



## WINE TERMINOLOGY

You may have wondered what all those fancy descriptions mean when you're at a wine tasting? Well, we have come up with a guide of terms you can learn from and use at your next wine tasting to impress your friends and sommeliers with.

### **Basic**

**Acidity:** Describes a tart or sour taste in the mouth when total acidity of the wine is high. “Tart” and “tangy” are two descriptors for acidity.

**Aftertaste:** The taste or flavors that linger in the mouth after the wine is tasted, spit or swallowed. May be “harsh,” “hot,” “soft,” “lingering,” “short,” “smooth,” or nonexistent. See also ‘Finish.’

**Aroma:** Usually refers to the particular smell of the grape variety, i.e., “appley,” “raisiny,” “fresh” or “floral.”

**Body:** The weigh or viscosity of wine in your mouth; commonly expressed as full-bodied, medium-bodied or medium-weight, or light-bodied.

**Bouquet:** A tasting term used to describe the smell of the wine as it matures in the bottle.

**Finish:** The taste that remains in the mouth after swallowing. A long finish indicates a wine of good quality.

**Legs:** The viscous droplets that form and ease down the sides of the glass when the wine is swirled. This is an indication of the alcohol present in the wine.

**Length:** The amount of time the sensations of taste and aroma persist after swallowing.

**Mouth feel:** The texture of the wine, how it feels in the mouth and against the tongue.

**Nose:** See ‘Aroma’

**Palate:** The feel and taste of wine in the mouth.

**Quaffer:** A wine to drink (not sip).

### **Character**

**Acrid:** Describes a wine with overly pronounced acidity. This is often apparent in cheap red wines.

**Assertive:** Upfront, forward.

**Attractive:** A lighter style. Fresh, easy to drink wine.

**Balanced:** Indicates that the fruit, acid, and wood flavors are in the right proportion. A wine is well balanced when none of those characteristics dominates. Wine not in balance may be “acidic,” “cloying,” “flat” or “harsh.”



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**Big:** A wine that is full-bodied, rich and slightly alcoholic tasting.

**Character:** A wine with top-notch distinguishing qualities.

**Crisp:** Denotes a fresh, young wine with good acidity.

**Closed:** Describes wines that are concentrated and have character, but are shy in aroma or flavor.

**Complete:** A full-bodied wine rich in extracts with a pronounced finish.

**Complex:** Describes a wine that combines all flavor and taste components in harmony.

**Delicate:** Used to describe light-to-medium weight wines with good flavors.

**Dense:** Describes a wine that has concentrated aromas on the nose and palate, desirable in young wines.

**Depth:** Describes the complexity and concentration of flavors in a wine. Generally refers to a quality wine with subtle layers of flavor that go “deep.” Opposite of ‘Shallow.’

**Developed:** Refers to the maturity of a wine.

**Elegant:** Describes a wine of grace, balance and beauty.

**Empty:** Flavorless and uninteresting.

**Fading:** Describes a wine that is losing color, fruit, or flavor, usually as a result of age.

**Flabby:** Lacking acidity on the palate.

**Flat:** Having low acidity; the next stage after flabby; or refers to a sparkling wine that has lost its bubbles.

**Full-Bodied:** Fills the mouth. Opposite of ‘thin-bodied.’

**Graceful:** Describes a wine that is subtly harmonious and pleasing.

**Neutral:** Describes a wine without outstanding characteristics, good or bad.

**Pedestrian:** Plain.

**Potent:** Describes a strong, intense, powerful wine.

**Robust:** Describes a full-bodied, intense and vigorous wine.



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**Round:** Describes a well-balanced wine in fruit, tannins and body.

**Seductive:** A wine that is appealing.

**Short:** Describes a wine that does not remain on the palate after swallowing. Common in inexpensive wines, but not necessarily a fault.

**Simple:** Describes a wine with few characteristics that follow the initial impression. Not necessarily unfavorable; often describes an inexpensive, young wine.

**Soft:** Describes a wine with low acid/tannin, or alcohol content with little impact on the palate.

**Supple:** Describes a wine with well-balanced tannins and fruit characteristics.

**Thin:** Lacking body and depth.

### **Taste**

**Barn-yardy:** Smell of earth, truffle, and wet leaves.

**Bite:** A marked degree of acidity or tannin. An acid grip in the finish should be more like a zestful tang and is tolerable only in a rich, full-bodied wine.

**Bitter:** One of the four basic tastes. Considered a fault if the bitterness dominates the flavor or aftertaste. A trace in sweet wines may complement the flavors. In young red wines it can be a warning signal, as bitterness doesn't always dissipate with age. A fine, mature wine should not be bitter on the palate.

**Buttery:** It refers to both flavor and texture or mouth feel. Common among chardonnay, especially new world.

**Chewy:** Describes rich, heavy, tannic wines that are full-bodied.

**Corked:** The wine smells of cork, it is unpleasant to smell and taste, slightly musty. The flavor of the wine will typically be flat and dull.

**Dirty:** Covers any and all foul, rank, off-putting smells that can occur in a wine, including those caused by bad barrels or corks. A sign of poor winemaking.

**Earthy:** Describes a wine that tastes of soil, most common in red wines. Can be used both positively (pleasant, clean quality adding complexity to aroma and flavor) and negatively (barnyardy character bordering on dirtiness).

**Flinty:** Describe the aroma or taste of some white wines; like the odor of flint striking steel. Often used to describe Riesling.



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**Fruity:** Describes any quality referring to the body and richness of a wine, i.e. "appley," "berrylike," or "herbaceous." Usually implies a little extra sweetness.

**Grapey:** Describes simple flavors and aromas associated with fresh table grapes.

**Green:** Tasting of un-ripe fruit. Not necessarily a bad thing, especially in a Riesling.

**Heady:** Used to describe the smell of a wine high in alcohol.

**Herbaceous:** The taste and smell of herbs.

**Murky:** Lacking brightness; turbid or swampy.

**Musty:** Having a moldy smell.

**Oaky:** Describes the aroma and taste of oak.

**Oxidized:** Describes stale or 'off' wines.

**Peppery:** Describes the taste of pepper in a wine; sharper than 'Spicy.' Good zinfandel often has a black pepper aroma, while Rhone Valley Syrah can have white pepper aromas.

**Perfumed:** Refers to a delicate bouquet.

**Smoky:** Describes a subtle wood-smoke aroma. Attributable to barrel fermenting or aging.

**Spicy:** Describes the presence of spice flavors such as anise, cinnamon, cloves, mint and pepper, often present in complex wines.

**Sweet:** One of the four basic tastes. Describes the presence of residual sugar and/or glycerin.

**Tannin:** Describes a dry sensation, with flavors of leather and tea.

**Tart:** Sharp-tasting because of acidity. See also 'Acidic.'

**Toasty:** Describes a hint of the wooden barrel. Usually associated with dry white wines.

**Velvety:** Having rich flavor and a silky texture.

**Zesty:** A wine that's invigorating.