Tasting Vocabulary — Quick Reference

Keep this page next to your glass. Words that help you put a smell or taste into language.

Colour guide

Red (young → old)



purple · ruby · garnet · tawny

White (young → old)



lemon-green · lemon · gold · amber · brown

Rosé



pink · salmon · orange

Primary aromas — from the grape

Citrus	lemon, lime, grapefruit, orange peel
Green fruit	green apple, pear, gooseberry, grape
Stone fruit	peach, apricot, nectarine
Tropical	pineapple, mango, passion fruit, lychee, melon
Red fruit	redcurrant, cranberry, raspberry, strawberry, red cherry
Black fruit	blackcurrant (cassis), blackberry, black cherry, plum
Dried fruit	fig, prune, raisin, dried cherry
Floral	rose, violet, elderflower, acacia, orange blossom
Herbal / green	cut grass, bell pepper, mint, eucalyptus, tomato leaf
Spice	black pepper, liquorice, clove, anise
Mineral	wet stone, flint, chalk, slate, saline

Secondary — from winemaking

Oak	vanilla, toast, smoke, cedar, coconut, coffee, chocolate
Malolactic	butter, cream, cheese rind
Yeast / lees	bread, brioche, biscuit, yoghurt

Tertiary — from ageing

Red wine	leather, earth, forest floor, mushroom, tobacco, game
White wine	honey, toast, nuts, petrol (Riesling), dried apricot
Oxidative	almond, hazelnut, caramel, toffee, coffee

Structure — how it feels

Acidity	makes your mouth water; crisp, fresh, zesty — or flat, soft
Tannin	drying grip on gums and teeth; silky, fine, firm, coarse
Body	weight in the mouth: like skimmed milk (light) to cream (full)
Finish	seconds the flavour lasts after swallowing: <5 short, 5–10 medium, >10 long

Scoring guide (100-point scale)

95 – 100	outstanding — balanced, complex, intense, very long
90 – 94	very good — great character and length
85 – 89	good — well made, enjoyable, some interest
80 – 84	acceptable — correct but simple
below 80	poor or faulty

Readiness for drinking

Too young	harsh tannin or acidity, closed nose — wait
Can age	enjoyable now, but fruit and structure will carry it further
Drink now	at its peak or made for early drinking
Past its best	fruit faded, dried out, dull or oxidised

Common faults — and how to spot them

Cork taint	wet cardboard, damp cellar, musty — fruit is muted
Oxidation	brownish colour, bruised apple, sherry-like (in a wine not meant to be)
Volatile acidity	vinegar or nail-polish remover
Reduction	struck match, rotten egg, cabbage — often fades after swirling or decanting
Brett	farmyard, sticking plaster, sweaty saddle — a little can add character

Tip: a wine is "balanced" when fruit, acidity, tannin, alcohol and sweetness support each other and none sticks out.