that you are tasting. Therefore, these questions are about selecting the key aspects of production that have had a significant influence on the wine’s aromas and flavours and structural components.

A general description of how wines in a particular style are typically made, with no reference to the specific wine you have tasted, will not gain full marks.

Style within Category

Style within category will only be asked for the D5 (Fortified Wines) examination. In some cases, you may purely be asked to identify the style; in others, you may be asked to give reasons for your choice.

‘Sherry’, ‘Port’, ‘Madeira’, ‘Rutherglen Muscat’ 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.; for Rutherglen Muscat, ‘Classic’, ‘Grand’ or ‘Rare’; and for a VDN, ‘Banyuls’ or ‘Maury’, etc.

Note that for VDNs you do not need to use local labelling terminology or identify specific ACs associated with ageing requirements, e.g. Maury Hors d’Age AC or Banyuls Grand Cru AC. It would be sufficient to identify the wine as ‘Maury’ or ‘Banyuls’, as appropriate.

For Madeira, the examiners would expect you to give the age or equivalent designation (e.g. ‘10 year-old’ or ‘Special Reserve’). Grape variety(ies) would be asked for separately if required.

6. The Marking of Conclusion and Identification Sections

The marking of the conclusion and identification sections is conducted in a holistic manner. The examiners will look, overall, at the strengths of the answer when determining what mark should be awarded. This means that it would be wrong to simply say that you will get a mark for each point that you write down. For example, a strong answer for a quality assessment would cover a number of the quality considerations detailed above (balance, complexity etc.), be detailed and specific in its arguments and provide logical reasoning for the quality assessment considering both positive and negative attributes.

When answering such questions, rather than counting the number of marks available and then trying to come up with that number of arguments in your answer, it would be better to simply consider:

- Have you covered all the relevant points that you can think of that apply to that wine or flight? For example, have you mentioned all quality considerations that are relevant to the wine, or have you mentioned the all of the factors that you think could be relevant to the identification of the wine?
- Have you been logical and clear in your reasoning? Will it be clear to the examiner how your evidence links to your conclusion or identification?
- Are your arguments detailed and specific? Have you given evidence from your tasting notes, or from what you've experienced from tasting that wine, in your answer?

If you can say 'yes' to all of these, then you will likely gain good marks for your answer.

Even if you have misjudged the level of quality or suitability for ageing, or have not identified the correct country, region or grape variety, you may still be awarded marks for correct and/or logical arguments within your reasoning.

For more guidance, examples of more and less successful answers are given in the next two chapters.

7. Examples of Tasting Notes and Conclusions

This section includes a variety of example tasting notes and conclusion, in each case giving a more successful and less successful answer.

EXAMPLE TASTING NOTE 1

D3 Wines of the World - Premium Red Wine – a more successful answer

Tasting Note	Commentary
Appearance (2 marks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium intensity • Ruby 	<p>This note has the potential to gain full marks if the assessments made concur with the marking key.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The note includes all scales on the SAT and it is clear what scale is being assessed in every bullet point (note, the student could have equally written their note in sentences). • One entry is given on each scale, and SAT terminology is used. • It can be good practice to separate the primary, secondary and tertiary characteristics, if present, into separate clusters as done here. A structured approach can help to identify how components in the wine have contributed to the style and quality. However, you are not required to (and will gain no extra marks for) naming the cluster e.g. 'Primary aromas' or 'Green fruit'. • This note has identified several descriptors in the primary type that are valid, as well as in the secondary and tertiary types. You will not be penalised for writing more than five aromas (as done here) if the examiners feel your representation of the wine is fair.
Nose (6 marks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronounced intensity • Plum, strawberry • Blackberry, blueberry • Mint • Vanilla, charred wood • Earth, tobacco 	
Palate (12 marks) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry • Medium (+) acidity • Medium, soft tannins • High alcohol • Full body • Pronounced intensity • Plum • Blackberry, blueberry, • Vanilla, charred wood, • Tobacco • Medium finish 	
Quality Assessment (6 marks)	
<p>This wine is of very good quality. The wine's high level of alcohol is integrated and balanced by the fruit concentration. The aromas and flavours are well defined (distinct blackberry and blueberry fruit). Flavours from oak (vanilla, charred wood) and a note of tobacco, showing development, give complexity to the wine. The wine does not have the long finish expected of an outstanding wine.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality level is clearly stated. • The assessment has demonstrated consideration of the indicators of quality. • The reason why it is not outstanding is stated. Alternatively, the reasons why it is more than good could be put forward.
Bottle Ageing (3 marks)	Commentary
<p>1. The wine is suitable for bottle ageing because it has enough primary fruit. Tertiary characteristics have already started to show and further tertiary characteristics from ageing may bring even more complexity.</p> <p>Alternatively, a student could argue that the same wine is not suitable for bottle ageing.</p>	<p>It is possible to have differing opinions on a wine's suitability to age in bottle. An assessment would be considered valid for either option if there is a logical explanation.</p> <p>Both assessments of the wine's suitability to age in bottle has potential to gain full marks because:</p>

<p>2. The wine is not suitable for bottle ageing because the tannin structure is not sufficient to support ageing and could, if it softens further, lead to the wine being out of balance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They state whether the wine is suitable for bottle ageing or not. • There is a logical explanation as to why it is or is not suitable, which clearly links to the tasting note and quality assessment.
---	---

D3 Wines of the World - Premium Red Wine – a less successful answer

Tasting Note	Commentary
Appearance (2 marks)	<p>This note would not gain full marks for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scarlet is not part of the SAT terminology • No secondary characteristics have been mentioned (assuming they were present in the sample) • Not clear what scales are being referred to by 'medium (+)' and 'medium' • Range of levels given for flavour intensity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium intensity • Scarlet 	
Nose (6 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronounced intensity • Plum, strawberry • Blackberry, blueberry • Mint • Earth, tobacco 	
Palate (12 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry • Medium (+) • Medium, soft tannins • High alcohol • Full body • Medium (+) - pronounced intensity • Plum • Blackberry, blueberry, • Tobacco • Medium 	
Quality Assessment (6 marks)	Commentary
<p>This wine is of very good quality. The wine has balance between the medium (+) acidity and medium tannins. There is complexity from black and red fruit, oak and some tobacco. The flavours are pronounced and the length is medium.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality level is clearly stated. • The argument for complexity gives some detail of how the wine is complex. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acidity and tannins generally do not need to balance each other – the key elements that needed to balance were the high alcohol against sufficient fruit. • The flavours and length comments are purely a repeat of the tasting note with no explanation about whether they are positive or negative. • With that in mind, it is not completely clear why the wine is not outstanding.
Bottle Ageing (3 marks)	Commentary
<p>The wine is suitable for bottle ageing because there is already some tertiary character.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability for ageing is clearly stated. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reason given for why the wine will improve with age is not a clear and logical explanation.

EXAMPLE TASTING NOTE 2

D3 Wines of the World – Inexpensive White Wine (e.g. basic Muscadet) – a more successful answer

Tasting Note	Commentary
Appearance (2 marks)	<p>This note has the potential to gain full marks if the assessments made concur with the marking key.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As in the first example, all scales in the SAT have been covered clearly and correctly. If the wine is simple it may be that only one or two aroma clusters apply. In this case, you should acknowledge the wine's simplicity in your description, e.g. 'simple apple, pear, lemon and grapefruit'. Assuming the four primary descriptors given are valid for the wine in question, this answer would score 5 marks, with one mark allocated for 'simple'.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pale Lemon 	
Nose (6 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium intensity Simple Apple, pear Lemon, grapefruit 	
Palate (10 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dry High acidity Medium alcohol Light body Medium intensity Simple Apple, pear Lemon, grapefruit Medium finish 	
Quality Assessment (6 marks)	
<p>This wine is of good quality. The green and citrus fruit has just enough intensity to balance the refreshingly high acidity. The wine is not complex and does not have potential to gain complexity through bottle ageing. Although the flavours are simple the fresh green apple and lemon flavours linger longer than would be expected, which lifts this wine above acceptable quality.</p>	
Bottle Ageing (3 marks)	
<p>The wine is not suitable for bottle ageing. The wine lacks the fruit concentration required to evolve positively in bottle, and its simple primary flavours will likely fade in 2-4 years.</p>	

D3 Wines of the World – Inexpensive White Wine (e.g. basic Muscadet) – a less successful answer

Tasting Note	Commentary
Appearance (2 marks)	<p>This note would not gain full marks for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The level of acidity is not clear as SAT terminology has not been used. The student has forgotten to mention alcohol. The student has not mentioned four flavours on the palate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pale Lemon 	
Nose (6 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium intensity Simple Apple, pear Lemon, grapefruit 	
Palate (10 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dry Refreshing acidity 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Light body • Medium intensity • Simple • Apple • Lemon • Medium finish 	
<p>Quality Assessment (6 marks)</p>	
<p>The wine is balanced and had medium intensity. It has simple flavours of green and citrus fruits, so lacks complexity. The moderate length of citrus fruit flavours is longer than would be expected of a wine of acceptable quality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The answer makes statements about the lack of complexity and the length. • The answer states why the wine is better than acceptable. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality level is not clearly stated. The examiner may be able to guess that you meant 'good' but will not make any assumptions on your behalf. • The statement about balance is vague without any indication as to what is balanced. • Similarly, the intensity of fruit could have been used within the balance statement. Currently, this is just a repetition of the tasting note, without any explanation about whether it is a positive or negative attribute.
<p>Bottle Ageing (3 marks)</p>	
<p>The wine is not suitable for bottle ageing, it should be drunk within 2 years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The suitability for ageing is clearly stated. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the fact that this wine would be best drunk within 2 years may be true, there is no explanation as to why it is not suited to bottle ageing and should be drunk in 2 years.

EXAMPLE TASTING NOTE 3

D4 Sparkling Wines - Inexpensive traditional method sparkling wine – a more successful answer

Tasting Note	Commentary
Appearance (2 marks)	<p>This note has the potential to gain full marks if the assessments made concur with the marking key.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As in the above examples, all scales in the SAT have been covered clearly and correctly. Only primary and secondary aromas are present in this wine. Therefore, the student must have identified at least five characteristics across both aroma types, as shown here. To gain full marks, at least four flavour characteristics need to be identified across both the primary and secondary aroma types, or a valid 'other observation' needs to be identified alongside at least three flavour characteristics across both the primary and secondary aroma types.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium Lemon 	
Nose (6 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium intensity Apple, pear Lemon, grapefruit Pastry, bread dough 	
Palate (10 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off dry Medium (+) acidity Medium alcohol Medium (-) body Medium (-) intensity Apple, pear Lemon, grapefruit Bread dough Thin texture Short finish 	
Quality Assessment (6 marks)	
<p>This wine is of acceptable quality. The fruit flavours are generic and lack intensity on the palate. The autolytic character also lacks intensity and complexity, and has not brought much texture to the wine. The wine has noticeable bitterness on the short finish. However, the crisp acidity is balanced by well-integrated dosage.</p>	
Bottle Ageing (3 marks)	
<p>The wine is not suitable for bottle ageing because the wine is dilute on the palate and, hence, lacks the fruit concentration required to improve in bottle. The fresh fruit aromas will fade within the next 2-4 years.</p>	

D4 Sparkling Wines - Inexpensive traditional method sparkling wine – a less successful answer

Tasting Note	Commentary
Appearance (2 marks)	<p>This note would not gain full marks for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unless the wine was very much lacking in fruit, the student has focused too little on the primary characteristics. It is possible that at least two marks may have been allocated to primary characteristics, in which case, the student has only picked up one of these marks. On the palate, the student has written down three flavours and one other observation. The observation is quite vague and unlikely to be something that particularly notable about the wine. Given it is not a notable characteristic, a mark is unlikely to be awarded for this observation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium Lemon 	
Nose (6 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium intensity Apple Bread dough, pastry, brioche, biscuit 	
Palate (10 marks)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dry or off dry Medium (+) acidity Medium alcohol 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium (-) body • Medium (-) intensity • Apple • Lemon • Bread dough • Smooth mousse • Short finish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two levels have been written for sweetness. Although it is possible that the examiners may allow either dry or off-dry, the student will gain no marks for writing down two options.
Quality Assessment (6 marks)	
<p>This wine is of acceptable quality. The wine has noticeable bitterness on the short finish. However, the crisp acidity is balanced by well-integrated dosage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality level is clearly stated. • The arguments are logical. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is not enough content in this answer to get full marks; the intensity of flavours, degree of complexity, extent to which there are identifiable flavours could have been mentioned. • With one positive and one negative comment it is not clear why this is acceptable, even if that is the correct answer.
Bottle Ageing (3 marks)	
<p>The wine is ready for drinking now because the wine is dilute on the palate and, hence, lacks the fruit concentration required to improve in bottle. The fresh fruit aromas will fade within the next 2-4 years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are some logical arguments in the answer. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the examiner may be able to guess that the student thinks this wine is not suitable for bottle ageing, the student has not directly stated this using the terminology from the SAT.

8. Examples of Identification Questions

IDENTIFICATION OF GRAPE VARIETY/IES

Question 1 of the D3 Tasting Examination will require you to identify the common grape variety for the flight and give reasons for your choice of variety. Typically, **9-11 marks** would be allocated to this section.

Example flight of wines.

1. Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon of very good quality
2. Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon of good quality
3. Bordeaux Cabernet Sauvignon dominated blend of outstanding quality.

Grape Variety: Cabernet Sauvignon	Commentary
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All three wines show varietal black fruit and herbal/herbaceous characteristics, firm tannin structure and med (+) or high acidity suggesting Cabernet Sauvignon. • Wines 1 & 2 have ripe fruit typical of warm climate whereas wine 3 is more restrained and herbaceous indicating moderate climate. Cabernet Sauvignon is grown in both climates. • All wines have received oak treatment which is typical of wines made from this variety. • There is a range of quality levels of wines in the flight. Cabernet Sauvignon can make wines that are simple and fruity, like Wine 2, and more complex wines of very good and outstanding quality, like Wines 1 and 3. • Wines 1 and 3 both have tertiary characteristics which show these wines are made from a variety that evolves in bottle, typical of Cabernet Sauvignon. 	<p>As suggested previously, considering the following will help you to structure the reasons for the choice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varietal characteristics • Climatic influences • Winemaking • Styles of wine • Quality levels • Bottle ageing <p>All of these headings do not need to be in the answer, but the answer will need to have identified a number of reasons for the choice of variety. The example to the left represents an excellent answer.</p>

IDENTIFICATION OF REGION OR COUNTRY

Question 3 of the D3 Tasting Examination will require you to identify the region for the flight and give reasons for your choice of region. A similar approach should be taken when identifying the country for Question 2. Typically, **9-11 marks** would be allocated to this section.

Example flight of wines.

1. Sancerre of very good quality
2. Muscadet *Sur Lie* of good quality
3. Coteaux du Layon of outstanding quality

Example Answer	Commentary
<p>Region: Loire Valley</p> <p>All three wines have high levels of acidity and moderate levels of alcohol. Also, wines 1 & 2 having just-ripe fruit characteristics suggesting they come from a cool climate region, such as the Loire.</p> <p>Each wine is made from a different grape variety and in a different style. The varieties (Sauvignon Blanc, Melon, Chenin Blanc) are key white varieties of the Loire Valley. Dry aromatic and sweet botrytised wines along with wines aged <i>Sur Lie</i> are all styles of wine produced in the Loire valley.</p>	<p>Considering the following will help structure the reasons you give for the country or region selected:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grape variety/varieties • Climate • Winemaking • Styles of wine • Quality levels <p>All these headings do not have to be included in the answer, but the answer should show a range of reasons for the choice of region or country.</p> <p>You should consider the most prominent feature(s) that the wines have in common as a starting point. In the example answer, the high acidity and moderate alcohol across all three wines along with the just ripe fruit have been used to identify the likely climate of the region. This links back to the Loire Valley as a cool climate region.</p> <p>You should consider the similarities and differences across the wines and how these can be linked back to the country or region.</p>

IDENTIFICATION OF PRODUCTION METHOD, STYLE WITHIN CATEGORY AND GRAPE VARIETY

This example is set within the context of D5.

Example flight of wines.

1. Fino Sherry
2. 20-year-old Tawny Port
3. Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise

Each wine in the flight has a different type of identification question

Style in Category – Fino Sherry – a more successful answer

Example	Commentary
<p>Wine 1</p> <p>Identify the style within category giving reasons for your choice.</p> <p>The wine is a Fino Sherry.</p> <p>The wine has evidence of the biological ageing that is part of Fino production. Characteristics of flor (bread, acetaldehyde) are found on the nose and palate. The pale lemon colour shows oxidation has been avoided. The wine has a low level of alcohol, typical of wines that undergo biological ageing.</p>	<p>(Note that style within category will only be asked in D5.)</p> <p>The answer highlights the key features of the wine that are characteristic of Fino Sherry and has explained why these features are suggestive of Fino Sherry.</p> <p>Given that winemaking and maturation choices have a significant influence on the styles of fortified wines, it is likely that reasoning for style will include some explanation about winemaking and maturation techniques.</p>

Style in Category – Fino Sherry – a less successful answer

Example	Commentary
<p>Wine 1</p> <p>Identify the style within category giving reasons for your choice.</p> <p>The wine is a Fino Sherry.</p> <p>The wine has characteristics of bread and acetaldehyde, a pale lemon colour and a low level of alcohol pointing to Fino.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The answer highlights the key features of the wine that are characteristic of Fino Sherry. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It does not fully explain why these features lead to the identification of Fino. It is likely simply a repeat of part of the tasting note.

Method of Production – 20-year-old Tawny Port – a more successful answer

Example	Commentary
<p>Wine 2</p> <p>Comment on the maturation of this wine.</p> <p>The wine has been matured oxidatively for a long period of time (typical of 20 years ageing).</p> <p>The tawny colour, the predominant tertiary aromas and flavours of dried fruit and caramel along with the soft tannin indicate prolonged oxidative ageing.</p>	<p>The question may direct the student to answer a specific production option.</p> <p>A common mistake when answering these styles of questions is to describe how the wine was made. A good answer will state what method has been used and focus on the evidence found in the tasting note which supports the identification of the method without being a straight repetition of the tasting note.</p> <p>This answer is specific about the method and approximate length of the ageing. The student has selected relevant evidence from the wine to support their answer.</p>

Method of Production – 20-year-old Tawny Port – a less successful answer

Example	Commentary
<p>Comment on the maturation of this wine.</p> <p>The wine is likely to be made from a blend of grapes. <i>Aguardente</i> spirit (77% abv) will have been added to stop fermentation early. The wine will then have been put into barrels for a long maturation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The answer mentions maturation in barrels over a long period. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is a description of the production, and does not link back to tasting evidence. It includes details of production choices outside the realm of maturation. While there is no penalty for doing this, there would be no marks awarded for this extra information and therefore writing it down wastes time.

Grape variety – Muscat de Beaugues-de-Venise – a more successful answer

Example	Commentary
<p>Wine 3</p> <p>Identify the grape variety/varieties, giving reasons for your choice.</p> <p>The grape variety is Muscat.</p> <p>The wine has the fresh aromatic floral, stone and tropical fruit characteristics typical of the Muscat grape. The wine only displays primary characteristics, suggesting limited maturation, which is in keeping with some styles of Muscat-</p>	<p>The answer highlights the key features of the wine that are characteristic of the Muscat grape or typical of Muscat-based fortified wines.</p> <p>It may be still useful to consider the following points, as listed in the Cabernet Sauvignon example above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Varietal characteristics Climatic influences Winemaking Styles of wine Quality levels Bottle ageing

<p>based fortified wines. The wine also has low levels of alcohol and is sweet typical of the unaged styles of fortified wines produced from this variety.</p>	<p>For fortified wines, climatic influences are likely to be less noteworthy. Evidence about winemaking and bottle ageing, can lead you to a certain style of fortified wine, which may then have implications for the grape used (for example, characteristics of flor will indicate that the grape is Palomino).</p>
--	--

Grape variety – Muscat de Beaumes-de-Venise – a less successful answer

Example	Commentary
<p>Wine 3</p> <p>Identify the grape variety/varieties, giving reasons for your choice.</p> <p>The grape variety is Muscat.</p> <p>The wine has a lemon colour and pronounced aromas of stone fruit. It is sweet with medium (+) acidity, low alcohol, and a medium length. The quality is good and it is unaged. All points are typical of fortified wines from Muscat.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The answer highlights a number of features that are characteristic of the Muscat grape or typical of Muscat-based fortified wines. <p>However,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The answer does not convincingly argue why these features have led to the identification of Muscat. • There are some irrelevant features mentioned in the answer which suggests the student does not know what the key characteristics of Muscat and the wines it produces are.