

The Wine & Spirit Education Trust would like to welcome you and wish you well on your forthcoming Diploma Course.

We hope you enjoy the course and are prepared to work hard.

It is important that you read this guide carefully. It will make your life, while studying for the Diploma, easier and more enjoyable.

The WSET® Level 4 Diploma, whilst academically challenging, is a vocationally oriented qualification and we aim to prepare you for responsible jobs within the wine and spirits business. As a result we place a great emphasis on all round skills. The Diploma course will not only develop your product knowledge to a specialist level, but will also enable you to acquire skills, for example in research and writing, that will continue to be of use beyond your Diploma course.

The WSET® Level 4 Diploma uses a variety of assessment methods. Each unit will have its own assessment schedule. These are set out in the Examination Regulations section of the Specification. Before you start studying it is well worth reading the Specification for the Diploma. This sets out what you need to know and do, to achieve the Diploma qualification; the Specification is contained within this Candidate Portfolio.

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. We will expect you to take a professional approach to your studies, a great deal of responsibility for your success lies with you. In particular your ability to plan and prepare for your assessments. This document is designed to give you guidelines for each of the assessment methods to help you prepare for these.

Once again we wish you well on what will be, in many ways, a challenging but rewarding course of study.



Preparation

Prior Knowledge

Everything on the Diploma course - lectures, (where appropriate) notes and examination - presupposes you have a sound grasp of the up-to-date, Advanced Certificate Syllabus content. It may be worthwhile, in preparation for the course, to re-read the course book for the Advanced Certificate (*Exploring the World of Wines and Spirits*) 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'.

Specification

It is very important that you read the Specification. Any assessment will be restricted to the Learning Outcomes (what you will need to prove you are able to do) and the Syllabus (the context in which those learning outcomes will be assessed) contained within the Specification.

By reading the Specification 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 Specification. The Specification also contains the following:

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



How to use the Diploma Study Guides

Breakdown of Syllabus

In your course materials you will find a copy of the Diploma Specification which contains the syllabus for each unit. The Study Guides are divided up into the Syllabus Units and Elements. You should read the guides in association with both the required reading and the syllabus. Remember the examination and assessments will be based on the syllabus.

The Diploma

This Diploma programme is a combination of self-study and lectures, and we have now introduced a more directed approach to the self-study aspect.

The Diploma notes now play a dual role:

- as a study guide
- as an information resource

Study Guide

The notes will help you gather and interpret information from your main reference resource. They do this by:

- asking questions that will help you cover the key areas
- setting activities to enable you to analyse information and apply it in a business setting
- completing each subject section with self-assessment questions and answers that will help you check what you have learned and monitor your progress

Information

In some instances information on certain subjects may not be available from other sources, or may be out of date. In these cases the notes will act as the main information resource.

Required Reading

There are many valuable sources of information on wines and spirits, and we would always recommend exploring these as widely as possible.

However, in order to ensure consistency across the programme, we have chosen **The Oxford Companion to Wine** (Third Edition) edited by Jancis Robinson, as the required reading for the Diploma Units 3, 5 and 6.

For the vast majority of subject areas, this volume contains all the information you need to complete the Diploma programme. In the few instances where the book does not deal with a subject – such as whisky, for example – or is not up to date, the notes themselves will supply the information.

The entries contain many cross-references to related subjects, and it is important that you follow these up where relevant in order to obtain a more rounded picture (although it is hard not to be sidetracked by some fascinating trails of facts!)

For the specialist, technical Unit on wine production (Unit 2), the Unit 2 study guide is the required reading. For Unit 4 (Spirits) the required reading is **Distilling Knowledge: A Professional Guide to Spirits and Liqueurs** by Dave Broom and the WSET®. These are obtainable by post from the WSET.



Recommended Reading

In addition to the required resource, we will recommend further reading or other information sources from time to time. Often these will be books written by subject matter experts, but sometimes we may direct you to a website or other source.

Don't feel you have to buy or explore all these resources. They are there to provide extra detail if you wish to pursue it; if you choose not to, this will not damage your chances of passing the closed book examinations. You will however need to demonstrate evidence of more extensive reading in order to gain a pass grade for the coursework assessment.

Study advice

Planning

Although the notes will provide plenty of guidance for your studies, we recommend that you take a little time to draw up your own plan of how and when you will work through the programme, and what other resources you can put together to assist you.

Working through the Diploma Notes

These booklets form the basic framework for your study and you should work through them in conjunction with your reference resource. In most cases we have not left space for answers to study guide activities, so you will need a good supply of paper for these. However, there is room in the margins of the booklets for any ideas or comments.

Study Guide Activities

These are important pointers to the key facts and issues you need to address in your studies, so try not to skip any. You may not always need to write down full answers, but you should ensure you make comprehensive notes

Objectives

Read through the learning objectives for each section before you start and when you have finished. They will show you where you are going and allow you to check what you have achieved.

Self-checks

These appear at the back of each main section. Once again, you should tackle them all, as they are a good way of checking your knowledge.

If you have difficulty with any answers, check back through the relevant part of the booklet to refresh your memory.



Business Application

A number of the activities refer to researching information or applying learning 'in your business'. If you do not work in the wine and spirit trade, try to obtain this information from someone who does. Otherwise, make some educated guesses!

Lectures

If you are attending a formal course of study your speakers will be able to answer questions, so read the notes, and relevant sections of *The Oxford Companion to Wine* before the session so you can go with a clear understanding of the subject, or at least a list of relevant questions.

Other Sources of Knowledge

It is important to explore as many avenues of wider knowledge as possible. These might include:

- The Institute of Wines and Spirits
- work colleagues with specialised knowledge of a particular field
- visits to local vineyards, wineries, specialist museums and exhibitions, either at home or overseas
- tasting experience both on and off the course
- informal tasting groups that you can organise with fellow students
- magazines and newspapers
- websites
- questions – there is no shame attached to ignorance, so ask questions!

Other Study Advice

All the above needs scheduling, if only to ensure that you can fit it all in! Students often ask how much time should be devoted to study.

It is difficult to be specific, but as a guide, you should aim to spend, in private study for each unit, a minimum of four times the lecture time devoted to it on the course.

Break your learning up into manageable chunks, particularly if it is some time since you were in formal education.

Ask for help as soon as you think you need it; don't struggle on.

Revision

You will obviously need to collate and review all the information you have gathered and identify and plug any gaps.

These tips may help:

- It's never too early to start revising. Don't leave it all until the end of the course.
- If it helps, make a structured plan of what to revise and when
- Try not to revise in chunks longer than about 30 or 40 minutes without a break (even if it is just for a cup of coffee)
- Build in some variety: don't revise the same subject for hours on end
- Many students have their own tried and tested revision techniques.

These might include:

- using a short note system with key points or header words that will jog your memory to supply the rest
- developing mnemonics - rhymes, acronyms, stories using key words - to remember lists of names or perhaps headings to larger bodies of information
- setting up revision groups of fellow students and devising games, quizzes or other activities to stimulate recall of facts (accompanied perhaps by some wine from the region you're revising)
- recording key information to play back on a personal stereo or in your car
- remember that revision is not a passive process of reading - you need to do things such as writing questions, drawing diagrams.



Assessment

A variety of assessment methods are employed in the Diploma examinations. This variety is to assess the breadth of the learning outcomes and syllabus, the assessments will test both your knowledge and understanding and your practical application of that knowledge.

The assessments aim to prepare you for advancement in employment or onto further studies.

The methods of assessment employed are:

1. Course work assignments
2. Closed book examinations including:
 - Case studies
 - Multiple choice question examinations
 - Written theory examinations
 - Practical tasting examinations



Levels of Assessment Skills

Having an idea of the kinds of skills that are being assessed will help candidates to direct their study effectively and write an answer that demonstrates they have these skills. Consider the following types of assessment, and how each successive one requires a deeper level of expertise:

- Factual Recall - (how things are)
- Explanation - (how things could be and why)
- Analysis - (how things might become and how they ought to be)

Factual Recall

Factual recall tests basic knowledge. This usually takes the form of an answer to a ‘what’, ‘where’ or ‘who’ question. This knowledge can be simply recalled, if known. This is the simplest form of assessment and success can be achieved through simply “learning by rote”.

Sample question	What style of wine is Châteauneuf-du-Pape?
Answer	Full-bodied red wine with relatively soft tannins, lowish acidity and high alcohol.

Factual Recall + Application

Factual recall can be combined with application to assess to a greater depth. This is commonly achieved by putting the question into a relevant context, eg:

Sample question	A customer asks you to recommend a soft, full-bodied red wine. What would you recommend?
Answer	Châteauneuf-du-Pape. <i>This is obviously only one of several legitimate answers.</i>

No matter how many facts the candidate has memorised, these do not constitute an **understanding** of a subject area. If the facts have been learnt by rote, the candidate either knows the answer or not. Using insight to work out what would be a correct answer, when the answer is not known, only comes at the next level: explanation.

The lower level WSET qualifications (Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced Certificate) mostly limit themselves to testing factual recall, assessed via multiple-choice format questions.

In the Diploma, the multiple choice Unit 2 examination, and the questions that require the candidate to write a paragraph about given topics which appear in units 3, 4, 5 and 6 are also mainly testing factual recall and recall + application. Factual recall will get candidates a reasonably long way in the WSET Diploma, but is not sufficient to guarantee success in Unit 1, and is unlikely to be adequate for the Unit 3 theory paper either.



Explanation

Explanation goes beyond ‘what’, ‘where’, and ‘who’, and asks ‘why’. This type of question tests not just memorised knowledge of the subject, but understanding as well. This is because in order to explain something, the candidate needs to know not just ‘*what is the case*’ but ‘*what would be the case if things were different*’. This kind of ‘counterfactual’ understanding is achieved by spotting patterns in the basic facts, and deducing explanatory mechanisms behind them. Alternatively, a tutor could explain the mechanisms. However, if the candidate then finds that they have to memorise this information, it is a clear sign that they have not really understood it, and will not be able to apply the mechanism themselves in other scenarios, such as in the examination itself.

The human brain naturally tries to find patterns in data – though some people are able to do this more easily than others are. These patterns mean that a lot of information can be deduced from a few simple principals. The skill of explanation is a higher order skill than recall, but the amount of data that needs to be memorised is less.

Sample question	Why is Châteauneuf-du-Pape a full-bodied, high-alcohol red wine with relatively soft tannins?
Alternatively	Account for the style of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, or explain the style of Châteauneuf-du-Pape.
Answer	The Grenache grape naturally gives wines that are high in alcohol, and full-bodied, but with soft tannins. The hot ripening conditions due to the location in sunny Southern France, aided by low-trained bunches benefiting from heat reflected from the ground also helps achieve fully ripe tannins and speeds sugar accumulation in the grapes.

A much more detailed explanation is also possible of course, and would be expected in the examination itself.

The basic facts (hot climate, Grenache-dominated blend) could be memorised and recalled, but what makes this a question about **understanding** rather than **factual recall** is the implication that if these causal factors were altered, then the style of Châteauneuf would change. For example, if the climate were cooler, then alcohol levels would be lower, and the tannins less ripe, or if more Carignan (or Cabernet) were used in the blend, then the wine would have firmer tannins, lower alcohol and less body.

Explanation + Application

Just like factual recall, explanation can also be applied to a particular situation to assess explanation combined with application. This is where the counterfactual implications of the causal process are explicitly put to work. For example, if X were not the case, then B, rather than A would be the outcome.

Sample question	You are a producer of Châteauneuf-du-Pape and one of your important clients has requested a wine with lower alcohol. How can you meet this demand?
Answer	This would take the form of a list of things you could do to achieve this style, such as altering the blend to include less Grenache; sourcing grapes from cooler sites; increasing yields; using the vine canopy to shade the ripening fruit; retraining the vines to raise the fruiting zone; using open fermenters and low-conversion yeast strains, etc, etc...

The WSET Diploma assessment, particularly the essay-format questions in Unit 3, aims to test **understanding** of the subject, rather than an ability to **recall facts**, but there is another level above this which should be considered particularly during preparation for Unit 1. This is **analysis**.

Analysis

Analysis requires you to draw conclusions from the facts and the causal mechanisms behind the facts. This might involve issues such as:

- identifying and extrapolating trends to make predictions.
- identifying which of a set of explanations is the most likely, or which of a set of causes is the most important.
- identifying what the consequences of something are.

Sample question	Average alcohol levels in Châteauneuf-du-Pape have been rising over the last ten years. What are the main reasons for this and to what extent is the trend likely to continue?
Answer	An important point here is that in this context the inclusion of the word ‘main’ (as in ‘main reasons’) is not making life easy by limiting responses to some rather than all of the possible reasons. It is challenging the candidate to identify which, of all the possible reasons, are the most important ones. Once these have been identified, the candidate would have to argue to what extent they are likely to continue to have an effect.

Analysis + application

In the same way that recall of knowledge and explanatory skills can be “applied”, so can analysis. This usually takes the form of making recommendations.

Sample question	What, if anything, should producers in Châteauneuf-du-Pape do in order to slow or reverse the trend towards increasing alcohol levels?
Answer	Note the subtle difference between ‘what can they do’ (a list of possible responses, as set out under ‘explanation + application’ above) and ‘what should they do’. In order to establish what producers should do, it is necessary to consider the possibilities, and argue which of these are going to be the most prudent or effective and this forms the basis of the response to the question.

Summary

As candidates progress from Foundation and Intermediate Certificate to Advanced Certificate, they move from learning ‘what wines are like’ to understanding ‘why they are like that’. An understanding of the six factors taught at Advanced Certificate level will form an excellent foundation for Units 3, 4, 5 and 6, but Unit 1 offers the chance to go beyond ‘what the world is like’ and ‘why it is like that’ to examine ‘what the world could be like’, ‘what it should be like’ and ‘what we should do about it’. These are far more interesting and challenging questions than mere factual recall. They should inspire candidates to explore the possibilities as they ponder them and hopefully find some convincing solutions.



Course Work Assignments

1 Course Work Assignment

One course work assignment (CWA) is required for unit 1:

Unit 1 - The Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages

The assignment will take the form of a report or essay of 2500 - 3000 words.

Titles for the coursework assignment will be posted on the WSET website (www.wsetglobal.com) approximately five months in advance of the first submission date, and there will be one compulsory assignment title for each submission date.

Candidates must register with their APP two weeks prior to submission.

An assignment submitted for marking must be valid for the specific submission date and academic year in which it is submitted. Candidates may only submit a given CWA title once in any academic year.

An assignment submitted for marking must be written in English.

You may start your assignment at any time, but it can only be marked after the submission date. You must not send your assignments directly to WSET® Awards. For an assignment to be valid for assessment purposes, it must be sent to WSET® Awards by the Approved Programme Provider with whom you are registered. The submission dates for assignments are the second Tuesday in November and April. The penalties for missing your submission date are discussed later in this document.

Each assignment will have a particular 'business' issue as part of the brief. Once you have successfully completed one assignment and one case study you will be awarded **Unit 1 - The Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages**.

For candidates enrolled prior to August 2008, Unit 1 is assessed by four coursework assignments of 1500-2000 words. Titles for these assignments will be posted on the WSET website. For further details contact your APP.



Sample Candidate Assignment Brief

Assignment title:

Has the bubble burst for Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay?

CONTENT, SUGGESTED APPROACH AND SECTIONS IN THE REPORT:

1. Context

Based on evidence of what is currently taking place in wine producing regions throughout the world, the candidate should compile a report to illustrate whether the bubble for these varieties has indeed burst or not. This report should be backed up by statistical evidence of what is taking place and should analyse the effect consumer demand is having on the situation, as well as consider the various ways in which the wine trade and wine industry are reacting.

2. Strategy and required sections

a) *Introduction:*

Discussion of the opening statement and personal views.

Current trends in consumer preference in the candidate's local market.

b) *Report on Production:*

This should include analysis of where these varieties are grown and discussion of current trends in the vineyard and the winery.

c) *Consumer demand:*

The candidate should consider what effect consumer demand is having on these varieties. This should include discussion of whether the consumer is tired of these varieties and is therefore seeking greater diversity and choice of other varieties. Research will also be required to establish current trends in the local and/or global market.

d) *Reaction of wine trade:*

The candidate should consider what initiatives the wine trade, in all its many guises, is doing to meet consumer demand or capitalise on the popularity of these varieties. This section should include analysis of both production (vineyard and winery), distribution, sales and marketing.

e) *Conclusion and personal commentary:*

The candidate should aim to draw together their ideas and indicate any additional factors or actions that have a bearing on the topic under discussion.

MARKING

Structure:

The report should be of between 2500 and 3000 words in length (not including appendices, tables or diagrams) with a declared wordcount and bibliography which is correctly referenced throughout the body of the assignment. Allocation of marks will be as follows:

Structure and style (coherence, flair, fluency, use of examples), bibliography showing diversity of evidence of research which is used appropriately and correctly referenced, presentation (spelling, grammar, legibility) - **20%**

Section a) - **5%**

Section b) - **45%**

Section c) - **10%**

Section d) - **15%**

Section e) - **5%**

Examiners will be looking for:

- Evidence to justify all allegations made to support the outcome of the report and analysis
- Explicit evidence within the body of the assignment of careful and thoughtful study of the elective materials plus additional evidence of diverse and relevant research.
- Good presentation and clear thinking. This includes good layout, contents lists, summary and references.
- Evidence of original and reflective thought and an ability to analyse and question data.



1.1 Word-processing versus writing

Do I have to word-process my essays, or is it okay to write them by hand? The answer is, the choice is yours. Word-processed (WP) has many advantages; it is easier on the eye of the Examiner and gives a professional finish to your work.

However, you will not lose marks if your assignment is hand written, provided your hand writing is neat and legible. An assignment that is littered with crossing out (and/or worse, the vestiges of last night's pizza), is too much to expect even the best intentioned examiner to struggle with. Poorly presented written work may result in a lower grade been given to the assignment.

WP 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 assignment; you can also use a formatting system which enables you to produce a very professional printed lay-out.

There are disadvantages to WP too, which you should not ignore. WP is reliant on machinery. As you know machinery can go wrong.

Computer and printer failure are never acceptable excuses for late submission of work. If you are going to WP, ensure that you allow time for the machinery to go awry in some way - it almost always will!

Only hard copies of assignments will be marked. You should also make a hard copy for your own record, as originals will not be returned after marking.

1.2 Assignment Presentation

Assignments submitted for marking must be in written English.

The main text should be in a single 12 point font, e.g. Times New Roman or similar. An alternative font such as Arial in a smaller point size may be more appropriate in diagrams and tables. Use bolding for emphasis within the text and for section headings.

Any material copied directly from another author must be enclosed in quotation marks, followed immediately by a reference to the source. Individual quotations should not normally exceed one paragraph, and **quotations should not exceed 5% of the length of the report.** Text which has been 'lifted' without the correct acknowledgement will have a negative impact on the final grade awarded for your work.

Colour printing may be used for charts, screen-shots etc. Clarity is more important than fancy graphics. Avoid clip-art except where required for drawing diagrams.

You are responsible for the accuracy of the finished work, so after it has been completed you should use the spell-checker to catch any typographical and spelling errors. You should also proof-read it yourself (or have it read by someone else), as the spell-checker is not likely to catch every error. Sloppy proof reading will certainly detract from the content of your work.

Your assignment must be of the appropriate length. **Assignments submitted with less than 2500 words will be graded a fail.** Assignments over 3000 words will only be marked up to 3000 words. Any work over 3000 words will not be considered for the overall mark.

The word count should not include:

- Index
- Bibliography
- Annotations on diagrams, pictures etc.

A word count MUST be included.

1.3 Covering Information

You will need to complete an **Assignment Report Form (ARF)** and attach it to your hard copy of the assignment. An assignment missing the ARF will not be marked but returned to the Approved Programme Provider. It can be resubmitted, however at best this may result in a delay in you receiving your results, at worst it could result in a fail grade.



DIPLOMA ASSIGNMENT REPORT FORM



WSET[®]
AWARDS

Candidate Number		APP name:
OLD Format Title Number	1 / 2 / 3 / 4 (circle as appropriate)	APP number:
NEW Format Title Number	1 / 2 (circle as appropriate)	
Assignment Title		
Submission Date		
<p>I declare that the attached work is entirely my own, other than in the sections where all sources of reference are clearly and properly indicated and acknowledged. I understand that the WSET[®] has a policy relating to all forms of cheating as set out in the Candidate Assessment Guide. In the event that the work I am attributing to myself is found NOT to be entirely my own, I acknowledge that I may be subject to penalties and/or disciplinary procedures.</p>		
<p>_____</p> <p>SIGNED (candidate signature required)</p>		
Examiner's Comments		

1.4 Assignment Structure

The simplest structure you can imagine is a beginning, middle and an end. Below is a graphic illustration of how this simple structure can be applied to an assignment.

Assignment Structure

Beginning

Introduction

The introduction:

- Sets the question topic against a wider background
- Clarifies your understanding of the question
- Defines key or problematic terms
- Outlines the approach you will be taking to the question

Middle

Main Text

The main body of the assignment:

- Your key points are clearly presented
- The points you make are systematically backed up by facts / evidence / examples / arguments
- Quotations and references to other works are accurately cited
- Any diagrams, figures or tables are labelled properly

End

Conclusions

The conclusion:

- Brings together the main points
- Links back to the question
- States clearly your conclusion(s)

The three parts fit the useful maxim about communications usually abbreviated to:

'tell 'em, tell 'em and tell 'em.

The Introduction

- tell the examiner what you are going to tell them

The Main Body

- tell them in detail

The Conclusion

- tell them what you have told them - in other words - summarise



A report may require you to present a case study or argument, which may be more complex than a straightforward essay style assignment, below is a graphic illustration of how the three part structure can be adapted.

Assignment Structure - Report			
Introduction	Main Text		Conclusions
Situation	Implications	Possibilities	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Setting out the situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describing the implications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reviewing the possibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Making a recommendation

1.5 Report and Essay Writing

This section is written to provide basic information regarding our general expectations for report and essay writing. An assignment might still speak of an essay - but in business you write reports.

However, regardless of the format adopted, it is vital you recognise that writing skills are essential throughout your course and probably essential if you are to develop a worthwhile career. Effective communication is at the heart of good management. Consequently, it is worth taking some time to think about the nature of the task and the best ways of tackling it.

Understanding what you should be aiming to achieve when writing reports and essays, and the best ways of going about it, will help ensure that you derive maximum benefit as well as achieving good marks.

You should also note that the approach adopted for this mini-report could usefully be adopted in your theory exam for Unit 3.

1.5.1 Understanding the Question

It is essential to start by reading the question carefully. What exactly are you asked to do? Is it a broad survey or is a narrow focused discussion appropriate?

What are the assumptions behind the question? What are the limits to the topic?

Does it require you to consider one issue or more than one?

In focusing on the assignment task, it is often useful to underline the key words in the question - those that specify the kind of report or essay required. Here are some examples:

Analyse: minutely examine the structure or component parts.

Compare: Look for similarities and differences and perhaps reach a conclusion as to which is preferable.

Contrast: Set in position, in order to bring out differences.

Criticise: Give a reasoned judgement about the merits of theories, or opinions about the truth of facts. Back your judgement by a discussion of evidence or reasoning involved.

Define: Set down the precise meaning of a word or phrase. In some cases it may be necessary or desirable to examine different, possible or often used definitions.

Describe: Give a detailed or graphic account.

Differentiate or Distinguish: Explain the difference.

Discuss: Investigate or examine by argument; sift and debate; give reasons for and against. Also examine the implications.

Evaluate: Make an appraisal of the worth of something, in the light of its truth or usefulness. Include, to a lesser degree, an opinion.

Explain: Make plain; interpret and account for; give reasons for.

Illustrate: Use a figure or diagram to explain or clarify; or make clear by the use of concrete examples.

Interpret: Expound the meaning of; make clear and explicit, usually giving your own judgements also.

Justify: Show adequate grounds for decisions or conclusions; and answer the main objections likely to be made to them.



Outline : Give the main features, or general principles of a subject, omitting minor details and emphasising structure and arrangements.

Relate : Show how things are connected to each other, and to what extent they are alike, or affect each other.

Review : Make a survey of; examine the subject carefully.

State : Present in brief, clear form.

Summarise : Give a concise account of the chief points of a matter, omitting details and examples.

Trace : Follow the development or history of a topic from some point of origin.

Sometimes an assignment or topic will include more than one of these key words. In this case it is important to take account of all and not just some of them. For example, if you were asked to describe and discuss a theory or event, you would need to give a detailed account of the theory/event and then give a response for and against, examining implication, etc. If you only focus on one of the key words, you will only have completed half the task.

If you have any doubts as to what is required, ask the lecturer - preferably in class so that it is clear to everyone and there is no ambiguity.

1.5.2 Gathering Material

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 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 questions/topics that you think may be relevant to the questions, 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 questions. 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 Guides and lecture notes may be relevant, but never merely regurgitate them. Assignments are not designed to test factual knowledge in isolation. Look for sources that give opposing views. Discuss the question with your fellow students. Never follow one source too closely, especially if this is an introductory text or summary.

Most important of all, **NEVER PLAGIARISE.**

- e) Keep a notebook or file cards for your notes. When taking notes don't rewrite the book - just jot down the vital points. **ALWAYS RECORD THE SOURCE**, including the page numbers because:
 - you may need to expand on your notes when you come to write your report, and it is often useful to look at your source details; and
 - you must give references to the sources of information and ideas used.

1.5.3 Planning your Assignment

Planning is vital for good written work. It provides a structure, which helps you to write the report. It shows the reader that you are in command of the topic and that you understand what the question requires of you. It gives fluency and helps you to avoid irrelevance. Your plan should consist of a series of brief headings or notes. Never let your source books and journals dictate your plan - they are unlikely to be written in answer to your specific question. Following too closely the approach taken in source material may amount to plagiarism, but in any case makes it very difficult for you to demonstrate that you have understood the material and can develop your own ideas.

The structure should be divided into the following main sections:

Introduction

Keep to less than 10% of the total length. Comment on the topic and explain your interpretation of the question. Say what areas or aspects you intend to cover and those you are not going to discuss, and why. It is often appropriate to outline the order of the discussion so as to help the reader through your report. It may be necessary to define some key terms.

Main Body

(this is, of course, an inappropriate title in a report)

When planning the main body of the report, put down your main points in a sensible order – one that will enable your discussion to flow and which avoids repetition.

Where appropriate expand on the points with examples or illustrations. Check that your discussion answers the question.

If the question has two or more parts, make sure you keep these distinct, and allow the proper amount of space for each.

The main part of your report may usefully be sub-divided into sub-sections.

Conclusion

Keep this to just over 10% of the total length. Summarise your main ideas and/or arguments. Ensure that your conclusion corresponds to the question asked, and that it follows from the discussion in the main body. It is not always possible to give a firm answer to a question; instead you may need to explain your uncertainties.

It may be appropriate to suggest the wider implications of your discussion, or point to future trends, or areas that are worthy of further research.

1.5.4 Writing the Assignment

General Approach

Your plan is your guide to the finished report, but you need not set about writing it in the order in which it will finally appear. Many people find the introduction is the most difficult part to write. So long as you have made the essential decision about what will go into the introduction (see above) you can leave it unwritten until after completing the main body.

Whenever possible, write a first rough draft and leave it for a short while before reading it through again. You will find it far easier to be objective and critical about your own work.

Deal with each point in turn, discussing them fully before passing to the next.

Avoid repetition and irrelevance. Insert any tables and figures that are necessary in the appropriate place giving a clear heading, number and source. Avoid using them where they have no relevance to the question set.

Sub-headings should be used where appropriate, but make sure they do not break up the flow of the report.

Arrange your material into paragraphs. Each paragraph should deal with one topic or idea. This is generally stated in the first sentence; then developed or elaborated. Try to avoid one-sentence paragraphs. Closely related material should be in the same paragraph, but avoid wandering from one topic to another.

Flow and Coherence

The flow and coherence of your discussion will depend on the flow of your topics, and hence your paragraphs and the way you think about them. There should be a continuous thread of argument or discussion throughout, with each point leading on to the next. It is a good idea to put contrasting points in adjacent paragraphs, e.g. for and against; cause and effect; positive and negative; merits and detriments, etc.

Link paragraphs by using 'transition' words or phrases, e.g. 'however', 'it follows that', 'consequently',

'furthermore', 'on the other hand', etc. But be careful to use these properly, eg don't use 'therefore' unless what follows is implied by (follows from) the previous point. Do not over-use the same few transition words.

Starting each paragraph or new point the same way does not make for a report that reads well.

Style

Your style is unique to you, but it is not fixed and not beyond improvement.

Always aim first at clarity and brevity. A good, varied, fresh vocabulary is attractive, but try to use simple straightforward language where possible and only use technical terms that are essential for precision. Avoid slang, colloquialisms, clichés and hackneyed words. Use short sentences, especially where you want to make a clear powerful point. Longer sentences can give a pleasant contrast to these, but avoid a jungle of subordinate clauses.

The style must be appropriate to the subject matter and discipline. That which is suitable for literary creation will not be suitable for business and commerce.

These demand evidence and rational argument, coherently and concisely stated.

Avoid using the first person singular. Phrases such as "*I think*" usually lead onto unsubstantiated conjecture. What is required is reasoned well-supported argument leading to phrases such as "*research has shown*" or "*it can be seen that*" - properly referencing your sources, of course!

Examples and Quotations

It is often useful to illustrate a point or argument with an example but this also involves dangers. Avoid excessively long, elaborate examples, which might unbalance your report and detract from the main thread of discussion. Ensure that the example does make the point you intend to make. You can draw examples from your own experience but avoid numerous anecdotes. Always use examples to illustrate a point, never to establish a generality.

Short quotations can be used sparingly, so long as full references are given.

Never copy sections out of your source books and journals.

English, Spelling and Punctuation

Report making is, to some extent, influenced by factors other than content and structure. Poor English, spelling mistakes or scruffy presentation will all detract from the impression given by your report.

At the very least your written English must be good enough not to detract from the clarity and precision of your discussion, and, preferably, enhance it.

1.5.6 Checking your Report

As mentioned earlier, it is always advisable to read through the first draft or your report very critically. It is also essential to double-check the final draft. In both cases a checklist is useful.

Report and Essay Writing Check List

- Have I answered the particular question that was set?
- Have I divided all the questions into separate, smaller questions and answered these?
- Have I covered all of the main aspects?
- Have I covered these in enough depth?
- Is the content accurate?
- Have I arranged the material logically?
- Does the report move smoothly from one section to the next, from paragraph to paragraph?
- Do examples and arguments support each main point?
- Have I acknowledged all sources and references?
- Have I distinguished clearly between my own ideas and those of others?
- Is the report the right length - both according to the word limit set and for its own purpose?
- Have I written plainly and simply?
- Have I read it aloud to sort out clumsy and muddled phrasing?
- Are the grammar, punctuation and spelling accurate?
- Have I presented a convincing case, which I could justify in discussion?

1.6 Submitting your Assignment

Standards of Presentation/Literacy

A good standard of literacy, written style and presentation is expected for all assessed work. **Work displaying poor standards of literacy or presentation will be penalised.** Students with special learning difficulties should speak to their APP who will make every effort to assist in line with WSET® Awards Special Needs Policy.

Plagiarism, Collusion and Cheating on Assessment

Don't! 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. Don't lend your notes, computer disks or assignments 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.

If the assignment is an individual piece of work, make sure that it is your own work and not that of a group. Presenting a piece of work as yours when it is, in fact, the work of a group is collusion and is a form of fraud.

Penalties for plagiarism include being marked failed on the assignment or failed on the unit.

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.

Referencing

The best way to avoid any risk of plagiarism is to reference all the important ideas and facts in your work.

Referencing is important in its own right. A business report or an academic essay needs to demonstrate its validity by giving the sources of the ideas, concepts and data used in the work. A precise reference, that enables the reader to locate the material referred to exactly, is the hallmark of good quality work. References within your report should be made using the author's surname, followed by the date of publication, eg Douglas (1999) or (Greaves and Rawlings, 1998b). The positioning of the brackets depends on the wording in the text. The suffixes a, b, c, etc. are added to differentiate between publications by the same author(s) in the same year.

Bibliography

A bibliography provided at the end of your work should include books (and pamphlets and journals, etc) that you have consulted, as well as those directly referenced.

All assignments must include a bibliography, omission of this could result in a fail/fail refer grade.

The following is an example of a possible format. The bibliography may be a single list in alphabetical order by author. The format of each entry will vary depending on whether it is a book or journal publication.

Book :

Other, A.N. (1984)
A Book Title, London: Methuen

Journal :

Other, A.N. and Good, B. (1983)
Title of Journal Article

Verbal communications :

Other, A.N. date and industry sector

Material published on the World Wide Web will often be available in print, in which case the normal reference format can be adapted. The full URL (Uniform Resource Locator) should also be provided with the date that the information was obtained, for example :

www.wset.co.uk September 2003

Assignments must be accompanied by a bibliography, which we expect to be both extensive and diverse.

Meeting Deadlines

It is your responsibility to ensure that you hand in all pieces of coursework by the required dates you have registered for. **Any work that is not handed in or presented on the date registered for, will not be marked. The examination fee will be forfeited and candidates must re-register for an alternative submission date.**

Note that the maximum grade that may be awarded on a re-sit assessment is a Pass.

Please remember, do not count on word processing your assignment the day it is due to be submitted, or even the day before. Inability to gain access to a computer or printer is not deemed a satisfactory reason for late submission.

Disk loss or corruption will not be accepted as an excuse for anything - it is up to you to make back-ups.

Submission deadlines are sacrosanct and late work will not be accepted. You will not get away with completing work late in business and it is our policy to establish meeting deadlines as a good habit.

In exceptional circumstances you may apply for an extension to the submission date.

You should complete an Assignment Extension Form, attaching any Medical Certificate or other written evidence, and return it to the APP Course Administrator. Students must normally apply as soon as possible but no later than one week before the submission date. All such applications will be dealt with by the WSET® Awards Examinations Co-ordinator who will reply in writing, setting a new submission date where appropriate. Unless there are genuine and unavoidable reasons for delayed submission, such requests will not be granted.

Note that whilst cases of genuine difficulty will be treated sympathetically, extensions are not granted automatically, and you are expected to organise your workload to ensure that deadlines can be comfortably met.

Job workloads and holidays are not sufficient to gain an extension.



1.7 Feedback

When your assignment is marked, your APP will keep it and return the ARF to you with examiner comments about the assignments strengths and the areas that you could profitably target for improvement next time round. Do read the comments the examiner makes, when you receive the ARF back and when you begin to write the next one. These comments will also be valuable in preparation for the closed book examinations. However, you should bear in mind that the volume of marking that examiners have to deal with can be very considerable and that it may not always be possible to give lengthy comments on individual pieces of work.

You will need to take a balanced view of what the examiner said; note what went well in your assignment, in addition to points where your argument or style were challenged. Congratulate yourself on anything that was an improvement over last time, before noting what you will try differently in your next assignment. Don't dwell on negative feelings associated with lack of success in some areas; this will do nothing for your morale or for your writing. Instead, use feedback to make plans for new behaviours you can try out. If and when those work, it will be a morale booster.

You may think of feedback as something that happens only after an assignment is completed, but it may sometimes be more helpful to consult someone else during the process of assignment production. Do not underestimate how useful colleagues and other students may be as a resource to support your learning. Ask other students to look at your work, and offer to read and comment on theirs. This will help

you build a realistic picture of what other people's work is like, and you can gain useful comments about the clarity and organisation of your own work. If someone else's work seems to be more successful than your own in some respects, don't put yourself down. Try and pinpoint what they did that made it more successful, and try it out for yourself next time. Don't be tempted to plagiarise others work, the consequences can be severe, not only for you, but also for the person who may be the innocent party.

1.8 Assignment Grades

In order to achieve a **Distinction** the student must:

- use a diversity of research methods to collect, analyse and process complex information / data
- display in-depth detailed specialist knowledge and understanding of the subject
- evaluate and synthesise relevant information and justify valid conclusions
- show an individual approach in presenting and communicating work coherently, using language fluently.

In order to achieve a **Merit** the student must:

- use a diversity of information sources
- display a clear understanding of the subject with greater depth of factual coverage, accuracy of information and examples
- coherently present and communicate work using language accurately.

A **Pass** grade is achieved by meeting all the requirements defined in the assessment criteria for each assignment. This is the highest grade awarded for a re-sit submission.

A **Fail** grade is given when:

- candidates have not covered all points listed in the assignment brief
- there is very little understanding of the subject
- the objectives have been poorly defined
- the criteria for assessment have not been achieved
- a poor quality attempt has been made at the activity.

A **Fail unclassified** grade is given when:

- candidates have not covered all points listed in the assignment brief
- there is no understanding of the subject
- the objectives have been omitted
- the criteria for assessment have not been achieved
- a seriously deficient attempt has been made at the activity.

No assignments can be resubmitted with the aim of achieving a higher grade.

Resits for fail grades can only be submitted using titles not already attempted. No higher than a pass grade can be achieved for the assignment and pass with merit for the unit.

1.9 Enquiries

Any queries concerning the results will be dealt with in line with WSET® Awards enquiries procedures. These are available from your APP.

3 Closed Book Examinations

You are required to pass closed book examinations for the following units:

Unit 1 - Business of wine

A closed book exam based on a case study that has been released 20 working days before the exam.

Unit 2 - Wine Production

A multiple choice examination of 100 questions.

Unit 3 - Light Wines of the World

A practical tasting examination of two tasting papers of six wines each.

A written theory examination of 5 questions.

Unit 4 - Spirits of the World

A practical tasting examination of 3 spirits and one theory question.

Unit 5 - Sparkling Wines of the World

A practical tasting examination of 3 wines and one theory question.

Unit 6 - Fortified Wines of the World

A practical tasting examination of 3 wines and one theory question.

3.1 Unit 1 closed book exams based on a case study.

Many of the points that that apply to open-book assignments also apply to the closed book exams. The main differences are that

- Until you enter the exam room, you will not know exactly which questions you are expected to answer (though you will know the subject area)
- You are not expected to cite all sources for statistics, quotes etc, or provide a bibliography.
- There is no upper or lower word limit, although in a 75 minute exam that expects some sophisticated, authoritative and detailed argument, you should expect to write approximately 1000-1500 words (about 4-5 sides of A4 paper in average sized handwriting)

Candidates will be issued with a Candidate Case Study Brief which they should download from the WSET website, www.wsetglobal.com. This will be posted 20 working days 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. However, the Case Study Brief will give a very good indication of what the likely focus of the question will be. The sample case study briefs and examination papers in this report also give more guidance. The examination question will be in multiple parts, all of which are compulsory. Candidates will be expected to structure their response accordingly, with clearly defined divisions (for example, using subheadings for the sections). However, this does not mean that responses should be submitted as stand-alone, numbered paragraphs nor are they individual essay questions. A full essay style is compulsory – this simply means an introduction, followed by the body of the essay with clear subdivisions that address each part of the question and a short concluding paragraph.

The most important thing to remember is that research prior to the examination should not simply consist of gathering facts, statistics, quotes, and other people's opinions. There is a danger the candidate will collect a lot of these and mislead themselves into thinking they are well prepared for the examination. It is better to take a different starting point and a different means of managing the direction of data collection.



Starting Point

The topic area will already have been defined. This could be a sector of an industry that is facing problems, or where there are interesting questions that can be asked. These may be challenging problems (such as how to solve excess production of bulk wine in the EU), or more straightforward ones (such as how to manage the marketing of a product).

Directing Study

Rather than gathering data and opinions, start by trying to establish some key facts that will give you a sound understanding of the topic area, such as:

- what the likely problems are that the topic area faces
- what the possible solutions are (try to gather examples of things that have really been suggested, or even better, have really been tried)
- which of the possible solutions to the main issues are, in your opinion, the most effective or promising
- why you believe these are the best solutions.

It is also important to establish who the key opinion formers are in the particular subject area. In some cases (for example, climate change), you will discover a clear consensus of opinion, and easily be able to identify those whose opinions are considered eccentric or maverick. Maverick opinions can still be used, but your answer will carry more authority if you show you are aware such opinions lie outside the mainstream. In other fields, there may be two or more conflicting 'schools of thought'. If you have done sufficient research, you should be able to identify what these are, and the key figures in each school. You may decide that one of these schools is correct, but a rounded answer should show awareness of what the other opinion-makers think.

Once you have established the problems, schools of thought and possible solutions to the problems, you are then in a position to research the subject with the aim of collecting particular examples, statistics, authoritative opinions etc that can be used to support opinions expressed. You may even find as you do this, that your views alter. They should certainly become more sophisticated, better argued, and more insightful.

It is possible that the Case Study Brief that introduces the topic area will help guide you towards certain problems, or make you aware of a context for asking the question. A good sign is if, after researching the topic a bit, you return to the brief to find that parts that originally seemed obscure now seem to offer some clues as to what the examination question might possibly be.

The Examination

It should be clear by now that no amount of basic fact-gathering, taken in isolation, will be sufficient to pass the Unit 1 examination. Even if the candidate successfully recalls all the statistics and quotes they were able to find in their research, this will not demonstrate the appropriate skills to the examiner unless the 'why' and the 'what should we do about it' parts of the argument are also answered convincingly.

SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

The following mock examination was given to candidates preparing for assessment in March 2008.

Candidate case study brief:

Meltdown, or the implications of climate change for the wine industry.

It is generally accepted that viticulture was introduced to Europe by the Romans and coincided with a period of warmth that facilitated this. There have been a number of climatic changes since then, most significantly a sharp drop in global temperature in the 14th century. A number of scientists believe that the current change in world temperatures is just another passing cycle in this trend and that temperatures will revert to their normal pattern with time. Others have warned of the possibility of a mini ice age similar to that experienced from 1660 to 1830. In any event, there is a growing body of research that indicates that climate change IS taking place with carbon emissions generally blamed for this phenomenon.

In recent years the issues relating to climate change have fuelled much debate in political circles, with topics such as the impact of developing economies in Asia and India, the growth of movements such as the Green Party in European governments and the Republican oil lobby in the US.

It is therefore widely acknowledged that climate change is a real threat for the wine industry as a whole and many projections have been made about what will happen to the global climate if the rate of emissions continues to increase. There is also plenty of evidence available to suggest what effect this will have on the existing wine producing regions of the world and the potential for new developments. There is no doubt at all that the impact of climate change will bring about many changes. Whilst some of these may well be positive, others could spell disaster for some regions as we currently know them. Higher average temperatures will result in changes in vine physiology, which in turn would influence viticulture and winemaking in most wine producing regions. Global warming will certainly force changes in order to ensure sustainability of current warm wine growing regions. It will potentially change wine styles in some regions and even necessitate the creation of completely new areas for wine production. However, global warming is only one aspect of the current indications of climate change and the long term effects for the wine industry merit far wider ranging research and consideration, such as impacts on quality regulations, changes in the winery, transport, and even marketing. After all, it will even affect consumer behaviour, potentially altering the demand for certain styles of wine.

It is vital for the trade as a whole to be aware of how the global wine industry, from the level of an individual grower to that of a multinational company, will be required to respond to this threat. Global warming will change the shape of the wine industry, leading to changes in consumption trends with possible increase in demand for the very styles of wines which could be the most difficult to produce. All of this combines to make climate change one of the most important issues facing the industry over the next few decades.



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 is of one hour's 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 as a written assignment with clear structure and presentation as described in the Candidate Assessment 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 assignment of diverse and relevant research drawn from both the trade and general press, plus other general publications and course materials as necessary.
- Evidence that the information and examples uncovered by research have been the subject of careful study and analysis before being deployed in the assignment.
- Evidence of original thought and an ability to analyse and question data.
- Good presentation and clear thinking.

Candidates must address all required sections of the question and gain an overall minimum mark of 55% to qualify for a pass grade.

*The time allowed for this paper has since been extended to 75 minutes.

The same candidates were then presented with the following examination question:

The following question is **compulsory**.

It should be answered in its entirety on the answer sheets enclosed.

Answers should be presented in the format of a written assignment, with clear structure and subdivisions as described in the Candidate Assessment Guide.

Meltdown, or the implications of climate change for the wine industry.

- a) Discuss the emergence of climate change as an issue for the world in general and the wine industry in particular.
- b) Explain the likely impact of climate change on the world's existing wine regions. Examples must be drawn from climatically and geographically diverse regions. The effects of climate change on aspects of the wine industry, aside from the vineyards, should also be considered.
- c) What can be done if climate change does follow the course of some of the projections? The differing options open to individual growers versus multinational drinks companies should be considered. The practicalities and cost implications of any responses should be indicated.

The following case study brief was issued to candidates registered to sit the pilot closed book examination in March 2008. All candidates in the Pilot were studying at the WSET School in the UK, and the question focuses on the UK retail sector.

Supermarkets – friend or foe?

The business profile of the UK's major supermarkets has changed enormously over the past 10 years. There is now no doubt that they are becoming increasingly powerful in terms of their position compared with other sectors of the wine and spirit trade. Approximately 70-75% of all wine consumed in the UK is currently sold through the off-trade, with around 73% of this sold by the supermarkets. This has led many to question how this position of dominance has come about.

The impact of this dominance is being felt in all sectors of the wine and spirit trade and by consumers themselves. Whilst some would argue that UK supermarkets have been instrumental in increasing wine sales in general, others would add that this has been at the expense of a potential threat to the wine and spirit industry as a whole, and is not necessarily always to the benefit of the consumer. The effects of this market dominance are felt through all stages of the supply chain, from production itself up to point of sale.

There are clearly advantages for the consumer in purchasing wine from the supermarkets with pricing a key driving force. However, the fierce discounting that is currently so prevalent has also been the subject of considerable controversy, with claims of “misleading” half price discounts in some supermarkets and allegations of “below cost” selling. The implications of such practices are widespread and are not limited to the consumer. To attribute the success of the supermarkets’ dominance in wine and spirits sales solely on discounting is perhaps an oversimplification, as there are clearly other advantages for the consumer but also inevitable drawbacks that need to be considered.

The concept of supermarkets as “friend or foe” is clearly one that generates plenty of debate and many will be keen to see how this plays out in the next few years.

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 is of one hour's 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 as a written assignment with clear structure and presentation as described in the Candidate Assessment 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 Explicit evidence within the body of the assignment of diverse and relevant research drawn from both the trade and general press, plus other general publications and course materials as necessary.
- Evidence that the information and examples uncovered by research have been the subject of careful study and analysis before being deployed in the assignment.
- Evidence of original thought and an ability to analyse and question data.
- Good presentation and clear thinking.

Candidates must address all required sections of the question and gain an overall minimum mark of 55% to qualify for a pass grade.

*The time allowed for this paper has since been extended to 75 minutes.

Candidates were then given the following examination paper:

The following question is **compulsory**.

It should be answered in its entirety on the answer sheets enclosed.

Answers should be presented in the format of a written assignment, with clear structure and subdivisions as described in the Candidate Assessment Guide.

Supermarkets – friend or foe?

- a) Give an account of the evolution of wine and spirit retailing in the UK supermarket sector over the past 10 years. How have supermarkets achieved their current dominant position? Statistical evidence should be used to provide an overview of UK off-trade sales. (25% weighting)
- b) What effects has this domination had on the drinks industry, from production to point of sale? (45% weighting)
- c) Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of the current position for the consumer. In your view, can the supermarkets maintain their dominance or is there evidence of a shift in public opinion? (30% weighting)

Candidates may use any of the following additional information in support of their response to the questions above as appropriate. However, examiners will be looking for evidence of clear understanding and analysis rather than simply paraphrasing these statistics:

80%: Percentage of Constellation wines sold at half price.

£3.99: The ‘magic price’ threshold for a bottle of wine - 60% of new world wine sold in Britain is £3.99 or less.

60%: Percentage of wine in Britain that is sold through supermarkets, where there are accusations of bogus half-price deals.

66p: The power of supermarket discounting: this is the equivalent price per pint of Foster’s lager in the supermarket. It costs on average £2.25 in a pub.

Source: The Guardian Newspaper

SAMPLE EXAMINATION RESPONSES

The following scripts were submitted by candidates in the March 2008 examination. Scripts have been selected from three grade bands, fail (between 45% and 54%), pass (between 55% and 64%) and distinction (in excess of 75%). They have been selected to give prospective candidates an indication of the level required to succeed, or indeed, excel in this examination. They are reproduced as submitted, including errors and/or inaccuracies but with spelling errors corrected, and in line with examination regulations are presented anonymously.

Fail Grade Candidate

The last decade has seen supermarkets in the UK rise to a position of enviable and to some observers, distressing, dominance. Through a combination of fierce and often below-cost discounting, tactical marketing and supplier manipulation, the multiple retailers now command over 70% of the UK off-trade wine and spirit sector, with Tesco, Sainsbury and Waitrose making the bulk of this figure.

By utilising buying power to coerce suppliers into ever-tighter margins in exchange for gondola-end displays and increased profile in marketing material, supermarkets have arguably harried supplier relations in an effort to boost footfall. This is the dichotomy of the multiples: on the one hand squeezing suppliers to produce wine in volume at a certain price point, in order to service consumer demand; yet at the same time, dictating that demand by introducing customers to new brands, new grape varieties and new countries.

Supermarkets have the potential to be an immense force for good. With the buying power they command, and the margins and resources at their disposal, they have a unique opportunity to expose consumers to the breadth and depth of the wine world. Whilst at the same time ensuring that all price points are serviced and all customer palates and budgets are catered for.

There is evidence that the market is changing. Consumers tire of a lack of quality, a dearth of options, and increasingly the trend is towards trading-up, both in terms of a desire to explore, and with regard to value for money. For too long customers have been content to quaff wine of indifferent quality, simply because it has been discounted to the hallowed £3.99 price point and available in bulk. With the threat of recession looming, and the anticipation of a swinging rise in alcohol duty in today's budget announcement, the average consumer is conscious that quality, whilst it may not come cheaply, increasingly represents a better use of their money than overpriced dross.

In part, this trend was anticipated in 2006 by Tesco when it announced it would be reducing and streamlining its finest range to two categories – sub £4.99 and plus £5.99, whilst also increasing their fine wine range to over 270 items. By offering clearly delineated price structures, Tesco provided a best of both worlds buying experience: magnums of Concha y Toro Merlot at £3.99 for indiscriminating customers at one extreme; 2000 Marques de Murietta at £14.99 at another.

Similarly, by ostensibly charging more for better wines, Waitrose has cleverly side-stepped the issue of discounting. By associating in the mind of its customers, quality with cost and offering selective price-reductions as opposed to perpetual buy-one-get-one-free offers, Waitrose has encouraged its customers to trade up and experiment.

Strange as it may seem, the domination of the supermarkets is not necessarily a bad thing. By providing customers with a range of quality at a range of price points, the multiples cater for the majority of the wine buying populace. Arguably, it is supermarket discounts and volume that has encouraged an increasing number to experiment with wine when they might not otherwise have done so. Furthermore, in a recent survey (May 2007) of supermarket wine suppliers, Wine & Spirit magazine found that 80% felt that supermarkets had had a positive role in creating the range and quality of wines available in the UK, and it should also be borne in mind that the Competition Commission enquiry of 2000 found that, on average, supplier margins in the wine and spirit category were 17% compared to 4.5% in other categories.

In conclusion, supermarkets should not be regarded as the great threat they are in some quarters. They provide a service, and undertake that service well. As long as wine is available cheaply, there will be certain customers who buy it irrespective of quality. If, however, far-sighted retailers such as Waitrose and Tesco can undertake to raise consumer expectations, and provide products at a range of price points, then that can only be in the interests of the industry.

Examiner's comments:

There is no clear structure to this piece of work making it difficult to determine how and where the content relates to the three specific sections of the examination question. It is rather simplistic in style and lightweight, lacking in good examples, with little indication of where research has been conducted. This candidate did not make use of any of the statistical data provided on the examination paper other than a brief reference to the "£3.99 price point". It is short at only 663 words for the time available. In fact, this would even be considered on the short side for a Unit 3 theory question where the candidate has 30 minutes for each question. There is far too much missing for this to be awarded a pass grade.

Fail Grade Candidate

Love them or hate them, supermarkets now dominate wine sales in the UK. The wine retail scene in the UK has altered drastically over the past decade and the biggest change has been the shift towards the multiple grocers. Most consumers are now choosing to buy their wine from supermarkets, with 60% of all wine in Britain being bought from this channel. Put another way, the "big four" retailers of Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury and Morrison have the lion's share of wine sales. TNS data shows that 33p of every £1 spent on wine goes to the country's biggest retailer – Tesco.

Over the past decade the increasing dominance of the supermarkets has resulted in a reduction in the number of routes to market. The traditional structure of producer / agent / wholesaler / retailer has evolved, with the multiple retailers going down a more direct route wherever possible in order to cut costs. As the multiple grocers have increased in importance, traditional outlets such as the multiple off-licence chains such as Thresher have seen decreasing sales. However, there is also an argument that the "halo" effect of supermarkets and the way they have created a mass market for wine has boosted specialist outlets such as Majestic Wine and independents.

Around 70-75% of all wine consumed in the UK is sold through the off-trade, with around 73% of this sold by the supermarkets. Looking at Nielsen data for the past few years, it becomes apparent that this trend is increasing year on year. This has raised questions about how supermarkets have achieved this dominant position.

The multiple grocers have used their buying power and the fact that many suppliers are willing to discount in order to have a presence in the UK market, to consolidate their dominant position through very keen pricing. Most consumers will choose to buy wine where they feel they are getting the best deals and supermarkets have certainly been providing these. Also, through having a consolidated supplier base, supermarkets have been able to offer the lowest prices. Having a big marketing spend, being able to offer a wide range of wine products and investing in large out-of-town stores as well as smaller outlets in town and city centres to challenge convenience stores has also helped the supermarkets tighten their grip on the UK wine retail scene.

This dominance has had a dramatic impact on the drinks industry, from decisions made in the vineyard to on the shelf. Supermarkets have helped create a mass market for wine, helped to democratise it some might say. This in turn has helped mass-market, big volume brands grow. Big brands now have a natural home on the shelves of supermarkets, as they can provide the necessary volume and discounts required.

Another major impact has been on how many suppliers operate. Many now produce a wine with a specific market and price point in mind, as this is demanded by the keenly consumer-orientated supermarkets. Suppliers have been forced to become more aware of marketing, as this is a key tool used by the supermarkets. Rather than produce the best wine they can and then search for a market, they must produce a wine with a market already defined.

Fail Grade Candidate (continued)

Another result of the dominance of supermarkets has been to create a wine retail scene that is defined mainly by promotions and discounts. For example, 80% of the world's biggest wine company's sales – Constellation – are sold at half price. The BOGOF (buy one get one free) mechanism is a common sight, and many of the big brands are on permanent discount. This culture is created by the supermarkets' dominance and their requirement that suppliers discount as a "crowd-pulling" mechanism.

A Grant Thornton survey shows 64% of food and drink suppliers to the supermarkets operate without a formal contract. While this means instability for producers, it also means flexibility in terms of what supermarkets have on their shelves. It could be argued, however, that this disproportionate power has been at the expense of the smaller winemakers who cannot afford to compete with the big brands on price.

Wine prices have barely risen above inflation over the past few years, if one looks at average prices in supermarkets. They are unwilling to go beyond the magic threshold of £3.99 (60% of New World wine in Britain is sold at this price point or less) in many cases and this has forced suppliers to consider how they may cut costs.

The drawbacks to consumers of this dominance include less choice in terms of outlets, as supermarkets push out many operators. There is little personalised service among the "wall of wine" in supermarkets, so it means less education for consumers. It could be argued that the dominance of multiple grocers has helped create a discount-obsessed consumer who is reluctant to try anything new. An Off Licence News survey of 200 independent wine shops showed they suffered a 10% drop in sales in 2007, so this sector is declining perhaps at the expense of choice.

However, keen pricing has helped create a mass market for wine. Consumers in the UK have among the widest choice and best deals on wine. And the supermarkets are responding to the increasing interest in provenance and authenticity. For example, last year Tesco increased its Finest and Fine Wine sections, which focus on smaller producers in the £10 - £100 price bracket.

With a recent investigation by the Competition Commission into the alleged abuse of power by supermarkets, there is evidence of a shift in opinion. However, as long as consumers continue to get good prices and variety of choice, it is unlikely they will change their buying patterns, despite the growing unease about the dominance of supermarkets.

Examiner's comments:

This candidate uses phrases from the question stem to introduce the relevant sections making it clear how and where they have addressed the various sections even though no formal formatting or section headings have been used. They have also used most of the statistical data provided on the examination paper and within the briefing document although this is largely just inserted in appropriate sections rather than questioned or analysed to any extent. This means this piece of work fails to demonstrate the higher level analytical skills Unit 1 seeks to assess. Reference is also made to some of the sources used to research this topic such as Nielson reports and Grant Thornton surveys. This piece of work comes in at 952 words, which was about the right length for the time available.



Distinction Grade Candidate

Today, 70-75% of all wines are sold through the off trade, with around 73% sold by supermarkets. Of this, 70% is sold by the "big 4" supermarkets – Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons.

Supermarkets have used their powerful economies of scale and heavy discounting to target the UK wine and spirits sector. The Competition Commission (CC) is currently undertaking a review of the major UK grocers and are due to report their findings and recommendations in April 2008. The CC's Working Paper on Pricing Policy highlighted that alcohol is one of 2 products used by supermarkets as "loss leaders" to attract customers into their stores, and that 10 major UK grocers had sold below cost. Although the CC in its provisional findings in October 2007 said that below cost selling "is not having significant unintended consequences on smaller retailers", the Federation of Small Businesses strongly disputes this. Many in the trade feel that the power of the supermarkets to discount heavily is driving smaller retailers out of business. Orbital went into administration in January 2008 when Waitrose and Sainsbury's delisted its flagship Stormhoek brand after they discovered Tesco was selling it £1 cheaper.

Over the last 10 years, the supermarkets have consolidated dramatically leading to the "big 4" situation we have today with Tesco the clear leader with over 30% of the market and Sainsbury's and Asda around 16% each. This consolidation allows the supermarkets to increase their buying power and drive economies of scale in their distribution cycle. The second tier supermarket Somerfield is owned by a private equity group and some fear that this will eventually be snapped up by one of the Big 4 leading to reduced competition. However, any sale would be subject to a CC review.

The supermarkets have gained their share of the alcohol sectors primarily via heavy discounting and consumers have enjoyed the benefits of this. In the late 1990's, Sainsbury's decided to move away from price as a focus and thought customers would warm to better stores and an improved supply chain. This proved to be an expensive, strategic mistake as it lost 3.6% market share between 1998 and 2003. Asda's focus on price meant it gained 3% over the same period.

Producers and suppliers have felt the most impact from the dominance of the UK supermarkets. In 2007, Grant Thornton surveyed 50 suppliers who said the main four negative effects of the supermarkets were price pressure, excessive power, delisting and refusal to renegotiate prices in light of increased costs. The same survey highlighted 64% of suppliers had no formal contract, 60% had no notice period, 80% had felt price pressure and in fact average prices had fallen by 8% over the previous 3 years. The heavy discounting culture of UK supermarkets favours high volume brands but means smaller suppliers are operating at very low margins. The risk is that these suppliers look to other markets. Peter Darbishire of Thierry's is quoted as saying "a healthy category needs good returns for all stake holders otherwise they will move to other more balanced markets."

Smaller retailers and high street chains have also felt the pressure with Unwins now out of business and Oddbins struggling. Thresher has introduced its "3 or 2" offer in a bid to compete. The risk is that the consumer is ultimately left with reduced choice.

Larger suppliers like the top Champagne houses have also expressed dislike of UK supermarkets. Several houses including Bollinger threatened to sue after Christmas 2007, when their wines were heavily discounted. The Champagne houses felt their brand was being damaged in order that the UK supermarkets improved theirs. With current supply problems in Champagne, these houses could move easily to more lucrative markets.

The on trade is also suffering with the average price of Foster's 66p versus £2.25 in a pub. There is evidence that more people are drinking at home (particularly post the smoking ban) or "loading up" on cheap supermarket alcohol before heading out to bars and clubs.

Distinction Grade Candidate (continued)

The on trade is also suffering with the average price of Foster's 66p versus £2.25 in a pub. There is evidence that more people are drinking at home (particularly post the smoking ban) or "loading up" on cheap supermarket alcohol before heading out to bars and clubs.

However, the supermarkets have the resources and ability to drive innovation and education into the wine category. Wine competes in store with other categories with much higher margins. Of around 800 lines, 250 will provide 80% of the profits and sales and there is a move by supermarkets to focus on brands and strong generic categories according to Decanter.

The UK consumer loves a bargain and price promotions can increase sales by over 25% according to Harpers. In a keynote survey recently 41% of consumers said they are swayed by price promotions. These have been boom times for customers, however a lot of this discounting has been driven by an approximately 40 million hectolitre over supply of wine globally. With recent poor harvests in Australia, France and Italy, prices may rise.

Supermarkets have also invested heavily in education and innovation with Tesco's Wine Club magazine circulated to over 500,000 people. Angela Mount of Wine Intelligence was quoted as saying that 70% of people found buying wine "an ordeal" or "difficult". Asda have come up with a unique way of addressing this with their two glass sampler range launched late in 2007.

However, people are becoming increasingly aware of the health and crime and disorder costs associated with cheap and available alcohol. The recent Garry Newlove murder has again highlighted the issue and the Guardian said last week that the government was reviewing the link between wine and disorder and alcohol promotions. According to the Royal College of Physicians, chronic liver disease in the UK has increased by 466% in the last 30 years at a time when it is falling in Europe. Alcohol related deaths have doubled since 1991 to 8,700 p.a.

Whilst the Competition Commission is due to report its findings in April 2008 there is little indication that there will be any significant restrictions placed on supermarkets with the government preferring to encourage the industry to voluntarily take action against irresponsible promotions. As supermarkets continue to focus on high volume brands this could lead to opportunities for other retailers to provide more interesting and unusual wine. However, the holy grail of everyone in the wine trade is encouraging the consumer to trade up. Tesco has launched its Fine Wine range with an average price of £15 a bottle and claims it puts more premium wine in front of customers than any other retailer. They have also launched a range with unusual varieties such as Durif and Fiano hoping that the confidence customers have in their brand will encourage them to experiment. It is this innovation plus the superior buying power of supermarkets combined with a government reluctant to regulate that will mean the supermarkets will continue their dominance into the foreseeable future.

Examiner's comments:

This candidate uses many very relevant examples to illustrate all the arguments put forward. There is evidence of very sound knowledge of all sectors of the trade and comments and examples are not simply limited to wine – the candidate being one of the very few who also mentioned spirits and sparkling wine (in this case with very valid comments relating to Champagne producers). Where statistical evidence from the exam paper is used, it is used for a reason, as in the case of the 66p Foster's beer impacting on the on-trade. This is the difference between this script and the previous one, where the statistics were simply quoted but not actually "used" to any real purpose. This is well written, well argued and extensive in terms of its scope and evidence of the research undertaken – a very well deserved distinction grade. A total of 1,117 words which were enjoyable and interesting to read.

3.2 Multiple Choice Examination Papers

Details of the Multiple Choice Examination are to be found in the Examination Regulations section of the Specification.

3.3 Unit 3 Theory Examination Papers

The examination dates for Unit 3 are set for each academic year by WSET® Awards. Your Approved Programme Provider will inform you of the date you will be taking your Unit 3 examination.

Please note that some Approved Programme Providers will only offer one Unit 3 examination date each year or may offer this examination only in alternative years.

Once candidates are registered onto an examination, fees are non-refundable.

Unit 3 **must** be sat in its entirety (tasting paper and closed-book theory paper). Only re-sits and transitional candidates are permitted to sit parts of this unit, but must then attempt ALL remaining parts of the unit in one sitting.

Nature of Questions

A variety of types and styles of questions will be used to test your breadth of knowledge across the whole of the Unit 3 Syllabus. It is the examiners aim to produce examinations that meet the needs of the diverse student body taking the Diploma examination and one that reflects current best educational practice.

All the questions are set so they are capable of being answered fully in 30 minutes. All questions also, therefore, carry an equal weighting of 100 marks.

Additional time is added to the total for written papers to allow candidates to read the examination paper and select which questions they will answer.

The questions may relate to any section of the Unit 3 Syllabus. The examiners will not be restricted to individual sections or elements. Examiners can ask questions that bridge the different elements within the Unit 3 Syllabus. Thus for example, a question may be on Bordeaux exclusively, or require a candidate to compare Cabernet Sauvignon based wines from Bordeaux, Chile and Bulgaria.

The paper will require the candidate to answer:

- ONE compulsory question, which may be any type of question.
- FOUR questions from a choice of SIX, which may be any type of question, but will certainly include the paragraph-type question (see pages 34/35).



Answering Written Questions

Time is limited. As a guide you should spend no more than 30 minutes preparing and completing an answer to each question of which only 25 should be spent actually writing. It is a good idea to find out how much you can write in 25 minutes in legible handwriting, and limit your answers to that length. The uses to which you can put your 30 minutes to answer a selected question are as follows:

Planning (5 minutes)

- What information is required? Re-read the question. This must be answered as set, so make sure you understand its meaning. For instance, if you are asked about AC red wines of the Rhône Valley, mention of Tavel or Condrieu is of no value.
- What form of answer is required? This is also important; are you being asked to list something, to describe it, or to write brief notes about it? If the question mentions two items (dry white Bordeaux and Sauternes, for instance) are you asked to describe the differences between them, to compare and contrast them, or to outline their similarities? Always make sure that you give the answer the examiner wants, not necessarily what you want to tell the examiner.
- Would maps/diagrams be useful? While these can convey a great deal of information, they can never be the total answer to a question; they supplement the written answer, and should be referred to in the text. Explain why the drawing is there, and what it shows. But be careful; there is a very real danger of the drawing taking up too much time.

Make a Plan

- Jot down words, phrases, etc. as headings. Do this as you are thinking about the things above. Arrange these headings into a logical sequence.
- In many cases, the ‘Six Factors’ that affect wine style and quality (see below) can provide a useful logical framework for answering a question. By ensuring you cover every factor that is relevant to an answer, you might avoid missing out something important. These six factors can also be a memory trigger – very useful in the pressures of the exam room. For other questions, a logical structure can be provided by
 - geography (discussing regions one by one)
 - time, eg for processes, discussing what happens in the order in which it takes place.
 - Compare and contrast. First discuss the common factors, then discuss the differences.

Writing (25 minutes)

- Easy to say, but don’t hurry, be legible, logical, concise and relevant. Form sentences in your mind before putting pen to paper.
- Make sure that you have covered the obvious – the examiner cannot assume you know something unless they can deduce it from what you have written. This is especially important for 4-part questions. Eg, if the question asks you about Mourvèdre, say, you should start by saying that it is a *black grape variety*, before discussing where it is grown and the styles of wine that are made from it. Also, when asked to discuss a wine region or a grape variety, it is often useful to include a description of the wines, using a brief systematic-approach style tasting note.

Checking

- If you look at the total time allowed for each paper, you will see that allowing 30 minutes per question will still leave time for your initial choices and also, importantly, for checking what you have written.
- Checking is very important, given the heat of the moment. You should check spelling and punctuation, especially of proper nouns. Does the answer make sense?
- Are any words left out, or wrong words used, reversing the sense?

Part of the key to success is being familiar with answering examination questions before the day itself. You may wish to practice for the examination by using previous examination papers. These are available from your Approved Programme Provider (an additional charge may be made for these papers).

The Six Factors

These are the factors that affect the style and quality-level of any wine. They are

- Grape variety
- Climate and weather (both the regional climate, any local effects, and the impact of the specific weather conditions in a single year)
- Soils and Topography (physical and chemical effects of soil on water supply and vine nutrition, and the effects of slopes) (note that there is considerable interplay between climate, weather, soils and topography eg some soils can affect temperature and water supply)
- Viticulture
- Winemaking, including barrel maturation.
- Post-packaging storage, including bottle-age.

Unit 3 Theory Questions

Please note these are not the only types of questions to be used in the Diploma examination.

Sample Paragraph Question

The essence of a good paragraph answer is plenty of relevant facts in clear, simple English, rather than opinion or argument. Leave these for the more discursive style essay questions. 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 differed, might gain many marks, but the candidate would lose marks if they failed to show the examiner that they knew Carmenère was a *black grape variety, grown primarily in Chile*, with some further notes on the *typical characteristics of Carmenère* (colour, flavours, structure...). Those basic marks are the easiest ones to get quickly. You should then aim for 5 or 6 supplementary points, though this will depend on the total number of paragraphs you are expected to write. What you include there will usually be up to you, and the marking key will be quite flexible.

Note however, that there are some instances where a more narrow focus is required (eg write a paragraph about *the production of...* or *With reference to the Americas*, write a paragraph about...). Your discussion must always be limited to the unit you are sitting so, for example, if you are asked to write about Muscat in Unit 3, you will not gain marks for discussing its use in Vins Doux Naturels or Asti DOCG.

The following are suggestions of information you might include:

Grape Variety:

- Style, characteristics
- Regions where it is grown
- Typical quality level
- Typical vinification techniques
- Examples of producers or wines

Region:

- Location
- Wine styles and quality
- Grape varieties
- Climate, soils, topography
- Major producers, production techniques.

We recommend you compile similar lists for legal terms (eg Crianza), organisations (eg VDP), events (eg VinExpo), people (eg Robert Parker) and processes (eg malting), so you have a template for the most common types of paragraph questions. Note that this is not an exhaustive list!

While some candidates struggle to find 3-4 things to say on a particular topic, others struggle to limit their answer. Perhaps you grew up in the Yakima Valley, wrote your Doctoral Thesis on Torrontés, currently work as a winemaking consultant for Canadian Ice Wine producers, and you've just finished reading a book about Pierce's disease. Or you may be a very

conscientious student. In such a situation, the examiner is not asking for *everything* you know about the subject: they are looking for a clear, concise discussion that covers the most *important* things to know.

As a general guide, if you are asked to write six paragraphs in 30 minutes, your paragraphs should equate to roughly one third to half a page (120-150 words) of average handwriting. If you are asked to write three, each 'paragraph' should be nearly a page (240-300 words). If you find it helpful to divide your text into blocks, or include diagrams or maps, then do so. Sometimes that can be the quickest way to present information to the examiner.

Finally, do not assume that you can gain enough marks by writing a great deal about a few subjects only. Each section of a paragraph question carries equal marks and by failing to answer one section only, you forfeit one sixth of the marks available in this instance. It is easy to see how missing out sections or providing weak answers will affect the candidate's overall chance of success.

It cannot be over emphasised - these questions do not offer the easy option!

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

- a) Torrontes
- b) Central Valley, California
- c) Ice Wine
- d) Carmenère
- e) Yakima Valley
- f) Pierce's disease

The sections on Ice Wine 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. Torrontes (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 Ice Wine:

“Ice Wine – Canada – Niagara Falls area is known for its quality ice wines made in the style of the famous German ice wines. 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.

“Ice Wine 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 ice wine 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 Ice Wine 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.

Sample Essay Question

For paragraph and multi-part question, most of the structure of an answer is provided by the question, and marks are gained by factual recall. In an essay question, you need to provide the structure for your answer, and you will usually be asked to express an opinion. For example, you may be asked to

- Identify/account for/extrapolate from a trend
- Explain why something has happened
- Say whether something should or shouldn't be done.
- Discuss whether you agree or disagree with a given statement.

In your answer, you will need to do two things:

- 1) Create a structure that demonstrates to the examiner that you have a good *perspective* of the topic you are discussing, so that whatever conclusion you draw is *persuasive*.
- 2) Use the essay as a vehicle to demonstrate your *knowledge* of the subject, so your conclusion is *authoritative*.

Correspondingly, poor essay answers almost always fall into at least one of two traps.

- 1) The facts that are included are not analysed or linked to the case that is being argued. In the most extreme cases, they are not even relevant to the question, and the answer becomes 'everything I know about X'.
- 2) There is very little factual content. Any argument or opinion that is included is not supported by examples.

It is essential that a candidate decides how they are going to argue their case before they start to write. Your opening paragraph should ideally

- Briefly outline the context of your answer, defining any terms that you believe might be open to interpretation
- Signpost how you will answer the question over the following paragraphs.

You will then have time to write 3-5 paragraphs giving the detail of your answer. It is good practice to be clear in your mind about exactly what point you are trying to make in each paragraph. Starting the paragraph with that key point, stated as clearly as possible, and then following this with some facts and examples that support your point is a good way to structure paragraphs.

In the time available, it is unlikely you will be able to cover more than 3-5 main points. It is up to you to decide what they should be. Part of the skill of writing a good essay is knowing what to leave out. Some facts will be left out because they are not relevant to your answer. Some points may be relevant, but you will have to leave them out because you are unable to include them in the time and space available. Knowing what the most important points are before you start will help keep your essay focussed.

Finally, your conclusion will draw together the arguments you have presented. You might briefly recapitulate the main points made in the preceding paragraphs. If you are asked to discuss a statement, this is the bit where you balance the 'for' and the 'against', and

decide whether or not you agree. If you are asked to explain a trend, the conclusion is the bit where you show what you think is the most important of the reasons you have discussed over the preceding paragraphs.

It is a very good idea to practice essay plans before the exam. In five-ten minutes, you can write your introduction, key paragraph sentences, and conclusion. The more times you do this, the clearer your thoughts will be, and the clearer your essays will be.

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 required 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 (1/2 hour), 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 almost all 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 per 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 Kiwis 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 1950's and 60's (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 70's, 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.) 900,000 hl 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. For example, in the 10 years from 1992, production doubled and exports tripled, from 2001 to 2002 exports to Australia expanded by 50%. The innovation of the New Zealand market was also worthy of mention – they have raised the (quality) profile of stelvin closures in a way that no other country has managed to do. Finally, they seem to employ excellent and sensitive marketing strategies that encompass both the on and off trade – something many other wine countries find difficult to balance.



Sample Label Question

Using your knowledge of the style of the TWO wines depicted, compare and contrast them based on the following:

- a) Climate
- b) Viticulture
- c) Vinification
- d) Resulting style of wine
- e) Target market



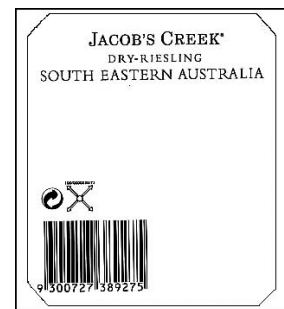
Label 1

The purpose of this question is to test the candidates' commercial awareness of the wines depicted in addition to their factual knowledge regarding production. The two wines were selected to provide a clear contrast under all the headings. The Riesling Auslese – a classic cool climate wine, labour intensive in terms of viticulture and strictly regulated with regard to picking (timing and condition of grapes), with a very small target market, (lovers of fine German wines who understand and appreciate this expensive style of wine). In terms of the style of this wine, few noticed that this was already 16 years old. Those who did, wrote a description to match, those who did not, scored less marks where their description failed to address the issue of maturity. In the case of the Jacob's Creek, this was clearly a very different wine – warmer climate, bordering on hot, with little in the way of vintage variation, large scale production (blending of grapes from different regions), highly mechanised with large yields, very high tech, modern vinification with a very different target market (wine purchased by brand name rather than grape variety). In terms of wine style,

Label 2

again very different to the German Riesling – commercial, dry, no distinct regional character, simple fresh citrus fruit for drinking young rather than long term ageing.

Unfortunately, although a large number of candidates felt this was a question they could answer, few of them did so in the level of detail required. Very few candidates actually compared or contrasted the wines – simply describing each in turn. These two wines were selected because they had certain similarities, but within the scope of these, were very different indeed.



Far too few grasped that this should have dictated the structure of their answer.

Finally, we had one candidate who, presumably knowing nothing about the wines depicted, decided to substitute their own choice of (red) wines instead. Not surprisingly, this candidate wasted their time (and the examiner's) and gained "null points".

3.3 Practical Tasting Examination

Unit 3 Tasting Examination

The practical tasting examination deliberately avoids exclusive reliance on the “blind-tasting-to-determine-origin” routine. This is because at its worst it degenerates into a party game (“I only got two right today”). At its best, however, this more academic approach still has an important role in the assessment of your tasting ability and technique.

The fact is that few commercial tastings today are conducted totally blind. Emphasis is increasingly placed on your ability to accurately assess quality in particular, as well as maturity and commercial value, for a set of wines whose origins are known in advance. The Unit 3 Syllabus, and therefore the examination, aims to strike a balance between the two approaches.

The tasting examination may relate to any section of the Unit 3 Syllabus. The examiners will not be restricted to individual sections or elements. Examiners can select wines from any wine producing area identified in the Syllabus; they are not restricted to the wines listed in the Specification for the submission of tasting portfolios.

The tasting paper will require the candidate to taste 12 wines. The paper will be divided into two parts each of 1 hour’s duration. Each part consists of 6 wines.

The paper has been divided to give you time to have a short break, wash your glasses, and prepare for the next 6 wines.

The part papers are not separate examinations, and must be sat in their entirety (with the exception of transitional candidates holding either Part A or Part B of the former

Diploma Syllabus). You must achieve an aggregate pass mark across both papers to be awarded a pass in the Unit 3 tasting examination.

Tasting Note Presentation - Wine

The WSET® Level 4 Systematic Approach to Tasting is designed to be thorough, systematic and logical in its approach to a skill where competence comes through discipline.

The points below will amplify its content:

General Points

- The examples of tasting terms included alongside each sub-heading are not intended to be exhaustive, rather to fix points along each scale in broad terms.
- The sub-headings themselves (in the left-hand column) are less flexible and form the framework of the systematic approach. These should be assessed, but only those that are relevant should be noted.
- Some tasting terms cannot be used alone without qualification. These include medium, light, full.
- Balance is not included as a sub-heading, because it too needs qualifying. It is included in the tasting terms for acidity and tannin on the palate, but note that it can also apply in an overall sense, eg balance / imbalance between nose and palate.
- Concise tasting notes can be achieved by combining elements, eg “pale ruby”, “pronounced mature nose” and by eliminating items that are

not relevant, eg “ripe fruit” may not be important every time, whereas “noble rot” needs to be mentioned.

Appearance

- Again, some basic colour terms should not be used without qualification, e.g. “lemon yellow” not “yellow”, “ruby red” not “red”
- Deposits, under other observations, would include crystals as well as sediment.

Nose

- Condition is the automatic reflex impression of the wine’s health.
- Development charts the evolution of the nose of a wine over time and makes the important distinction between primary aroma, which is derived from the grape, and bouquet, derived from anaerobic maturation.
Note that some wines, for example Oloroso Sherry, are deliberately oxidised, so if oxidation is detected it should be noted whether or not this is deliberate.
- The tasting terms listed alongside “fruit aroma characteristics” are group headings only, allowing scope for further description. It often helps, when trying to define an odour, to think first in general terms (eg fruit, spice) and then more specifically: (which fruit? blackberry? blackcurrant? which spice? etc).
- Complexity, a term to be used with caution, would be indicated by the identification of several aroma characteristic groups.

Palate

- Be aware of the difference between body – sometimes called “mouth-feel”, and which is allied to extract – and actual alcoholic content. A wine can be high in alcohol and still feel thin in the mouth.
- It is a fact when tasting that the components of a wine are not consistent in the mouth. Sweetness is an early sensation which then fades, acidity and tannin only emerge later and are more noticeable towards the finish.
- Avoid terms like ‘medium-high’. This could be read as ‘somewhere in between medium and high’ or ‘either medium or high, I’m hedging my bets’. The marking key will, where appropriate, accept a range of acceptable descriptions for levels of acidity, tannin etc. Be as precise as you can. Terms such as ‘just above medium’ or ‘medium plus’ are fine.
- Remember that the exam is asking for you to write a *description* of the wine using *prose*, not an assessment of the palate components. If you are in a hurry, you will gain some points for lists or bullet points. However, adding a few linking words does not take much time, and will make your answer flow.

Conclusions

- Evidently, the headings you use here will vary depending on which you are given in advance, and which you are left to assess.
- Quality is usually asked before a comment on origin or grape variety. The most important thing to discuss here is the absolute quality level of the wine. A good answer will include a reference to aspects such as Balance (eg of structural components, flavours), Length (of the finish, and also length on the palate ie do the flavours fill the mouth), Intensity (concentration of flavour and extract) and Complexity.
- If you have an idea of what the wine is, you should use quality designations where they exist (eg, if you think the wine is a Burgundy, then say whether it is basic Bourgogne, a commune-level wine (greater or lesser commune), a Premier Cru or a Grand Cru quality. Spanish ageing categories (Reserva etc), German Prädikats and Bordeaux classifications should also be mentioned. Note the ‘AC level’ is not a precise quality level since it covers everything from large-volume entry-level wines to super-luxury rarities.
- Age in years is exactly that. Simply state how old you think the wine is, in years. A vintage is not asked for. The marking key will allow a margin of error so that for a wine that is one year old, a mark might be given for any of ‘less than one year’, ‘one year’, or ‘two years’. Older wines will have larger margins.
- Readiness to drink: The level of detail required will depend on the marks available. For two marks, you will need to state whether the wine is ready to drink, and give a timescale for how long it needs, or how long it will be drinkable (using the terms in the Systematic Approach). If 3-4 marks are required, you will need to add some reasons. For example, ‘At peak, drink over the next 6-12 months because the fruit will fade and there is insufficient concentration for the wine to improve’, or ‘ready to drink now, but the high level of tannin balanced by concentrated fruit, suggests the wine can continue to improve over 3-5 years’
- In the case of immature wines, an indication of how long it will take to mature, ie its ageing potential, would make the conclusion that much more specific.

Note the difference between age (“how old is it?”) and maturity (“do I keep it or drink it?”).

List of questions that may be asked to make up the 10/13 marks (unit 3) or 5 marks (unit 4, 5 & 6)

- | | |
|--|---|
| ● Country and Region of Origin: (1-2 marks) | ● Assessment of Quality: (2-7 marks) |
| ● Specific Identity of wine/spirit within the region: (1-2 marks) | ● Method of Production: (1-2 marks) |
| ● Grape Variety(ies): (1-2 marks) | ● Age of wine in years: (1-2 marks) |
| ● Readiness to drink/Potential for future ageing: (1-4 marks) | ● Base material: (1-2 marks) |
| ● Approximate retail price, including all taxes: (1-2 marks) | |

Sample Completed Tasting Notes

Wine	<i>Dr Thanisch Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling Auslese QmP 1995 €14.75</i>
Appearance	<i>Clear and bright, medium intensity with a medium straw core and a narrow pale watery lemon rim.</i>
Nose	<i>Clean, showing maturity with a pronounced intensity of honeyed apple fruit with a balance of grapefruit and lemon, kerosene, petrol aromas also present. It also has a firm steely slate edge.</i>
Palate	<i>Medium sweet. High acidity (mouth-watering) though balanced by fruit intensity, which is pronounced. Tangy green apples, honeyed, grapefruit, lemons with a steely slate backbone. Good complexity with a slight prickle on the tongue. Medium body and a long finish and medium alcohol.</i>
Conclusion	<i>Assessment of Quality: This is a good quality wine from a good producer and single vineyard site as is typified by the good fruit intensity and mineral complexity resulting in a wine of great balance. Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: Showing some signs of maturity with kerosene, petrol aromas. Drinking well now, but has fruit and mouth-watering acidity to last another 7 –10 years.</i>

Spirit	<i>Havana Club Blanco (Cuban White Rum), €13.99</i>
Appearance	<i>Clear and bright, water white with legs.</i>
Nose	<i>Clean. Medium intensity, youthful. Creamy, caramel, sweet spices (cinnamon, nutmeg).</i>
Palate	<i>Off-dry with balanced alcohol and medium body. Medium+ flavour intensity of orange peel and dried fruits with sweet spice and a citrus element. Creamy mouthfeel. Balanced, but simple finish and medium length.</i>
Conclusion	<i>Raw material: Molasses Style of Spirit: Cuban white rum Estimated off-premise retail price including all taxes: €15</i>

Sample Unit 3 Tasting Questions

Single white variety, not specified

The three wines were a classic, Premier Cru White Burgundy from the Côte de Beaune, a commercial, heavily oaked Australian Chardonnay, and a premium California Chardonnay - a trio that should have posed few problems for Section III candidates. In the main, this was certainly the case, but there were a few common pitfalls.

The easiest way to lose marks in this paper is by failing to identify the grape variety. A number of candidates insist on giving a different variety for each wine despite being told in advance that one variety applies to all three wines. Another classic mistake is assuming the identity of the grape variety on the basis of the first wine tasted. It is easy to become distracted and attempt to make the remaining descriptions fit the variety chosen rather than use the information they contain to arrive at the correct identity.

The sample scripts reproduced below give clear examples of the level of response that will guarantee a top grade in this paper and the shortfall in an answer that leads to failure.

Wine no 1

Appearance: Clear, intense lemon / pale gold with greenish hue - very little variation between rim and core - overall more youthful in appearance than mature; fairly viscous.

Nose: Clean, pronounced, intense aromas of baked apples, lemon pulp, creamy, toasty notes, nuts and spice, mineral hints - overall, nose is developing and intense with concentrated fruits and refined oak aromas.

Palate: dry, crisp lemony acid, lemon pulp and green apple fruit character, oak treatment evident in creamy mouthfeel and caramel flavours, alcohol is high but balanced with concentrated fruit and mineral character. Length is considerable with lemony fruit and spicy warmth of alcohol. Full bodied and gaining complexity.

Country of origin: France

Region of origin, if applicable: Burgundy, Côte d'Or

Assessment of quality: A very good quality Chardonnay from Burgundy - premium fruit, tremendous mineral character, judicious use of oak - could be Premier Cru level.

Approximate age of wine: youthful for Burgundy - 3-4 years

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: Wine deserves to bottle age further for optimal harmony of oak and fruit - probably could handle 8-10 years.

Wine no 2

Appearance: Clear, fairly intense brassy gold, moderately focused core and a defined watery rim.

Nose: Clean, moderately pronounced youthful aromas of yellow apple fruit, citrus and tropical notes and a whiff of tinned asparagus. Vanilla aromas suggesting oak treatment. Wine is overall youthful and not as complex as wine no 1.

Palate: Dry, tart acid supports apple and pineapple fruit character. Creamy notes from oak as well as the astringency of plenty of oak contact. Alcohol is balanced with fruit, wine is medium bodied and length is decent, but less finesse than wine no 1, and more oak astringency and spice than fruit.

Country of origin: Australia

Region of origin, if applicable: NSW, Hunter Valley perhaps

Assessment of quality: Average quality Chardonnay. International and approachable in style - lots of oak and the tinned asparagus suggests a simply made wine.

Approximate age of wine: still youthful - 1-2 years old

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: Ready to drink - oak could integrate more successfully with a year of bottle age, but this wine is not made for cellaring.



Wine no 3

Appearance: Clear, fairly intense brassy gold with green tints, discernable watery rim - viscous and more youthful in appearance than developed.

Nose: Clean, pronounced developing aromas of apple/pear fruit - very intense and concentrated with toasty, vanilla notes suggesting oak contact.

Palate: Dry, moderate lemony acidity supports ripe apple / pear, melon fruit. Intense and creamy, full bodied and rich with zing of oak. Alcohol is high but balanced, length is generous with both ripe apple fruit, citrus zest and toasted spice.

Country of origin: USA

Region of origin, if applicable :
California, Sonoma

Assessment of quality: Good quality Chardonnay, ripe fruit, a pleasing balance of oak and fruit, well structured.

Approximate age of wine: 2-3 years

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: Certainly drinking well now, balanced, could hold for a year or two.

Grape variety: Chardonnay

There is very little to add to the notes on wine no 1, except perhaps for the slight spritz that could be observed on the edge of the glass and a slight smoky character on the nose and melon fruit character. Wine no 2 is also well described. The examiner picked up herbal notes on the nose, which this candidate has identified as "tinned asparagus". They could also have mentioned the slightly confected, sweet smelling fruit. The body on this wine was a little higher than the "medium" in this note but this candidate has done well to identify the simple, youthfulness of this wine. The note for wine no 3 is also very accurate.

Conclusions for all 3 wines are extremely accurate and quality assessment shows logic and good analysis of tasting notes.

Compare these very full notes with the rather brief but very inaccurate note for wine no 1 below:

Appearance: Clear and bright, pale lemon with slight green tinge; some viscosity and pale watery rim

Nose: Clean, medium intensity of white fruits, youthful.

Palate: Dry, light to medium bodied, crisp acidity, medium plus intensity of unripe green apples, citrus, mineral, petrol, medium alcohol, medium long length.

Country of origin: Old world - Germany

Region of origin: Mosel

Assessment of quality: Well made, commercial wine with balance of good fruit and acid, fruits both primary and some secondary aromas and palate of mineral petrol.

Approximate age of wine: 2-3 years old.

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: Drinking now, very fresh, will last 2-3 years.

This is a classic case of deciding on a grape variety and writing the notes to fit rather than writing a note based on what is actually in the glass and using this information to identify the grape variety. At this stage in the Diploma cycle, candidates should not be confusing a classic, rich, full bodied oaked Chardonnay with a light bodied, German Riesling. The assessment of quality is also largely irrelevant, and merely repeats the (inaccurate) observations already made under the nose and palate. Having committed himself or herself to Riesling, this candidate then went on to identify wine no 2 as an Australian Riesling (correct in terms of country but inaccurate as far as the description was concerned), and identified wine no 3 as a Pfalz Riesling despite the obvious oak and alcohol of 13.5%.

Not surprisingly, this candidate did not achieve a pass in this paper.

Partly-Specified Wines

Traditionally, tasting papers achieve higher pass rates than theory questions.

However, in this instance, the examiner was faced with an extremely poor standard of responses that left them, the examination panel and the appeals panel at a loss as to why candidates had only put in a mediocre performance when assessing what should have been 3 extremely easy wines.

The wines selected were all from the same producer (Dr Thanisch) – well respected for the quality and typicity of his wines. They ranged in age from the 2000 vintage to 1997 and 1995 and covered 3 quality levels with one QbA and 2 Prädikat wines, a Spätlese and an Auslese.

There was an alarming ignorance of the German wine classification system, which is after all taught at Intermediate Certificate level. The examiner noted all the possible variations, from QbP, QAP, GMP. Other major errors were down to not reading the given information accurately. Instructions on the examination paper clearly said “wines 1-3 are all Rieslings from the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer”, so why did so many candidates describe them as from the Rheingau, Pfalz, Australia and New Zealand?

There is still confusion over what is required under “detailed assessment of quality”, especially amongst overseas candidates. This also spills over into the “state of maturity” section.

The extract below is a good example of this:

Detailed assessment of quality: Nose matches palate, yet youthful primary fruit, with hints of secondary fruit – 3 or so years old. Well-made wine. Will age well for 5 or so years.

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: 3-4 years old. 1998/9 vintage.

Some of the comments under the assessment of quality are just a repeat of the notes on the palate of this wine, and in some instances, are even better. In any event, it is NOT an assessment of quality and is certainly not “detailed”. State of maturity does not mean, “How old is the wine?” It is asking about the development of the wine. Is it ready to drink? Does it require further keeping, or is it past its best? It also requires an indication of the estimated lifespan of the wine.

Some of the comments made under “assessment of quality” would have been more appropriate here.

In view of the bad performance of many candidates sitting this examination, it would seem appropriate to give an example from one candidate who clearly knew what they were doing.

The 3 wines in this instance were:

Wine no 1 – Dr Thanisch
Bernkasteler Badstube Riesling
Auslese QmP 1995, £14.75

Wine no 2 – Dr Thanisch
Bernkasteler Lay Riesling Spätlese
QmP 1997, £12.00

Wine no 3 – Dr Thanisch Riesling
QbA 2000, £7.25

Wine no 1

Appearance: clear and bright, medium intensity with a medium straw core and a narrow pale watery lemon rim.

Nose: clean, showing maturity with a pronounced intensity of honeyed apple fruit with a balance of grapefruit and lemon, kerosene, petrol aromas also present. It also has a firm steely slate edge.

Palate: medium sweet. High acidity (mouth-watering) though balanced by fruit intensity, which is pronounced. Tangy green apples, honeyed, grapefruit, lemons with a steely slate backbone. Good complexity with a slight prickle on the tongue. This wine is the weightiest of the 3 with medium body and a long finish and medium alcohol.

Detailed assessment of quality: this is a wine of QmP level - Auslese or Spätlese, from a good producer and probably single vineyard site as typified by the good fruit intensity and mineral complexity resulting in a wine with great balance.

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: some signs of maturity with kerosene, petrol aromas. Drinking well now but has fruit and mouth-watering acidity to last another 7-10 years.

Estimated off-trade retail price per bottle including all taxes: £13-15



Wine no 2

Appearance: Clear and bright, medium intensity, watery lemon core with water white rim and slight green hue.

Nose: Clean, mature bouquet indicated by kerosene aromas. Medium+ intensity of fruit, initially kerosene is very dominant, however apply and grapefruit aromas come through and floral intensity of honeysuckle as well, plus steely slateyness. Very good complexity.

Palate: Off dry. Balanced acidity, medium++ fruit intensity, ripe, crisp green apples with a honey finish. Mouth-watering grapefruit and lemon fruit, floral honeysuckle tones also apparent and a marmalade tang. This is a wine of good complexity, long length and reasonably low alcohol.

Detailed assessment of quality: this is a very good, well made wine of QmP level. Probably a Spätlese from a good producer and single vineyard. This is indicated by the excellent balance of fruit and acidity, and intensity of fruit and structure.

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: drinking well now but still maturing. Will last another 3-5 years.

Estimated off-trade retail price per bottle including all taxes: £11-13

Wine no 3

Appearance: clear and bright, pale intensity, lemon/straw core with green lights and a slight spritz.

Nose: Clean, youthful nose of medium intensity. Grapefruit and lemon with slight apple blossom bouquet.

Palate: medium sweet with crisp acidity. Medium fruit intensity, which is fairly simple – stewed apples, lemons and limes. Light body with medium alcohol and a finish of medium length.

Detailed assessment of quality: this is a well-made simple style of wine of QbA level. It lacks the complexity and length to be QmP, however does have a nice balanced structure, complemented by plenty of fresh fruit intensity.

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: a youthful style of wine, which is ready for drinking now – not for keeping.

Estimated off-trade retail price per bottle including all taxes: £5-7

Although there is a general tendency in these notes to show a slight lack of imagination when it comes to fruit character (with all 3 wines very similar), the key points in the systematic approach have been addressed. Assessment of quality shows some reasoned thought process and state of maturity gives a good level of detail. Pricing is spot on - perhaps this candidate works in the retail trade?

Compare this with the sparcity of the following extract from another candidate's submission. Not surprisingly, this was marked as a low Fail grade.

Wine no 3

Appearance: clear, pale lemon yellow

Nose: clean, moderately intense fruit, floral, youthful.

Palate: clean, off dry, light bodied, medium to high acidity, short finish.

Detailed assessment of quality: QbA

Readiness to Drink/Potential for Future Ageing: 2-3 years

Estimated off-trade retail price per bottle including all taxes: \$10

(this paper submitted by a US candidate therefore prices given in dollars).



Wines 1 - 3 are all made from the SAME white grape variety.

Describe each wine under the headings below, then IDENTIFY the grape variety.

WINE Number 1 (and 2 and 3)	
Appearance (3 marks)	
Nose (7 marks)	
Palate (10 marks)	
Assessment of Quality (4 marks)	
Approximate age of wine (1 mark)	
Readiness to Drink/ Potential for Future Ageing (2 marks)	
Country of origin (1 mark)	
Region of origin, if applicable (2 marks)	

GRAPE VARIETY (5 marks)	
Reasons for this choice? (5 marks)	

Sample Tasting Question Papers continued

Wines 4 - 6 all come from the SAME country.

Describe each wine under the headings below, then IDENTIFY the common link indicated at the end of this paper.

WINE Number 4 (and 5 and 6)	
Appearance (3 marks)	
Nose (7 marks)	
Palate (10 marks)	
Assessment of Quality (4 marks)	
Readiness to Drink/ Potential for Future Ageing (2 marks)	
Grape variety(ies) (2 marks)	
Region of origin (2 marks)	

Country of origin (5 marks)	
Which characteristics in the 3 wines lead to this conclusion? (5 marks)	

Wines 7 - 9 are all produced in the Rioja DOC.

Describe each wine under the headings below.

WINE Number 7 (and 8 and 9)	
Appearance (3 marks)	
Nose (7 marks)	
Palate (10 marks)	
Detailed assessment of Quality (7 marks)	
Readiness to Drink/ Potential for Future Ageing (4 marks)	
Estimated off-premise retail price per bottle, including all taxes (2 marks)	



Sample Tasting Question Papers continued

Wines 10 - 12 have all been selected from areas of the world as studied in Unit 3.

Describe each wine under the headings below.

WINE Number 10 (and 11 and 12)	
Appearance (3 marks)	
Nose (7 marks)	
Palate (10 marks)	
Assessment of Quality (5 marks)	
Readiness to Drink/ Potential for Future Ageing (3marks)	
Approximate age of wine (1 mark)	
Predominant grape variety(ies) (1 mark)	
Country of origin (1 mark)	
Region of origin, if applicable (2 marks)	

Spirits 1 - 3 all relate to Unit 4 of the WSET® Diploma Qualification.

Describe them all under the headings below.

SPIRIT Number 1 (and 2 and 3)	
Appearance (3 marks)	
Nose (7 marks)	
Palate (10 marks)	
Estimated off-premise retail price per bottle, including all taxes (2 marks)	
Distilled from (raw material) (1 mark)	
Identity of type and style of spirit (2 marks)	



Sample Tasting Question Papers continued

Wines 1 - 3 all relate to Unit 5 of the WSET® Diploma Qualification.

Describe them all under the headings below.

WINE Number 1 (and 2 and 3)	
Appearance (4 marks)	
Nose (6 marks)	
Palate (10 marks)	
Country and region of origin (2 marks)	
Grape variety(ies) (2 marks)	
Method of production (1 mark)	



Wines 1 - 3 are fortified wines made by the same method.

Describe them all under the headings below.

WINE Number 1 (and 2 and 3)	
Appearance (3 marks)	
Nose (7 marks)	
Palate (10 marks)	
Country and region of origin (2 marks)	
Specific identity of wine within the region (2 marks)	
Age of wine (1 mark)	



