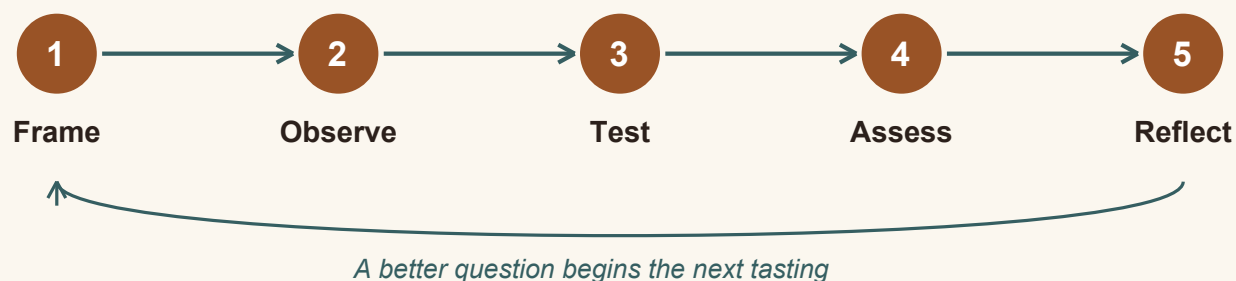




The Academy Tasting Methodology

A practical way to notice more, compare thoughtfully and explain what you enjoy.

A good tasting record gives an experience a shape. It tells you what stood out, how the sip developed and why you would choose that whiskey for a particular purpose. Our five-step method turns those impressions into something you can revisit and share.



Four kinds of note

OBSERVATION

What did I notice?

INTERPRETATION

What might explain it?

QUALITY

How well does it serve the purpose?

PREFERENCE

What do I enjoy?



Set the question and meet the glass

1 Frame

Choose one question before you pour. "Which would I enjoy neat?" keeps the whiskeys at bottled strength. "How do they compare at the same strength?" calls for measured preparation at a common ABV. A blending question asks what a component might contribute to the intended whole.

Prepare a comparison you can return to

Use clean, odor-free matching glasses and equal small servings. Record strength, volume, any water, temperature, time since pouring and sample order. Keep bottle identities behind unrelated codes when useful; a helper can hold the key. Vary which sample comes first and write independently before sharing impressions.

Have drinking water and a discard vessel nearby. Take brief, gentle sniffs and small optional sips; spitting is welcome. Pause with irritation or fatigue. Written examples and familiar food aromas offer a way to participate without alcohol.

2 Observe

Begin with your own words. Move from a broad resemblance such as fruit to a familiar reference such as apple or orange peel. Consult a flavor wheel after the first note, then keep only words that fit.

Before the sip

Appearance under stated light; aroma families and specific reminders.



During the sip

Basic tastes, aroma, texture and warmth; what arrives and changes.



After the sip

Which flavors remain? Track their duration separately from warmth or drying.

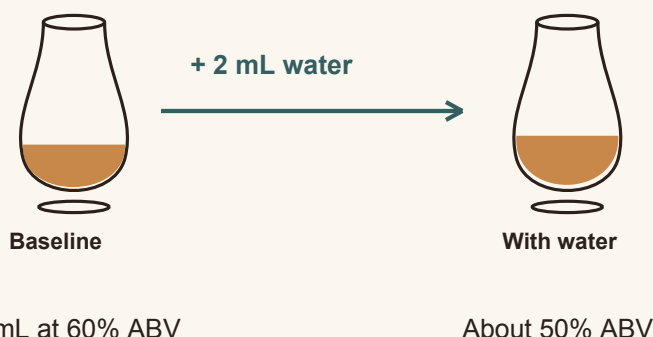
Give everyday words a meaning. Vanilla-like aroma, sweet taste, coating texture and warming prickle describe different parts of flavor. A drying feeling is mouthfeel; bitterness is a taste. Write the sequence as well as the list.



Repeat, change and learn

3 Test

Predict what a measured change will do and what would challenge that prediction. Keep an unchanged baseline. Use concealed repeats to check consistency, then apply the method to an unfamiliar whiskey. Build these checks across short sessions.



A repeatable preparation

$10 \times 60 / 12 = \text{about } 50\% \text{ ABV.}$

For a controlled comparison, serve equal small amounts from both prepared versions into matching glasses.

Water to add = starting volume x (starting ABV / target ABV - 1). Use the same ABV units and a target below the starting strength. This is a tasting approximation: mixed volumes are not perfectly additive.

4 Assess

Name the purpose, then explain the judgment. What is clear? How do the parts work together? What happens through the finish? How well does that serve your purpose? Support the answer with observations. Record your personal preference on its own line.

5 Reflect

State confidence in a specific claim and say why. Keep a plausible alternative explanation, reveal the sample key after recording, and add corrections as new notes. Choose one useful next step: a fresh coded pour, a measured change or an unfamiliar whiskey.

For a blend: separate the observed flavor, its proposed contribution and what a measured blend trial would need to show.



From three codes to one clear report

Question: which preparation better serves a fruit-led neat tasting? This invented case uses one whiskey and two preparations. All samples are served in equal small amounts, in identical glasses, at the same temperature and after the same interval.

418

Orange peel clear; toasted grain faint. Coating middle. Pronounced warmth remains after the fruit fades.

672

Orange peel and toasted grain clear. Lighter coating and gentler warmth. Fruit remains noticeable later; preferred.

935

Citrus clear; grain faint. Coating middle with pronounced lingering warmth. Similar overall impression to 418.

Reveal after the notes are complete

418 = A 672 = B 935 = A again

A: 10 mL of whiskey at 60% ABV. B: the same amount plus 2 mL water, approximately 50% ABV. Equal servings were then poured from these preparations. Codes 418 and 935 are the concealed duplicate.

A reasoned report

For a fruit-led neat serving, I preferred preparation B. Its fruit remained noticeable later and its warmth was gentler. The two A records were broadly similar, with citrus, coating texture and lingering warmth. The measured water addition may explain the change, although serving order or session effects could also contribute. My confidence in repeating this preference is moderate because this was one session. I would compare fresh coded preparations on another day, changing the order.

The duplicate checks consistency within this exercise. It does not establish general tasting reliability or identify a producer, age or recipe.



Your Academy tasting record

Date / assessor

Sample codes / session / method v0.2

FRAME Question and intended use

PREPARE Glass / serving volume / ABV / water / temperature / rest / order

Information visible before tasting / source of sample details

OBSERVE Record each sample before discussing or revealing

Sample code	Code _____	Code _____
Appearance / aroma		
Taste / texture		
Warmth / finish		
Intensity / what leads		

INTERPRET Leading explanation / alternative / evidence needed

TEST Baseline / measured change or repeat / what changed

ASSESS Success for the purpose and the observations supporting it

PREFERENCE + REFLECT My choice / reason / confidence / next step



Make the method your own habit

Build a record of learning

Keep your original notes and preparation key. Across short sessions, repeat a coded preparation, make a measured change, then transfer the method to an unfamiliar whiskey or lot. Record what carried over and what you revised. Pages 5 and 7 form the printable record; page 8 explains assessment.

Give your vocabulary something to point to

Agree on a few attribute definitions and familiar food references. For focused practice use 0 not noticed, 1 weak, 2 moderate, 3 strong, 4 very strong. These ordered teaching categories are not equal sensory intervals. Record which impression leads separately: dominance is not intensity. Keep not assessed outside the scale, and leave unknown facts unknown.

A useful final note

"I noticed _____. It may suggest _____; an alternative is _____. For _____, the whiskey works because _____. I prefer _____ because _____. I would next _____."

Keep the structure flexible. A specific observation and an honest reason are worth more than a long list of borrowed descriptors.

Continue with the Academy

Evaluating Whiskey course - the complete twelve-lesson learning sequence.

Method, Sources and Validation - the research companion, source notes and development plan.

Methods foundation: Meilgaard, Civille and Carr, *Sensory Evaluation Techniques*, 5th ed. (2016), chapters 3-6, 10-14 and 16. Shepherd and Stuckey inform approachable sensory observation; primary whisky dilution and descriptive-language studies inform specific exercises. See the linked research companion for exact locators, professional comparisons and the proposed learner study.

Edition 2 / 3 October 2026 / Research revision v0.2. Learner validation pending.

For adults of legal drinking age; participation is optional. Written practice develops reasoning; sensory competence needs direct assessment. Plan transport so nobody drives after drinking.



Keep the evidence behind the verdict

Session / codes / task: repeat, change or transfer

PREDICT What do I expect? What result would challenge it?

TRACK Choose a flavor and a physical sensation

Sensation / code	Arrival	Development	Finish

REPEAT Similarities, differences and any condition changes

CONFIDENCE Specific claim / tentative, moderate or high / reason

LOCK ORIGINAL Time saved before reveal: _____

REVEAL + REVISE Key / source / what changed my mind / date

TRANSFER Unfamiliar sample / what carried over / next practice target



Show the skill, not just the vocabulary

Three tasks: describe a coded sample and concealed repeat; predict and test a measured change; apply the method to an unfamiliar whiskey or lot. Retain independent records, the preparation key, results and a dated reflection. Split tasks into short sessions.

Question + preparation

Can another person reconstruct the question and conditions?

Independent observation

Did the original precede discussion and reveal? Are senses distinct?

Sensory development

Are arrival, development and finish recorded, with defined intensity?

Repeat + change

Are similarities, discrepancies and actual preparation changes shown?

Interpretation + confidence

Are evidence, alternatives and claim-specific confidence explained?

Assessment + preference

Does the verdict fit the purpose, with personal liking separate?

Reflection + transfer

Are revisions preserved and unfamiliar-sample performance shown?

Communication

Can a reader follow the reasons and a useful next action?

Formative feedback: 2 = demonstrated; 1 = partly demonstrated, with a specific revision needed; 0 = attempted but not demonstrated. Use **not assessed** when the task did not test a skill. Cite the supporting record for every rating. These ordered categories are not summed into a certification pass mark.

Written cases assess reasoning, not the learner's actual sensory performance. Two independent assessors should rate practical portfolios before resolving disagreements. Duplicate consistency must be considered alongside discrimination: the same generic note for every whiskey is not strong performance.