

WSET Level 3 Systematic Approach to Tasting Sake®

Appearance		
Clarity	clear sake cloudy sake	clear – slightly hazy – hazy (faulty?) light lees – medium lees – thick lees
Intensity	clear sake cloudy sake	water-white – pale – medium – deep colourless – slightly coloured – coloured (faulty?)
Colour	clear sake cloudy sake	colourless – lemon-green – lemon – gold – amber – brown pure white – off-white – yellow – brown – grey (faulty)
Other observations		e.g. legs/tears, tiny bubbles, bubbles, red/pink tints
Nose		
Condition		clean – unclean (faulty?)
Intensity		light – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – pronounced
Aroma characteristics		e.g. <i>ginjō-ka</i> , other fruity/floral, cereal/grain, lactic/dairy, 'sweetness', age, other
Palate		
Sweetness		dry – off-dry – medium-dry – medium-sweet – sweet – luscious
Acidity		low – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – high
Umami		low – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – high
Alcohol		low – medium – high
Body		light – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – full
Mousse		delicate – creamy – aggressive
Flavour intensity		light – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – pronounced
Flavour characteristics		e.g. <i>ginjō-ka</i> , other fruity/floral, cereal/grain, lactic/dairy, 'sweetness', age, other
Other observations		e.g. balance, texture, finish
Finish		short – medium(-) – medium – medium(+) – long
Conclusions		
Assessment of quality		
Quality level		faulty – poor – acceptable – good – very good – outstanding

Notes for students:

For lines where the entries are separated by hyphens – You must select one and only one of these options.

For lines starting with 'e.g.' where the entries are separated with commas – These are entries that you should consider when writing your tasting note. You may not need to comment on each entry for every sake.

WSET Level 3 Sake-Lexicon

Supporting the WSET Level 3 Systematic Approach to Tasting Sake

Describing aroma and flavour

Ginjō		banana, apple, pear, melon, lychee, pineapple, cherry, strawberry, aniseed, bubblegum, blossom, lily, rose, guava, mango, passion fruit
Fruity/floral (other than <i>ginjō</i>)		ripe banana, banana bread, fig grape, nectarine, apricot, plum, lemon, orange white flowers
Cereal/grain		rice flour, bran, steamed rice, porridge, toasted cereal, malt
Lactic/dairy		milk, cream, yoghurt, butter, fresh cheese (cream cheese, mozzarella), mature cheese (cheddar)
'Sweetness'		cotton candy, honey, sugarcane, brown sugar/molasses
Age (<i>koshu</i>)		honey, molasses, caramel, dried fruits, coffee, chocolate, meat broth, clove, cinnamon, fenugreek, almond, walnut, pickled vegetables, soy sauce, bacon, compost
Other	nuts/beans	coffee, chocolate, fresh hazelnut, fresh almond, chestnut, fresh walnut, roasted nuts, caramelised nuts
	herbs	mint, basil, lemongrass, grass
	spices	clove, cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper
	other	earthy, mushroom, hay meat (broth, ham, roast meat) Japanese cedar, oak aromas, smoke

Commenting on texture, balance and finish

Texture and balance	creamy, silky, velvety, viscous <i>tanrei karakuchi</i> (vibrant, refreshing, dryness) <i>nigami</i> (hints of bitterness) <i>shibumi</i> (hints of astringency)
Finish	<i>kire</i> (cleansing and refreshing short finish)

Faults

Open too long	staleness, oxidation, caramel, alcohol
Hine	pickled vegetables, rotten vegetables, caramel
Nama-hine	malt, bacon, geranium, sweet spices, caramelised nuts
Light damage	scorched rubber, burned hair, sulfurous, musky, cardboard
Microbiological spoilage	egg, vinegar, rotting vegetable, compost, onion, sour milk, rancid cheese, sweat, sulfurous, sticking plasters
Other faults	damp cardboard (TCA), volatile acidity (VA), butter (diacetyl), woodiness (acetaldehyde) taints from production equipment (plastic, rubber, paper, metal, wood)
Palate defects	unpleasant bitterness, astringency, coarseness/roughness, poor balance

Note to Students:

The WSET Level 3 Sake-Lexicon is designed to be a prompt and a guide which you do not need to memorise. You can pass the tasting examination with distinction if you use the descriptors in the Sake-Lexicon but you do not need to limit yourself to these terms and the examiners will accept other descriptors so long as they are accurate.