

How to taste wine

Before you start

Make sure that you have a separate glass for every wine you are going to taste. Even though there will only be a mouthful in the bottom, it is worth using the largest glasses available as they help you to focus on the aromas.

Sight

Hold up the glass and look at the wine.

OK - it is easy to see whether it is white, pink or red, but if you compare three or four whites or reds, it is immediately obvious that there are lots of different shades. These can give you some useful clues.

Red wines can vary from clear ruby red to almost black. The darker shades will probably indicate that the wine is heavier, richer and possibly more alcoholic than lighter ones.

Similarly with whites. Some are very light, almost colourless, and often this will tell you that they come from a cool climate and are unlikely to have been in an oak barrel (oak gives added colour).

Tilt the glass away from you and look again. If you can put a sheet of



white paper behind it, you will find it easier to see the true colour. The wine should always be clear and not cloudy. If it is cloudy open a fresh bottle as it may well be faulty.

Swirl the glass to agitate the wine. This will release the aroma. Note whether it has any tiny bubbles. Some still wines do have a few 'prickles'.

Some wines will cling to the glass and form 'trickles' down. This may well give you a clue regarding the type

of wine you are tasting. If it is very 'sticky' and takes a long time, it may be high in alcohol or very sweet and sometimes both.

Smell

Then stick your nose in and take a big sniff. Don't expect it to smell of grapes, because with the exception of the Muscat grape, most wines smell of other things. Don't panic here. You are not expected to be able to identify 10 obscure aromas such as leather or tobacco! However, it is likely that you will identify at least one aroma that you recognise, and depending on the individual variety it could well be blackcurrants, butter, vanilla, cherries, peaches, gooseberries or even grass or liquorice. Don't be afraid to say so. What matters is how it smells to you.





are seriously tasting for the first time, all that is required is that you can at least recognise that wines do taste different from each other. Proper tasting is a new experience for most people.

You may well drink wine already, but usually it is a shared social activity and the only time you register the flavour is because it is faulty, too dry, too sweet, or you just don't like it. You are not used to making any assessment.

But when you taste more than one wine at a time compare the different smells and flavours. In time, you will find that you can remember them. And, if you think this is far fetched, remember how learning to ride your bike, driving or sending an email seemed impossible. Yet, you mastered it. Why? Because you wanted or needed to.

Wine tasting is just the same. You can do it. All you need is the determination and the desire... and it beats learning to ride a bike!

Taste

Take a sip. By now you may be desperate to get to the 'tasting bit' but be patient, roll the wine around your mouth so that it reaches all your tastebuds. It is helpful if you suck your cheeks in and draw in some air as well, as it will release more aromas that go up the back of your nasal passage. Don't worry if you sound a bit like a trumpeting elephant. It's par for the course.

Then, write your impressions down. This sounds tedious but it helps to build up the picture.

At this stage you may be losing the will to live as it seems so complicated or silly. Well it can be, but when you

Rate

Is it dry?

Is it sweet?

Is it sticky?

Is it very alcoholic? All wine is alcoholic but the higher the level the warmer and rounder it feels in the mouth.

Does it make your mouth pucker up or feel dry and furry? This indicates tannin.

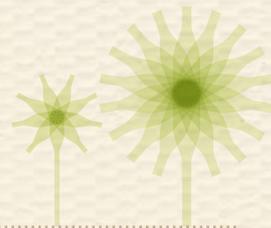
Does it make your mouth water? This indicates high acidity.

Does it taste oaky?

Finally, do you like it?



Running an instore tasting



Giving your customers the chance to taste wine before they buy is a great way to encourage them to trade up/buy wines they've not tried before. It's quite easy to set up and run, you just need to make sure you plan properly in advance.

Looking at your store

Bear in mind you might attract groups of customers at any one time. If you have space the best place to host a wine tasting is by your wine fixture.

Think of timings

Weekends are always popular but would they be too popular and put off customers that want to purchase. How about a couple of early evenings?

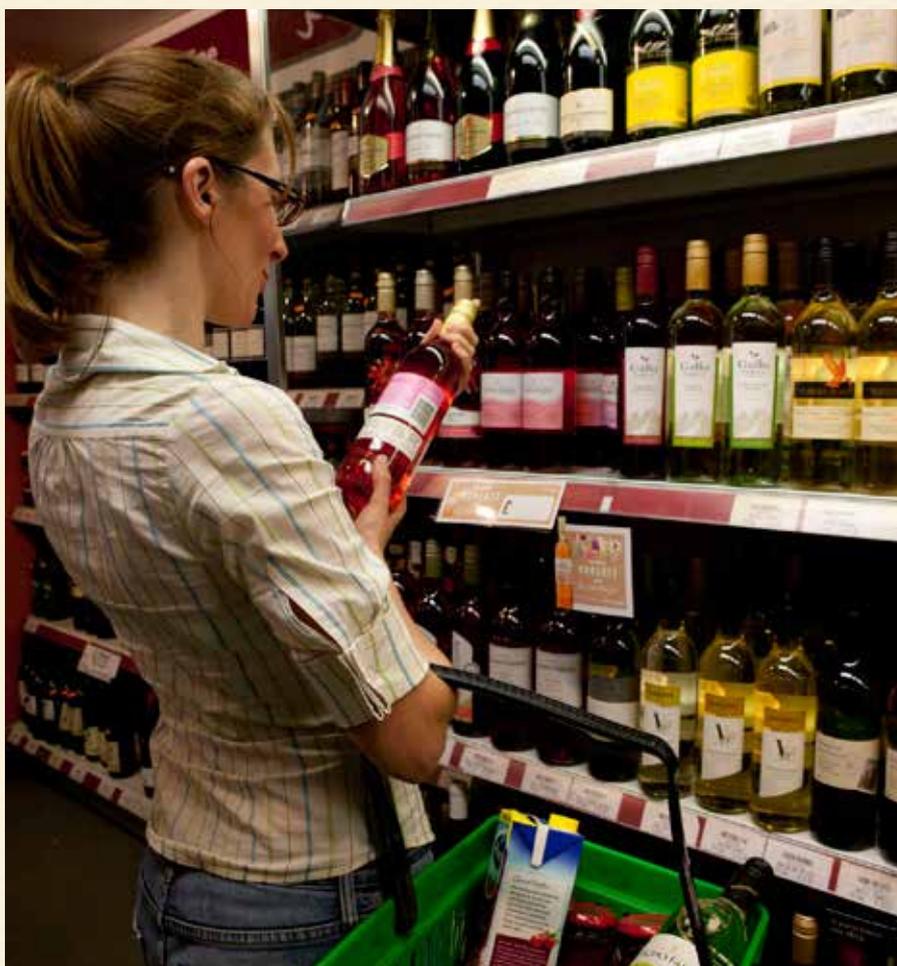
How will you do it?

You will need an area or maybe a small table to take the wines and the sample glasses... But you must think of who will manage the activity, bearing in mind the need to keep your other regular customers happy.

Decide on your wines

You can sample anything from one wine to several, but if you are going to the trouble of setting up a tasting in store, you might as well sample a few wines to make it worthwhile. Most people recommend 3 white/rosé and 3 red.

You can choose whichever wines you like – a random sample from your range, or you could have a theme.



some examples of themes you could try:

New World Wines

Wines from Australia

Wines from the Americas (using California, Chile and Argentina)

Summer Whites

Full bodied reds

Chardonnays from around the world

Rosés

How many bottles do you need for sampling?

Generally speaking, you can get up to 20 samples from a 750ml bottle of wine. The objective is to sample and sell – not give a party! You will need to get hold of some sampling glasses: you can hire them from supermarkets or off-licence chains. Or you can buy clear plastic cups from your local cash and carry or homeware store.

What deals will you have?

Ideally, you will be able to offer the wines you are sampling at special prices. It's always good to be able to offer the double bonus of the chance to "try before you buy" and a special price deal on the day.

Advertising

You can advertise your tasting in the week before with posters in the window or in store or simple leaflets on the counter. Don't forget to tell your regular wine customers about it when they are in store too.

On the day

If you are offering white or rosé wines, make sure they go in the chiller at least two hours before you



plan to use them. Set up your tasting area with plenty of glasses and the wines you are going to sample. Make sure you've got a corkscrew.

Keep a bucket or something similar next to the sampling table for customers to spit out their sample or empty their glasses. Remember that you're not there to get your customers drunk – be firm with your sampling, you're there to "sample and sell". Don't be tempted to charge customers for the samples as this could infringe your off-licence.

Restrict samples only to people entering the premises, that way you can ensure that those who are driving will not drive immediately after a sample.

No money must change hands for anything that is consumed on the premises. If you are using glasses, make sure you keep on top of the washing up so that you always have clean glasses available.

