

# 2023 Upper Level Theory: Illustrative Examples of Questions & Answers

The following is a set of questions from the 2023 Advanced & Master Sommelier Diploma Theory examinations which represent concepts and levels of knowledge both best understood, and most challenging, to the candidates.

To illustrate their reconciliation within our overall curriculum and difficulty level as determined by the Examination Committee, the accepted answer (knowing we allow different phrasing and spelling when the knowledge is clearly demonstrated) and the difficulty level are provided with explanation.

In addition to how Theory supports Tasting, Business of the Sommelier, and Hospitality and Service, all curriculum and examination standards are designed to support the professional roles defined in the Expected Skill Set document ([link](#)) for both Advanced and Master Sommeliers.

**Difficulty Levels:** Master Sommelier Diploma Theory examinations consist of Advanced & Master Sommelier-level questions. The Advanced Sommelier Theory examination consists of Advanced-level questions with small amounts of both Certified-level (to ensure more foundational aspects are solid) and Master Sommelier-level (to both provide candidates hoping to become Master Sommeliers an expectation and ensure the more difficult aspects within in the job skills description are prepared for).

We hope this helps one better understand the Court of Master Sommeliers curriculum to set standards for a successful outline of study in the future.

**QUESTION (MASTER SOMMELIER, MAY):**

**Name the warmest growing season from 2016 to 2021 in Barbaresco:**

(NOTE: the phrasing “from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_” INCLUDES the endpoints mentioned. In this case, both 2016 and 2021 should be considered.)

**Acceptable Answer:** 2017

**Success rate:** 28% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Piedmont is one of the three most essential regions of one of the core wine growing countries in the world. We begin teaching Barbaresco DOCG at the Introductory level; at the Certified level we expect additional knowledge of iconic producers, awareness of the spectrum of modern and traditional styles, and foundation-level natural features. At the Advanced level, this depth of knowledge increases into vintage variation, additional producers, history & lore, and more. Additionally, 2017 is a current vintage and Advanced level sommeliers will be encountering these wines in their daily lives while selling wine to guests, importing and distribution, or buying wines from their programs & portfolios - unlike asking the difference between the 1991 and 1996 vintages in Barbaresco, which would be Master Sommelier level.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Major Country:** Italy
- **Major Region:** Piedmont – Barbaresco DOCG
- **Vintage - Climate Conditions:** Piedmont
- **Vintage – Style:** Riper wines made in 2017

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*Understanding vintage growing conditions in fundamental regions such as Barbaresco is expected of a sommelier in a buying and/or lead service position, to whom the community looks towards for depth of knowledge in the profession. Moreover, understanding extraordinary vintages which are regularly found in the everyday marketplace is essential. Finally, understanding the impact on growing conditions in a region where wines are regularly cellared and sold with age is also a factor.*

**QUESTION (MASTER SOMMELIER, MAY):**

Which village contains all of the following *Premier Crus*: Clos des Mouches, Les Teurons, and Clos du Roi?

**Acceptable Answer:**

Beaune

**Success rate:** 79% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Within the topic of Burgundy, understanding individual Cru locations begins in earnest at the Certified level and ascends throughout our curriculum and examinations. Moreover, knowledge of major producers' "iconic wines" is expected at the Advanced level. Finally, *listening* to the question is important so as to not list multiple villages.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Geography – Appellation:** Beaune
- **Geography - Location**
- **Geography – Named Vineyard:** Clos des Mouches, Les Teurons, and Clos du Roi

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*The ability to engage guests and professional colleagues with confidence in a region with such focus on Cru level is essential to upper level professionals. The concept of Burgundy fragmentation, village/vineyard/Cru, and Domaine vs. Negociant begins at the Introductory level. At Certified level major Grand Cru, iconic producers, and a basic understanding of regional layout are present. Additionally, there are no Grand Cru in Beaune; therefore, the Premier Cru are the most important to know and understand.*

**QUESTION (MASTER SOMMELIER, MAY):**

Name the commune of origin and current classification of Château Troplong-Mondot (please provide the full title of classification):

**Acceptable Answer:** St.-Émilion Premier Grand Cru Classé B (must say all)

**Success rate:** 48% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Bordeaux - and its classifications & hierarchy - are core curriculum. The Court of Master Sommeliers teaches so at the Introductory level; as we ascend towards the Certified level, we expect additional knowledge such as touchstone producers, commune locations and awareness of landmark vintages. At the Advanced level, this depth of knowledge increases into vintage variation, geography, topography and viticulture, naming of grape varieties, additional important producers, history & lore, and more.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Major Region:** Bordeaux
- **Geography:** Appellation
- **Label Term**
- **Wine Law:** Classification
- **Producer:** Leading Producers

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*Building wine lists, understanding pricing, purchasing en primeur, guest and buyer expectations: are all part of classification hierarchy & understanding the wines and market of Bordeaux. St.-Émilion, with its dynamic approach & re-classification, is a particularly important example of this paradigm. For the Tasting portion, naming official classification levels are expected.*

**QUESTION (MASTER SOMMELIER, MAY):**

**Which AVA contains the Temperance Hill, Shea, and Seven Springs *single vineyards*?**

**Acceptable Answer:** Willamette Valley

**Success rate:** 38% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Recognition of the Willamette Valley as a Pinot Noir producing global leader begins at Introductory. In the same way we approach Napa Valley, Mendoza or Vouvray, additional familiarity which assists in service, sales and hospitality builds at Certified level and ascends towards the deeper knowledge associated with upper level professionals.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Major Region:** Oregon
- **Geography - Appellation:** Willamette Valley & AVA
- **Geography - Named Vineyard:** Temperance Hill, Shea, and Seven Springs
- **Wine Law:** Classification
- **Producer:** Leading Producers

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*Standard bearing, single vineyard and specific appellation knowledge of iconic regions is expected in someone who is selling/serving/representing wines of this core nature. As our Advanced level certifies someone in a buying position or lead sommelier role, this level of knowledge is to be expected. This is also an example of listening skills and processing the question before rushing to an answer; candidates who paid thoughtful attention were successful here, as they knew Willamette Valley was the only possible answer – not a single sub-AVA.*



**QUESTION (MASTER SOMMELIER, MAY):**

**At what temperature do most grapevines begin to shut down to conserve water? Please indicate Fahrenheit or Celsius.**

**Acceptable Answer:** 95-105 degrees F or 35-40 degrees C

**Success rate:** 47% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Understanding fundamental information which impacts grapevine life cycle begins at our Introductory level. As candidates ascend through our curriculum and take ownership of regional climate differences, varietal identities and growing conditions around the world, they should understand the how temperature affects the vine growth cycle.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Grape Growing:** Affect on Style
- **Geography:** Climate

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*In warmer regions and growing seasons, the fringes of climate have a massive impact on yield, market conditions, wine style, and quality. Natural conditions and corresponding viticulture are integral to understanding the raw materials of wine and the cascading impact on the quality, viability, and availability of the final product. Emerging themes such as global warming should be tracked.*

**QUESTION (MASTER SOMMELIER THEORY, MAY):**

**How does high humidity slow oxidation in the *Canteiro Process*?**

**Acceptable Answer:** Maintains higher ratio of wine-to-oxygen in barrel by minimizing evaporation within the wine

**Success rate:** 50% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Process driven wines and extrapolating the reasons behind - and impact of - conditions and decisions along the way are essential in understanding the types and styles produced within a category. We shine a bright light on the process and production of fortified wines at our Introductory course and build from there, including the presence of these wines at the Certified hospitality and service exam.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Minor Region:** Portugal
- **Fortified Wine:** Madeira
- **General Term**
- **Winemaking:** Fortified Wine
- **Winemaking:** Affect on Style
- **Winemaking:** Fermentation & Impact Methods

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*Understanding cause and effect in winemaking represents comprehension far beyond regurgitation of facts and figures. Fermentation, fortification, aging, storage and transport, grape varieties used: all impact the eventual profiles which inform how to sell, serve, and store these wines. Why are some so expensive, rare, and ancient in vintage? Why are some so ubiquitous and modestly priced? Madeira is a wine which is unique in ambitious beverage programs; we expect our candidates to be fluent in explaining why and how.*

**TWO-PART QUESTION: (ADVANCED SOMMELIER, MAY):**

**Question One: Which AOP's soil chart is shown below? (NOTE: the soil chart listed 10 different soil types under the titles "On mountain side" and "Sub-Hills".)**

**Answer:** Alsace.

**Success rate:** 62% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

Most did very well to identify the AOP, understanding the uniqueness of Alsace's soil patchwork within France's AOP possibilities. The follow-up question proved more challenging.

**Question Two: How does the diversity of this soil chart relate to the presence of *Edelzwicker* and *Gentil* wines?**

**Acceptable Answer:**

Diversity of soils leads to diversity of grapes, having a wide array of grapes results in the multi-grape blends created and named to ensure a consistent product year-to-year.

**Success rate:** 14% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly. 10% answered this question partially correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Testing the understanding of label terminology indicating an established wine style in a major region (Alsace) of the most established wine country in the world (France). Said style is made from a blend of grapes within a region noted for varying soils and, in conjunction with other factors, a wide array of grape varieties. There are additional reasons for these blends, but this question focuses on the relationship between soil and grape variety.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Major Region:** Alsace
- **Geography - Appellation:** Alsace
- **Soil – Type & Name:** a vast array of soil-types rarely in the same proximity, with different causes
- **Label Term – Style & Type:** both terms indicate "blends of different grape varieties"
- **Wine Law – Grape Variety**
- **Wine Law – Label Term & Grape Variety:** not naming the grape variety is somewhat unique in the rare French AOP which names grape varieties on its most established wine labels

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*Understanding Gentil and Edelzwicker label terms (established styles of wine in the major region of Alsace), linking soils to grape varieties planted and recognizing the unique mosaic of the AOP, all explain why these wine blends taste the way they do. Gentil and Edelzwicker categories provide an option for unique flavor profiles at a low price point, context for other key aspects of the Alsace region, and pairing options.*



**QUESTION: (ADVANCED SOMMELIER EXAMINATION, APRIL):**

How many hours of sunshine does *Bandol AOP* receive on average each year?

**Acceptable Answer:**

Any number between 2,500 and 3,300 - 3,000 is most commonly cited

**Success rate:** 17% of candidates succeeded in answering this question correctly.

**Difficulty Level:** Advanced Sommelier

Bandol is among the most established, unique and quality *AOPs* in Provence (and for that matter, all of Southern France - for table wines).

Grapevines require a minimum of 1,500 hours of sun; most quality regions receive 1,800 to 2,200. Bandol is established as one of the sunniest regions in France. Mourvèdre is known to require – and, is established in other regions (Jumilla, Australia, California, etc.) which also receive – “a lot” of sun. The deep color of Bandol’s red wines is part of the reputation of Bandol. UV-light levels from sunlight hours is a major factor in achieving deeply colored grapes and wine.

Key: one doesn’t need to memorize exact average sunlight hours for this (or, any) region to contextualize the information and extrapolate to an acceptable answer. This concept applies to many different aspects of Master Sommelier Diploma theory examinations – if one didn’t commit a specific figure or name to memory, use reason and logic.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Geography – Appellation:** recognizing Bandol AOP as one of the higher quality, established, and most unique wine regions in Southern France/France
- **Geography – Location:** Bandol is located on the coast of southern France, a sunny area
- **Geography - Grape Growing:** sunlight hours is a foundational consideration of vine needs, Mourvèdre needs more than most grapes, Mourvèdre is reserved for the sunniest vineyard land within Bandol
- **Geography - Grape-Variety-to-Region:** Mourvèdre is the most established red grape variety for the best wines of Bandol
- **Geography – Climate:** sunlight hours is a foundational consideration of climate
- **Grape Variety – Physical Characteristics:** Mourvèdre requires lots of sun to ripen, has deep purple color from UV rays

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*Bandol is established as both a classic wine of high quality and re-emerging as a unique option to bigger name regions. Both theoretically and in tasting, understanding why Bandol is unique begins with its remarkable climate. It extends to understanding Mourvèdre and the most established producers and proprietary brands of the region.*

**QUESTIONS (ADVANCED SOMMELIER EXAMINATIONS, APRIL AND MAY):**

1. Name the primary grape variety used to produce the *La Faraona* proprietary wine:
2. What winery produces the *Sorella* proprietary wine?
3. Which of the following applies to *Clos Saint Florentin St.-Joseph*? (Choose ALL that apply)
4. Define the official category of the base Cognac used to produce *Grand Marnier Quintessence*:  
(Official category of Cognac base examples: VS, XO, etc.):

**Acceptable Answers (in order of bullet points above):**

1. Mencía
2. Andrew Will
3. Only single vineyard-labeled wine from J.L. Chave & 2015 was first release
4. XXO or Hors d'Age

**Success rate:**

1. 0%
2. 0%
3. 13% correct, 46% partially correct
4. 7%

**Difficulty Level:** Master Sommelier

These are all small, rare, highly established, price and quality leading proprietary wines or beverages of their type. Different (extremely important) aspects about them were asked, from source material to vineyard name to brand name to grape variety to release dates. While they are from “minor” (not as widely established or enjoyed in the marketplace, or for as long as some others) regions or types of beverages, they are in the upper tier of quality/most expensive in their category.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Minor Regions:** (in order)  
1) Bierzo      2) Washington State      3) Saint-Joseph      4) Sweet Liqueurs
- **Geography - Grape Variety-to-Region:** if producer/proprietary brand is recognized to place or type, can extrapolate to information inquired about
- **Producer - Leading Producers:** 1) Palacios    2) Andrew Will    3) J.L. Chave    4) Grand Marnier are leaders in their respective categories, mostly established for at least 20 years, some for over a century
- **Producer – Proprietary Blend:** iconic/highest quality/high price within their category
- **Grape Variety or Base Material of Production**
- **Non-Wine – Production:** if one recognizes *Quintessence* as the highest quality/most expensive Grand Marnier, they can extrapolate that the highest quality (oldest) Cognac base being used
- **Non-Wine Law – Label Term & Classification:** XXO and Hors d'Age level of classification and required aging
- **Wine Law - Grape Variety:** if one recognizes *La Faraona* as Bierzo, can extrapolate to grape variety



**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*Producer knowledge supports tableside service and builds rapport with guests who are familiar with the specific wines, or the region they represent. High pricing indicates demand, recognized quality and lower availability. Oftentimes, leading producers and/or proprietary brands use or have established methods of production which improve the overall quality and reputation of a category – which can be tasted in the glass and sold at the table.*

**QUESTION (ADVANCED SOMMELIER EXAMINATION, APRIL):**

Name four *domaines* that co-produced *Montrachet Grand Cru* in the 2016 harvest:

**Acceptable Answer:**

(ANY four of the following)

- Guy Amiot
- Fleurot-Larose
- Lafon
- Lamy-Pillot
- Leflaive
- Claudine Petijean
- Romanée-Conti

**Success rate:** 0% of candidates succeeded in answering this question completely correct; 5% answered this question partially correct.

**Difficulty Level:** Master Sommelier

There are 16-ish total producers of Montrachet with approximately 11 *Domaine*-produced examples. If one didn't know about this specific bottling, knowing three of the most renowned producers likely to co-produce in such a situation is an Advanced-level understanding; expanding to four makes it Master Sommelier-level.

**Topics Broached:**

- **Major Region:** Burgundy.
- **Producer - Leading Producers:** in the Region and world
- **Producer – Proprietary Blend:** one of the more remarkable and exceptionally rare in the world for an iconic vineyard recently on the market. With great plots of *Montrachet*
- **Geography – Named Vineyard:** Leading Chardonnay vineyard in the world by reputation and quality
- **Vintage – Climate Conditions:** vintage variation – exceptionally small crop forced the co-production (600 bottles made), frost was a hallmark grape growing hazard, prices and availability were highly affected
- **General Term:** *Domaine v. Négociant* understanding
- **History & Lore:** exceptionally rare occurrence with some of the most renowned producers of wine – much less *Montrachet*, much less Burgundy

**How it Reconciles with the Court of Master Sommeliers Curriculum:**

*This demands a combination of tableside and business acumen for purchasing & selling AND having general knowledge of why this wine will be different in the glass. Limited quantities of iconic wines affect price; here, there is a rarity of the melding of winemaking philosophies amongst some of the greatest winemakers within the most renowned white wine vineyard in the world. And, the thought of “some DRC, some Lafon, some Leflaive...in one bottle of...MONTRACHET!!!!...” is exciting to anyone who loves wine.*