



CANDIDATE MENTORING GUIDELINES

To ensure there is equal opportunity for all candidates, consistent sharing of information to candidates and, above all, sound examinations of the highest standards at all levels of the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas (hereafter referred to as CMS-A), the following is a set of guidelines for mentors engaged in mentoring candidates.

The CMS-A has as its mission mentoring great beverage service, not how to pass an examination. Our “pay-it-forward” philosophy makes it tempting to try to “help” our talented protégées by giving them guidance on how to take the exam; we must do our utmost to teach officially endorsed principles and trust the exam to take care of itself. A mentor shall not give advantage to any candidate by sharing information about examinations that is not permitted to be given to all candidates. As the communication of our exact curriculum and standards continues to improve and our examination scoring systems provide more specific feedback, mentoring to stated standards will be sufficient to help candidates achieve success in CMS-A examination situations and will result in a greater ownership of the knowledge and skill necessary.

General Rules

- 1) Mentoring is a voluntary process and is not required for membership in the CMS-A.
- 2) Any exchange of fees, monetary or otherwise, for mentoring candidate CMS-A exam preparation outside of CMS-A courses is prohibited. Reimbursement for product is acceptable.
- 3) The sharing of exact theory questions, service situations, blind wines or grading point weights outside of those shared during official CMS-A classes is prohibited. Mentors should be very specific in the teaching, demonstration and critique of performed beverage service task standards. They should not teach test-taking techniques as they apply to success within our grading practices.

Example: Candidate asks, “How many points do I lose for getting the varietal correct, but putting a Red Burgundy in Central Otago?” A suggested proper response would be along the lines of, “It is very important to the Court of Master Sommeliers that you understand the differences between New World and Old World when they are obvious.”

- 4) Teaching to standards provided by the CMS-A in courses and on the CMS-A website is encouraged.

Mentors must clarify with every candidate that the employing of any specific service situations/deductive tasting wines/theory questions utilized in the training of a candidate is a training tool and NOT an indication of exact examination content.

- 5) Group mentoring is encouraged.

Any group mentoring outside of official CMS-A classes and events should not be branded as CMS-A “official sponsorship”.

Participation in Mock Examinations meant to simulate CMS-A Examinations is prohibited.

- 6) Master Sommelier Ethics - Examining those with whom you have a significant relationship as defined by the CMS-A Code of Ethics is prohibited due to the conflict of interest and the appearance of impropriety that arises from a Master Sommelier examining someone mentored by that Master Sommelier. See the guidelines in the Conflict of Interest and Non-Fraternization Policy section of the Code of Ethics/Conduct for specific limitations on a Master Sommelier’s participation in certain examinations and prohibitions on fraternizing, or appearing to fraternize, with candidates outside of official CMS-sponsored events.

Deductive Tasting

Mentors are encouraged to participate in Deductive Tasting mentoring as often as possible, in group or one-on-one sessions. These sessions should not mirror examination situations exactly, *i.e.* having 3 Master Sommeliers sitting across a desk with a timer, giving the tasting introduction while scoring one candidate. Explaining how and why the CMS-A system works, suggesting theoretical and tasting techniques, designing exercises meant to hone the palate, etc. are encouraged.

- 1) Teaching to the full grid as published on the CMS-A website is encouraged.
- 2) Timing candidates, sharing personal methodologies you think work, noting missed areas listed on the grid, etc. are encouraged.
- 3) Sharing point weighting or a specific list of possible wines with a candidate is prohibited.
- 4) Sharing CMS-A methodology as to how wines are chosen should be limited to the following:

The Examination Director and Committee meet several times a year to discuss and taste possible wines for examination. If the committee determines that a Napa Chardonnay will be used in a deductive tasting examination, they will blind taste numerous Napa Chardonnays. Notes are consolidated and a wine must have strong majority consensus to be considered for use.

Theory

Mentors are encouraged to utilize current basic curriculum as stated in classes and on the CMS-A website as a basis for theory mentoring. As we are not fully specific as to what level of questioning applies to what level of CMS-A examination for all regions – mentors should use their best judgment as to which questions to ask based upon a candidate’s level of examination.

- 1) Asking questions gleaned from personal/professional study in a general manner is encouraged.
- 2) Sharing personal study techniques and general curriculum structure philosophies (i.e. *suggesting the candidate learn producer/viticulture/vinification/grapes/soils/geographic highlights/ etc. of classic wine regions around the world*) is encouraged.
- 3) Sharing the exact theoretical curriculum examined is prohibited.
- 4) Sharing point weighting with a candidate is prohibited.

Practical Service

Mentors are encouraged to utilize current service standards as stated in classes and on the CMS-A website as a base to demonstrate and critique. Decanting, sparkling wine opening, spirit service, food and wine pairing, basic table etiquette, banquet service, cost controls and *mise-en-place* may all be addressed.

- 1) Critiquing candidate service practices is encouraged.
- 2) Sharing point weighting for any portion of the Practical Service examination is prohibited.
- 3) Sharing of specific/exact potential service situations found in past or future Practical Service examinations is prohibited.

When in Doubt

Should any mentoring situation arise in which you are unsure of the guidelines, you are obligated to contact Kathleen Lewis at klewis@mastersommeliers.org.

Ramifications of Employing Prohibited Practices

The sanctity and quality of our examinations lies in our ability to be fair and inclusive to all candidates. Any infraction to the above guidelines compromises this sanctity. The Court of Master Sommeliers Ethics Committee will investigate any claims made regarding a Member in violation of outlined prohibited practices in this document. Once a claimed infraction is validated, in accordance with the Code of Conduct Policy, the Ethics Committee will make a recommendation to the Board of Directors.

References

[CMS-A Commitment to Examination Integrity](#)
[CMS-A Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility](#)
[CMS-A Candidate Code of Conduct](#)
[CMS-A General Exam Standards, Syllabi, and What to Expect](#)