

CONDUCTING STRUCTURED TASTINGS

The main point of difference between a general tasting and a structured tasting is the method of delivery. Rather than simply allowing visitors to pick and choose the wines and the tasting order, you select a number of wines and present them in a pre-determined order. The term 'structured' implies that a basic level of education is also included and leads to an "experience". This method is particularly suitable for large groups and lends itself to either a stand-up or seated tasting. It's a guide only, so tailor it to suit your own individual requirements.

Prior to the Tasting

1. Select a range of wines (6-9) from your portfolio that are representative of:
 - Varietals
 - Vintages
 - Vineyards/Regions
2. Choose a set tasting order starting with light aromatics, sparkling, oaked whites, light reds, oaked reds and finishing with botrytised or fortified wines.
3. Make up a sheet listing each wine accompanied by a brief tasting note.
4. Include any special offers and a brief history if room permits.
5. Limit the information to one A4 sheet (could be double sided).
6. For durability, the sheets can be laminated and re-used, unless you want the sheet to double as an order form/tasting record (be aware that visitors like to take these with them if they can).

Delivery

1. Select a suitable area to conduct the tasting that can accommodate the anticipated numbers comfortably (preferably away from the general public)
2. Welcome the group and attend to any "housekeeping" items (i.e. Amenities, spittoons, water, etc)
3. Explain how the tasting will be conducted (i.e. In tasting order according to the sheet provided)
4. Provide a brief history/overview of the winery and its facilities/services.
5. Conduct the tasting in the pre-set order by introducing and explaining each wine as you pour. If customers want to taste something further down the list (i.e. Reds only), politely encourage them to wait.
6. As you are getting ready to pour the next wine, invite feedback from visitors.
7. As each "bracket" is concluded (i.e. End of the whites), pre-empt sales by asking, "Which wine did you prefer?" of different visitors.
8. If you have something special available, such as a back vintage or a barrel sample, introduce it at the conclusion of the tasting.
9. Conclude the tasting with an invitation to purchase, perhaps explaining your methods of delivery and packaging, mailing list opportunities, distribution, etc. Also flag any supporting merchandise at this time.
10. Thank the group and invite feedback.

Benefits of Structured Presentations

- Efficient use of staff (generally, one person can handle up to 30 people – groups greater than this can require a second person pouring while one speaks)
- Groups remain more focused on the tasting and can appreciate the wines better because of the pre-determined tasting order
- Potential for greater sales as the cellar door attendant will be aware of individual preferences
- Promotes an “experience” rather than just a tasting, with an educational focus
- Winery maintains control of the tasting

Variables

- Depending on your layout, structured tastings might not work well for very diverse groups (i.e. Large coach groups comprising a range of demographics)
- Consider seated tastings if room permits, with wine already pre-poured, perhaps with a food accompaniment. Works well with very large groups (45+) and allows efficient use of staff resources
- Test what works for you and don't be afraid to try something different