



## **ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM**

### **A GUIDE ON WHAT TO EXPECT & HOW TO PREPARE**

#### **PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT:**

The Advanced Sommelier Theory is a difficult exam and requires a significant increase in knowledge from the Certified Sommelier exam. Success requires a combination of industry experience and creating a study system to cover all necessary topics in appropriate breadth and depth. This manual provides candidates guidance on what to expect and a road map for how to prepare.

#### **PART I: WHAT TO EXPECT**

- Expected Skill Set of an Advanced Sommelier
- Advanced Sommelier Theory Exam General Description
- Advanced Sommelier Application Process & Timeline
- What to Expect at the Pearson VUE Testing Center
- Results, Scores, and Feedback
- CMS-A Exam Accommodations Policy

#### **PART II: HOW TO PREPARE**

- Advanced Sommelier Theory Exam Details
- Exam Day Planning: Exam Practice for the Pearson VUE experience
- Exam Day Planning: Considerations and Helpful Hints
- Resources for Study
- Study Strategies
- Study Topics
- Areas of Study
- Example Questions



## **PART I**

### **WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM**

## EXPECTED SKILLS SET OF AN ADVANCED SOMMELIER

- In-depth theoretical knowledge of major beverage alcohol subjects
- World-class proficiency in formal beverage service that encompasses:
  - Still and sparkling wine, decanting, beer, after-dinner, and by-the-glass pour service
  - Global cuisine, food-and-wine pairing, and salesmanship of pairings
  - Classic cocktail production and spirits service
  - Comprehensive understanding of benchmark producers and vintages in highly established wine regions
  - Hospitality and salesmanship
- Deductive Tasting Method ability for a broad spectrum of classic red and white wines
- Complete beverage program management ability that includes:
  - Beverage alcohol assessment for style, quality, and thematic suitability
  - Assessing a wine and beverage list for content, design, and knowledge of basic marketing
  - Cellar design, purchasing, and inventory systems
  - Creation and implementation of staff training and education for single-unit operation, including mentorship towards CMS certifications at the Introductory or Certified Sommelier-level
  - Financial management of a beverage program, including cost controls, spreadsheet creation and comprehension

### Potential Roles:

- **Restaurant:** Floor Sommelier, Head Sommelier, Beverage Director of Single-Unit Restaurant or Hotel
- **Other:** Winery Hospitality Management, Retail Manager/Owner, Distributor and/or Importer Educator or Senior Salesperson

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM GENERAL DESCRIPTION

- Candidates pursuing the Advanced Sommelier certification must successfully complete the Theory portion of the exam first. The Theory portion is a written exam, administered at the nearest industry-leading Pearson VUE testing center to the candidate.
- Upon passing the Theory portion, candidates will be invited to sit the Practical and Tasting portions later in the calendar year.
- Candidates that do not pass the Theory portion must wait until the next calendar year to re-take the exam.
- Candidates are still required to pass all three portions of the examination within a calendar year. If a candidate passes Theory but does not pass the Practical and/or Tasting portions, they must start the process again with the Theory Exam the following year.

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM GENERAL DESCRIPTION, continued...

- Eligible Certified Sommeliers may sit for the Advanced Sommelier Theory examination in perpetuity. However, in the following cases, they will be required to wait an additional year between exams to allow for the preparation necessary for a reasonable chance of success:
  - A first attempt at Practical without at least a 40% score
  - A second consecutive year's attempt at Practical without at least a 50% score.
  - A third consecutive year's attempt at Theory or Practical without at least a 55% score.
  - Note: There is no required minimum score on any attempt at the Tasting portion.

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM APPLICATION PROCESS & TIMELINE

### Eligibility Requirements:

- Applicants must attend the three-day Advanced Sommelier Course prior to October of the application year.
- Current employment must be in the restaurant/hospitality or beverage industry.
- Applicants must have a minimum three years of restaurant experience in a service/sales position within nine years of the date the application is submitted.
  - Due to COVID-19, restaurant experience has been extended from seven to nine years.

### Application Process:

- Applicants go to the CMS-A website, log in with their student ID, and fill out the application.
- The application time period is open for one month in the fall of the calendar year prior to the exam.
- Once the application time period is finished, the CMS-A will send an authorization to test at a Pearson VUE center. Make sure this email does not go to spam or check your spam box if you did not receive it.

### Schedule Date and Time:

- CMS-A will send an email detailing the time and date the exam is scheduled.
- Candidates will also receive a confirmation email from Pearson VUE.
- Candidates can log into their Pearson VUE account at <https://home.pearsonvue.com/Clients/Court-of-Master-Sommeliers.aspx> to view their test center appointment details and reconfirm date and time.
- The applicant will go to the Pearson VUE website to find a Pearson VUE or Authorized Pearson VUE Center closest to them and register to take the exam. There may be travel required for certain applicants.

### **Schedule Date and Time: continued....**

- If a candidate cannot get the time needed at their center of choice, they should continue to check back at that center or broaden their search to other centers.
- \*TIME ZONES\* Note there is only one test time that will differ depending on region and time zone.

### **WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE PEARSON VUE CENTER ON EXAM DAY**

**To get a feel for that the testing center is like and what to expect when you arrive, Pearson VUE has video resources.**

1. Go to the **CMS-A** Pearson VUE homepage - **DO NOT LOG INTO YOUR ACCOUNT.**  
<https://home.pearsonvue.com/Clients/Court-of-Master-Sommeliers.aspx>
2. Look for “Related Links” halfway down the page on the right-hand side
3. Click on the link “What to expect in a Pearson Vue test center.” There is an informative video to see exactly what to expect upon arrival to your test center with reminders of what to bring.  
<https://home.pearsonvue.com/Test-takers/Resources.aspx#what-to-expect>

### **Arrive 15 Minutes Early:**

- This examination is **ONLY** at the time scheduled.
- Arrive at the test center 15 minutes before the scheduled appointment time. This will give adequate time to complete the necessary sign-in procedures. If a candidate arrives more than 15 minutes late for your appointment, admission will be refused, and the candidate will not be refunded for that exam. The candidate will need to reapply to take the exam the following calendar year.

### **Non-Disclosure Agreement:**

- Prior to beginning the Advanced Sommelier Theory examination, five (5) minutes will be given to read and accept the Nondisclosure Agreement (NDA).
- The time used to read and accept the NDA will not count against examination time, and any time left if the NDA is signed early does not extend examination time. Signing the NDA confirms the candidate agrees not to disclose, publish, reproduce, or transmit this Advanced Sommelier Theory examination in whole or in part in any form or by any means, verbal or written, electronic or mechanical, for any purpose.
- If the NDA is not signed, the exam will not move forward, the session will end, and no refund will be provided.

## WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE PEARSON VUE CENTER ON EXAM DAY continued...

### **ID Policy:**

- One form of ID will be required and must be original (no photocopies), valid (unexpired), and government-issued that includes name, photograph, and signature.
- The first and last name used to register must match exactly the first and last name on the ID that is presented on test day. All IDs required must be issued by the country in which testing is taking place.
- If a candidate does not have the qualifying ID issued from the country being tested in, an International Travel Passport from the country of citizenship is required. Any questions or concerns about ID requirements for admittance for the exam please contact Pearson VUE Customer Service at <https://home.pearsonvue.com/test-taker/Customer-service.aspx>.
- To view the full ID policy, including any additional allowances to this policy, please visit <http://www.pearsonvue.com/policies/1.pdf>

### **Personal Items Policy:**

- No personal items may be taken into the testing room. This includes all bags, books, notes, phones, pagers, watches, and wallets.

### **Exam Timeline:**

- **Arrival:** Arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled exam time.
- **Pre-Exam:** 5-minutes to review and sign the nondisclosure agreement (NDA).
- **Examination:** 60 minutes
- **Post-Exam:** 5-minutes for an anonymous exit survey
  - This survey is to help us improve the exam and the exam experience. Answers on the survey questions will not affect Advanced Sommelier Theory examination results in any way.

### **Issues or Problems:**

- If there are any difficulties with the computer or equipment, please let a Pearson VUE representative know immediately so they can correct the problem.
- If there are any other difficulties with scheduling, the center itself, or encountering any emergency issues that will prevent attendance to the exam up until the time of the start of the examination, please do not hesitate to call or email Kathleen Lewis at [klewis@mastersommeliers.org](mailto:klewis@mastersommeliers.org) or (707) 255-5056 x11

## RESULTS, SCORES, AND FEEDBACK:

- You must achieve at least a 60% to pass.
- Results, scores, and feedback will be provided within four weeks of the exam date.
- Feedback will include your overall percentage score and performance within key aspects of the examination.

## Next Steps After Results & Feedback:

A candidate must pass the Theory portion to qualify to sit the Practical and Tasting portions.

- **If you pass the Theory examination:**
  - You are eligible to sit the Practical and Tasting portions of the examinations.
  - You must take the Practical and Tasting portions later that calendar year.
  - Your Advanced Sommelier Theory portion does not qualify you to sit in any other year.
  - You must pass the Practical and Tasting portions (together) in the same calendar year to achieve the Advanced Sommelier certification.
- **If you do not pass the Theory examination:**
  - Please look for the Advanced Sommelier Theory Examination application posted to the [CMS-A website](#) in the fall of each calendar year along with a notification email sent to the current e-mail address provided.
  - Eligible Certified Sommeliers may sit for the Advanced Sommelier Theory examination in perpetuity. However, in the following cases, they will be required to wait an additional year between exams to allow for the preparation necessary for a reasonable chance of success:
    - A first attempt at Practical without at least a 40% score
    - A second consecutive year's attempt at Practical without at least a 50% score.
    - A third consecutive year's attempt at Theory or Practical without at least a 55% score.
    - Note: There is no required minimum score on any attempt at the Tasting portion.

## CMS-A EXAM ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY:

The Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas welcomes all individuals who can fulfill the essential duties of a professional sommelier to participate in CMS-A programming and examinations.

In compliance with the American Disabilities Act (ADA), the CMS-A is committed to providing accommodation to enable a candidate with a disability(s) to participate in courses and examinations successfully.

Please see the CMS-A website Resources Page for our full Exam Accommodations Policy.

<https://www.mastersommeliers.org/resources>



## **PART II**

### **HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM**



## THE ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM DETAILS:

### Advanced Sommelier Theory Exam:

- The exam is a 60-minute timed exam with approximately 90 questions.

### Types of Questions Asked:

- Multiple-choice
- Short-answer
- Matching
- Map identification
- Label identification and recognition
- Ordering lists
  - Examples:
    - From lowest to highest or highest to lowest
    - Geographical location: from east to west or north to south
    - Age: From youngest to oldest or oldest to youngest
    - Age: From least amount of aging to most amount of aging
    - A winemaking or grape-growing process in order of steps
- Pertaining to vintage knowledge
- Pertaining to producer knowledge
- Applying tasting and beverage service knowledge to answer theory-related questions
- **Note:** Questions will have both US Standard and metric units given; answering in either unit is acceptable.

### Types of Questions Not Asked:

- **Essay questions**
  - Example: Explain the difference between grand cru in Alsace, St. Emilion, and Burgundy.
- **Questions with multiple answers**
  - Example: List ALL of the 1er Crus in Beaune.
- **Opinion questions with no definitive answer**
  - Example: Name the top three Napa Valley Cabernets
- **Business of the Sommelier Questions**
  - This includes costing and math-related questions. At the Advanced Sommelier-level, these questions are part of the Business of the Sommelier exam, which is part of the Hospitality and Service exam. You will not need a calculator at the Theory exam.

### EXAM DAY PLANNING: Exam Practice for the Pearson VUE Experience

- Knowing how to take the test is key to success. Knowing exactly how the test works on the computer, understanding the system, and making a game day plan will alleviate some of the stress of the of exam itself to allow focus on the questions at hand.
- Pearson VUE has resources available for you to practice and experience the system.
- **Learn How To:**
  - Move forward and backward as you progress through the examination using the “Previous” or “Next” buttons.
  - Mark questions for review using the “Flag” or “Review” button.
  - At the end of the examination, you will be provided with a **Review** page showing all questions you marked, including items marked **Incomplete** (passed on without answering) and **Marked for Review** (using the “Flag” or “Review” button).
  - You can review Advanced Sommelier Theory examination questions only if time permits.

### EXAM DAY PLANNING: Exam Practice for the Pearson VUE Experience, continued....

1. Go to CMS-A - Pearson VUE homepage *DO NOT LOG INTO YOUR ACCOUNT*  
<https://home.pearsonvue.com/Clients/Court-of-Master-Sommeliers.aspx>
2. Look for “RELATED LINKS” halfway down the page on the right-hand side
3. Pearson VUE demo test: Use this to get to know the system, how to answer questions, how to flag questions and how to forward onto the next question. <https://abe-prd=1.pvue2.com/st1/driver/startDelivery?sessionUUID=dc3f1da0-16ba-4ddf-92b3-5e6c6129db4c>

## EXAM DAY PLANNING: Considerations and Helpful Hints

- The first Advanced Sommelier Theory examination question appears on the screen as soon as you accept the non-disclosure agreement. This is when the timer will begin. You will have 60 minutes to complete the examination.
- **Timing: Keep calm and keep moving!**
  - 90 questions in 60 minutes averages to an estimated 1.5 questions per minute.
  - **Read each question carefully.** Do so twice if necessary to ensure you are answering what is being asked. Stress and nerves can make it difficult to process information, so give yourself the tools you need to succeed. It is your exam and your test room/cubicle; use it as needed for best performance.
  - **Spelling, Grammar, and Accents Important!** Exact and/or proper spelling, grammar, punctuation (especially language characters such as “ü”, “ç”, and “ê”) and other similar considerations are NOT required. A team of Master Sommeliers hand-grade these exams to account for spelling and other potential answers that we can accommodate.
- **Flag for ‘Review’ questions to come back to**
  - Don’t forget to flag questions you want to review. Hit the small flag button at the top right of your screen. It can be difficult to find that question later, if needed amongst all the questions unless you note the question number down or flag it.
  - Remember to leave time in the end to return to flagged questions.
  - If you plan to leave 5 minutes in the end to review flagged questions, that will provide 55 minutes for the 90 questions. Which means you will need to answer closer to two questions per minute.
  - Plan for how you will answer questions. Will you pass on or flag the questions you do not know immediately and return to them later? Or try to answer every question as you go and only flag questions you are not 100% about? You may decide what is best for you, in the moment but know you have options!
  - Practice flagging questions and going back to them in the preparatory session that Pearson VUE provides.
- **There are no score deductions.**
  - Points are earned from correct answers, and never penalized.
  - Make sure to fill in all questions even if you are unsure of the answer. It is worth it to make an educated guess on every question. You might be right!



## STUDY RESOURCES

### HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE THEORY EXAMINATION

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Resources for Study

*Studying for the Advanced Sommelier Exam requires a combination of industry experience and multiple resources to create a comprehensive understanding of a given subject. Facts without context will only go so far. This is by no means an exhaustive list and be sure to add your favorite resources on a subject!*

*Additionally, as wine regions evolve and modify significant trends, producers, styles, maps, and laws, many of the top wine books are “out of date” upon publication! They are nevertheless important resources but should always be counterbalanced with up-to-date beverage law resources such as regional websites, governmental law sources, respected importer and producer websites, respected traditional and web-based educational bodies, various blogs, established wine media, and tech sheets for iconic wine in highly established regions.*

- **CMS-A Resources:**
  - **Advanced Sommelier Course Lectures**
    - Revisit lectures from your Advanced Course to look at the holistic approach of study. Note the level of knowledge, the wines tasted, Hospitality and Service aspects, and the Business of the Sommelier.
  - **Hospitality and Service Standards**
    - The Hospitality & Service standards published by the CMS-A are the only accepted service standards for any CMS-A examination.
- **GuildSomm.com** *subscription-based*
  - A wealth of up-to-date information, videos, podcasts, and the Compendium for updated regional wine law. This resource should be used in combination with the resources below
- **JancisRobinson.com** *subscription-based*
  - Articles, maps, vintage evaluations, tasting notes
- **Wine-Related Magazines:**
  - Decanter, Wine Spectator, The World of Fine Wines, Vinous, and Wine Enthusiast
- **Wine Books:**
  - **The World Atlas of Wine, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition**, by Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson
    - ISBN: 1784726184 [Amazon.com link](#)
    - A reference for understanding the location, geography, and topography of the world’s major wine regions.
  - **The Oxford Companion to Wine, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition**, by Jancis Robinson
    - ISBN: 9780198705383 [Amazon.com link](#)
    - A reference for all aspects of wine, from quick lookups to diving into complete subjects one definition at a time.
  - **The New Sotheby’s Wine Encyclopedia**, by Tom Stevenson
    - ISBN: 142622141X [Amazon.com link](#)
    - A reference that details regions, sub-regions, and approved grape varieties of the world’s major wine-producing countries.

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Resources for Study, continued...

### **World Wine Region Specific Websites:**

*Most topics of study have online resources to reference with updated information. It is helpful to research and cross-reference online resources with book study and producer websites. This is by no means an exhaustive list but a start to help get in the mindset of working in this type of online research.*

- **France:**
  - Champagne: <https://www.champagne.fr/en/terroir-appellation/appellation/appellation-origine-controlee-aoc>
  - ChampagneGuide.net
- **Italy:** <https://www.federdoc.com/en/>
- **Germany:** <https://www.germanwines.de/>
- **Spain: Research individual DOs such as:**
  - Rioja: <https://www.riojawine.com/en/home-en/>
  - Ribera del Duero: <https://riberaruedawine.com/ribera-del-duero-tempranillo/>
- **Portugal:** <https://www.winesofportugal.com/en/>
- **South Africa:** <https://www.wosa.co.za/>
- **New Zealand:** <https://www.nzwine.com/>
- **Australia:** <https://www.wineaustralia.com/>
- **Chile:** <https://www.winesofchile.org/en/>
- **Argentina:** <https://www.winesofargentina.org/en>
- **USA:**
  - <https://www.ttb.gov>
  - <https://www.ttb.gov/images/AVA/>
  - <https://pasowine.com/>
  - Washington State Wine: <https://www.washingtonwine.org/>
  - Oregon: <https://www.oregonwine.org/>
- **Canada:**
  - <https://winesofcanada.ca/>
  - <https://winebc.com/>
  - <https://winecountryontario.ca/find-vqa-wine/>
- **Austria:** <https://www.austrianwine.com/>
- **Greece:** <https://winesofgreece.org/>

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Resources for Study, continued....

- **Beer Books:**
  - **Tasting Beer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: An Insider's Guide to the World's Greatest Beverage**, by Randy Mosher
    - ISBN: 1612127770 [Amazon.com link](#)
    - Insight into the world of brewing beer and learning major styles in easy-to-understand language.
  - **The Oxford Companion to Beer**, by Garret Oliver
    - ISBN: 0195367138 [Amazon.com link](#)
    - A reference for all aspects of beer including ingredients, production, and styles.
- **Sake:**
  - **Sake World:** [www.sake-world.com](http://www.sake-world.com)
    - Website created by John Gauntner, one of the top sake experts in the world. Information on sake basics, downloadable guides, and a food-pairing section.
  - **A Comprehensive Guide to Japanese Sake**, by Japanese and Sochu Makers Association
    - <https://www.nrib.go.jp/English/sake/pdf/guidesse01.pdf>
  - **Japan Sake and Shochu Information Center:**
    - <https://japansake.or.jp/sake/en/>
  - **Exploring the World of Japanese Craft Sake**, by Nancy Matsumoto and Michael Tremblay
    - ISBN: 4805316519 [Amazon.com link](#)
  - **Podcast: Sake On Air:** <https://sakeonair.com/>
- **Spirits & Cocktails:** *There are many great books that cover the world of spirits as a whole. At the Advanced Sommelier-level, it is important to also research each type of spirit and liqueur individually as well.*
  - **The Oxford Companion to Spirits and Cocktails**, by David Wondrich and Noah Rothbaum
    - ISBN: 0199311137 [Amazon.com link](#)
  - **Cocktail Codex: Fundamentals, Formulas, Evolutions**, by Alex Day, Nick Fauchald, David Kaplan
    - ISBN: 160774970X [Amazon.com link](#)
- **Top Producers:** Research wine lists from award-winning restaurants. This will help in identifying iconic producers, approximate prices, top vineyards, vintages, and proper spellings.



## **STUDY STRATEGIES**

### **HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE THEORY EXAMINATION**



## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Study Strategies

### Study Strategies - Big Picture

To create a study strategy, or plan to study, one of the most important things to discover or understand is who you are as an adult learner. This can differ greatly from how we learned in high school or college.

We will discuss a few ways to approach the vast amount of information and knowledge needed for the Advanced Sommelier Theory Exam and practices that have worked for others.

As you will see, there is no one prescriptive or all-encompassing path to follow that fits every student or candidate's learning style. What works best for you may not be the same for others and that is okay! But it is important to stay open to what works best for **you** to create your own strategy and your own learning tools that optimize your individual learning style.

### Study Strategies - A Systematic Approach to Study

Just as we have a *systematic approach* to tasting, it is essential to also have a systematic approach to theory study. Following a similar approach with each subject will ensure you cover all the topics necessary in appropriate depth. The following sections will outline **General Theory Topics of Study** and **Areas of Study**.

**Systematic Approach to Study = General Theory Topics of Study + Areas of Study**

**General Theory Topics of Study = *Breadth***  
**Areas of Study = *Depth***

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Study Strategies

### Study Strategies - A Holistic Approach to Study

The pillars of the Court of Master Sommeliers, Americas examination and education do not exist to be viewed as individual silos, instead as interrelated and interconnected parts of a whole.

Theory, Deductive Tasting, Hospitality and Service, and Business of the Sommelier are all examined separately, and each have a unique way of focusing preparation. However, a holistic approach to study creates context and a better understanding to answer questions of how and why things exist the way they do and how you can apply the information to best serve a guest.

It is not advised to wait until you pass the Theory examination to start studying for Tasting, Hospitality and Service, and Business of the Sommelier. Notice in the *Areas of Study* how all sections interrelate and inform each other to create an all-encompassing view of a subject.

As you are studying, get curious to find these connections and notice how any subject from Rioja to beer has all of these aspects of education and examination in mind.

*The Holistic Approach:* When possible, taste the beverages you are studying alongside your theory learning. Connect why and how the beverages taste the way they do. What are you finding in the glass that directly links to what you are reading? What are the causes for what you see, smell, or taste in the beverage you are studying? How does that connect to its history, geography, and production? How would you describe and serve this beverage in its best light to a guest?

#### HELPFUL HINT

##### **Get Curious. Get Creative. Ask Questions.**

Commit to understanding, getting curious, being creative in your learning, asking why, and focusing on cause and effect. This will help immensely by creating the context needed for information to make sense rather than just memorizing facts.

#### HOLISTIC STUDY MINDSET

##### **Two foundational questions to ask for every subject you study:**

Why does a wine (or, any beverage alcohol) taste the way it does?

What do I need to know to serve it tableside?

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Study Strategies

### Study Strategies - Where to Begin?

#### Get Organized: Make a Plan

- Create a timeline and personal syllabus to get through the topics of study. Some subjects will take longer, take longer than you planned, or life happens! Keep the schedule relatively flexible with built-in cushions for extra time if needed.

#### Prioritize: Buckets of Importance

- Consider determining buckets of major and minor regions and topics of importance and spend an appropriate amount of time accordingly. An example of this would be when studying Italy, budgeting a proportionately more significant amount of time to study Tuscany and Piedmont than perhaps Basilicata or Molise.

#### Begin at the Beginning!

- Go back and start with the basics, i.e.: Pre-Introductory Sommelier fundamental knowledge. This is incredibly important to make sure you can build and draw from a solid foundation. Not all Advanced or Master Sommelier-level information or exam questions are as challenging as they seem. Many exam questions ask you to draw from basic knowledge to answer seemingly difficult questions. Often the simplest answers are the best answers. Don't assume you know or remember the basics.

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Study Strategies- Some Advice from Others

*We have interviewed Advanced Sommeliers and Master Sommeliers to get their advice on what helped them in their studies and preparation to give multiple perspectives. Here is what they had to say.*

- ✓ Make sure to gather information from multiple sources such as books, websites, podcasts, movies etc...
- ✓ Back to the Basics! Time and time again I hear candidates say they wish they had gone back to the basics as it was many of those questions they needlessly missed!!
- ✓ It all goes back to theory to understand what is happening in the glass, but it also always goes back to the guest and how to show a beverage in its best light to give great service, create successful pairings, and in the end, make the guest happy.
- ✓ There is a lot of theory knowledge needed for Hospitality and Service, and to be fair for deductive tasting. How can you know really know the difference between certain wines like Rioja, Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and Brunello di Montalcino if you don't learn wine law, how the grapes are grown, and how the wines are made? If you just go back to theory, it makes it much clearer.
- ✓ As I improved my theory knowledge my confidence on the floor in my restaurant developed and my relationship with my guests improved. I understood more of what they were looking for, and how to speak about vintages and producers. I could also knowledgeably speak about cocktails and beer. I was able to connect with the guests in a new way.
- ✓ I loved researching wine lists online from the big famous restaurants with crazy wine programs. I learned so much by just looking at the selections. So many cuvées and single vineyards I did not know existed or overlooked. It was mind-boggling.
- ✓ I had a ball coming up with mnemonic devices, like acronyms or little songs about something I needed to memorize like the Crus of Beaujolais from north to south, or specific subzones of a region. I made it a game to help it be more fun than tedious.
- ✓ Prioritize! Preparation must be a priority. It takes a lot of work and commitment. It is hard to commit to something so intensely as an adult with real life happening every day. How can you carve out the time and commit to it? For me it was rationing Netflix and Game of Thrones. Well, if I did watch Netflix, it was about food, wine, beer, or cocktails.
- ✓ It takes a village! I enlisted everyone I knew, from friends and family to co-workers. I utilized all my resources from my chef to talk about food and pairings, to my bartenders quizzing me on cocktails and spirit producers. Plus, my colleagues or friends would quiz me on note cards during down times at the restaurant, or they would pull wines for me to blind taste.
- ✓ After extended periods of studying, I had to get out of the house and explore some of the great wine and spirits shops where I live to browse the immense selections or go to a restaurant with a great wine program. It helped me with a much-needed new perspective and see some brands or producers I did not know or were not on my radar to research and study.
- ✓ One thing I didn't even think about before I took the Advanced Sommelier Exam is the low and the high. Most of my studies did not need to be all about the high-end brands and producers. I needed to understand the entire gamut from well spirits and big brands to get the complete picture.

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER THEORY EXAM: Study Strategies- Some Advice from Others

### Get to Know Yourself as an Adult Learner

#### What works for you?

*Here are a few ideas.*

- Taking notes in a notebook.
- Color-coded notes with highlighters or color-coded notebooks.
- Making flashcards or using apps like Quizlet or Anki.
- Tracing maps from books or printouts with tracing paper and colored pencils.
  - Color code different regions and rivers.
  - Make blank copies to quiz yourself.
- Form or join study groups with like-minded individuals for motivation and support.
- Find a single study partner for motivation and support.
- Teach others such as taking a topic and teaching it to your study group.
- Teach others such as teaching your staff or colleagues on how to simply explain information to a guest.
- Incorporating what you are learning on the floor table side service with great stories about winemakers, regions, and history.
- Work toward understanding the why and cause and effect.
- Creating personal and fun associations, songs, or acronyms to memorize information.
- Read outside the box: something not study-related or tangentially related.
- Vendor or local wine shop tastings: Attend portfolio tastings. Sit in on or book tastings with vendors or suppliers when they are in town or attend as many tastings as possible to talk to producers. Seek out and learn about the wines of the world that you are unfamiliar with.
- Other ways to learn though podcasts, food and beverage-related movies or shows, live sessions, master classes.

**OTHER THINGS?  
and/or  
ALL OF THE ABOVE?**



## GENERAL THEORY TOPICS OF STUDY

## ADVANCED SOMMELIER EXAMINATION

### GENERAL THEORY TOPICS OF STUDY

	Topics Covered	Subtopics	
	Grape Growing <i>Viticulture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vine cycle</li> <li>• Factors of production</li> <li>• Vine-Training Systems</li> <li>• Cause and effect: what happens in the vineyard and how that translates to what we see in the final wine.</li> <li>• Types of viticulture (organic/ biodynamic)</li> </ul>	
	Winemaking <i>Vinification</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Techniques</li> <li>• Cause and effect: what happens in the winery and how that translates to what we see in the final wine.</li> <li>• All types of winemaking</li> </ul>	
	France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Champagne</li> <li>• Burgundy</li> <li>• Bordeaux</li> <li>• Loire Valley</li> <li>• Alsace</li> <li>• Rhône Valley</li> <li>• Dordogne and Southwest France</li> <li>• Provence</li> <li>• Languedoc-Roussillon</li> <li>• Jura and Savoie</li> </ul>	
	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Piedmont</li> <li>• Valle d' Aosta</li> <li>• Liguria</li> <li>• Lombardy</li> <li>• Trentino-Alto Adige</li> <li>• Veneto</li> <li>• Friuli-Venezia-Giulia</li> <li>• Emilia-Romagna</li> <li>• Tuscany</li> <li>• Marche</li> <li>• Umbria</li> <li>• Lazio</li> <li>• Molise</li> <li>• Abruzzo</li> </ul>	

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campania</li> <li>• Basilicata</li> <li>• Puglia</li> <li>• Calabria</li> <li>• Sicily</li> <li>• Sardinia</li> </ul>	
	Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mosel</li> <li>• Rheingau</li> <li>• Pfalz</li> <li>• Nahe</li> <li>• Rheinhessen</li> <li>• Mittelrhein</li> <li>• Baden</li> <li>• Württemberg</li> <li>• Franken</li> <li>• Ahr</li> <li>• Hessische-Bergstrasse</li> <li>• Sachsen</li> <li>• Saale-Unstrut</li> </ul>	
	Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All major regions</li> <li>• Vino de Pago</li> </ul>	
	Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All major regions</li> <li>• All major styles</li> </ul>	
	Greece	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All major regions</li> <li>• All major styles</li> </ul>	
	Other Europe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• England</li> <li>• Switzerland</li> </ul>	
	<b>Austria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Niederösterreich</li> <li>• Wein</li> <li>• Steiermark</li> <li>• Burgenland</li> </ul>	
	Eastern Europe & Caucasus/Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slovenia</li> <li>• Hungary</li> <li>• Bulgaria</li> <li>• Romania</li> <li>• Georgia</li> <li>• Russia</li> </ul>	
	Middle East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Israel</li> <li>• Lebanon</li> <li>• Cyprus</li> </ul>	
	Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• China</li> <li>• India</li> </ul>	



	North America <b>United States</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• United States</li> <li>• California</li> <li>• Oregon</li> <li>• Washington</li> <li>• New York State</li> <li>• Other wine producing states (Virginia, Texas, Missouri, Idaho, New Mexico, Michigan, etc.)</li> </ul>	
	North America <b>Canada</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• British Columbia</li> <li>• Ontario</li> <li>• Nova Scotia</li> <li>• Québec</li> </ul>	
	North America <b>Mexico</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baja <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Valle de Guadalupe</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
	South America <b>Argentina</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Center Region</li> <li>• Cuyo IG</li> <li>• North Region</li> <li>• Patagonia IG</li> </ul>	
	South America <b>Chile</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Atacama</li> <li>• Coquimbo</li> <li>• Aconcagua</li> <li>• Valle Central</li> <li>• Sur</li> <li>• Astral</li> </ul>	
	South America Uruguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important regions and grape varieties</li> </ul>	
	Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Southeastern Australia</li> <li>• New South Wales</li> <li>• Victoria</li> <li>• South Australia</li> <li>• Western Australia</li> <li>• Tasmania</li> </ul>	
	New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Island</li> <li>• South Island</li> </ul>	
	North Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Morocco</li> </ul>	
	South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northern Cape</li> <li>• Eastern Cape</li> <li>• Western Cape</li> <li>• KwaZulu Natal</li> <li>• Limpopo</li> <li>• Free State</li> </ul>	

	<b>Other Methods of Making Wine</b>		
	Sparkling Wine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methods of production</li> <li>• Champagne</li> <li>• World sparkling wines</li> </ul>	
	Fortified Wine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sherry</li> <li>• Port</li> <li>• Madeira</li> <li>• Marsala</li> <li>• Vins Doux Naturels (VDN)</li> <li>• Vin de Liqueur (VDL)</li> <li>• Others</li> </ul>	
	Sweet Wines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methods of production</li> <li>• Important sweet wines of the world</li> </ul>	
	Aromatized Wines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examples: Vermouth, Chambéry, others</li> </ul>	
	Beer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ingredients</li> <li>• Steps in production</li> <li>• Production methods</li> <li>• Common styles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Classic beers, locations, types, and styles</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
	Sake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ingredients</li> <li>• Styles</li> <li>• Sake classification system</li> <li>• Sake production methods</li> <li>• Polishing minimums for premium production</li> </ul>	
	Spirits / Cocktails	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basics of distillation</li> <li>• Base ingredients of common spirits</li> <li>• Aging requirements and laws</li> <li>• Aperitifs and digestifs</li> </ul>	



## AREAS OF STUDY

## AREAS OF STUDY, continued...

A systematic approach is important to ensure every topic is covered similarly and in appropriate depth and detail. Not all subjects will check off every box especially when studying spirits and liqueurs.

Notice the interrelated nature of preparation and how the *Areas of Study* include aspects of Hospitality and Service, Business of the Sommelier, and Deductive Tasting to give a complete and holistic picture of a region to create understanding. For example, what are the **causes** of what we see, smell and taste (**the effect**) in a beverage we are tasting or evaluating. Think “how can this information be helpful and **useful tableside**” rather than rote memorization without context and understanding.

### WINE:

#### **Location & Geography:**

- Map location of:
  - Country and areas of the country
  - Region or appellation
  - Location in relation to other regions
- Important physical features (rivers, lakes, forests mountains etc.)
- Aspect

#### **Climate:**

- Climate type: Continental, Maritime, Mediterranean, Desert
- Climate temperature: Cool, Moderate, Warm, Hot
- How does the climate affect the region and wine production?

#### **Grapes Varieties:**

- Major grape varieties for the region
- Other grape varieties of the region, not just the most recognizable
- What is unique about the major grape varieties in this region or variety profile, including physical aspects that affect the taste of the resulting wine.

#### **Grape Growing / Vineyard Management / Viticultural Techniques:**

- All things that happen in the vineyard including vine training techniques, irrigation, harvest timing, ripeness levels at harvest, irrigation, pest control, special techniques used unique to that region, especially those which affect how the resulting wine tastes.

#### **Winemaking / Vinification Techniques:**

- All things that happen in the winery: fermentation techniques, oak usage, type of oak used if applicable, make up of blends, acidification, chaptalization, malolactic fermentation, carbonic maceration, and other special techniques used unique to that region.
- What techniques are used for still (table), sparkling, fortified, or aromatized wine?

#### **Soils:**

- Is there an important soil type (and local name) to note?
- Why is it important?
- How does the soil type impact the grape growing and winemaking?
- How does the soil affect how the resultant wine tastes?

## AREAS OF STUDY, continued...

### Wines Styles Made:

- What are the general styles or types of wine are made?
  - **Type:** Still / Sparkling / Fortified / Aromatized
  - **Color:** Red / White / Rosé / Other (Tawny, Gold, etc.)
  - **Sweetness level:** Bone Dry / Dry / Dry with Slight RS / Off-Dry / Medium Sweet / Lusciously Sweet

### Wine Law:

- Laws regarding any of the areas of study above, such as grape growing, grape varieties planted, and wine-making techniques. Especially those that affect the taste of the resulting wine.
  - **Grape Growing:**
    - Examples*
      - Harvest dates
      - Ripeness at harvest requirements / must weight minimums
  - **Winemaking:**
    - Examples*
      - Styles of wine made
      - Alcohol minimums
      - Residual sugar minimums or maximums
      - Oak vs no oak
      - Aging requirements
        - Length of time in oak and bottle
        - Release dates
  - **Classifications and Regional Hierarchy:**
    - Examples*
      - Official Regional Classification
        - IGT vs DOC vs DOCG, or AOP vs Vin de France
      - Sub-Regional Classifications
        - Villages, Vineyards, Premier Cru, Grand Cru
        - Producers - example 1855 Classification
        - Districts vs Wards in South Africa

### Vintage Knowledge

- **For major wine regions with reputations for aging only.**
- Assess the last 15 years for reputation (and resultant selling price) and style.
  - **Poor/Fair/Good/Excellent? And why?**

## AREAS OF STUDY, continued...

### Terminology:

- **Wine Law Terminology:** (*often overlaps with Label Terms*)  
*Examples:*
  - Gran Reserva vs. Crianza in Rioja, Federspiel vs. Smaragd, Riserva vs. Normale, etc.
- **General Terms:**  
*Examples:*
  - Assemblage, Marco Real, Meritage, Stück, Stickies, Super Tuscan, etc.
- **Label Terms:**  
*Examples:*
  - Sec vs. Demi- Sec, Recioto, Sorí, Estate, Beerenauslese, Tawny, Generoso, etc.
- **Wine region-Specific Label Terminology –**
  - **Style, Grape Variety, Age, Quality Levels:**  
*Examples:*
    - Sforzato, Aszú, Essencia, Hanepoot, Steen, Rutherglen Rare, etc.

### Major Producers:

- **Research the five (5) most iconic for each region at all ranges of quality and price:**
  - What makes this producer unique?
  - How have they impacted the region from a historical perspective?
  - Signature cuvées or proprietary brands
  - History and Lore (the big stories, the romance)
  - Named vineyards
  - Price per bottle retail

### History and Lore:

- Important historical timeline and events that shaped the region as it is today.
- Important historical figures, influential people, cuvées, styles, and quality.  
*Examples:*
  - Veuve Clicquot “inventing” the pupitre, Schloss Johannisberg “discovering” Spätlese-level wines because the person responsible for telling them to pick was robbed on their way to the vineyard, so they were delayed, “Est! Est! Est!” legend, etc.

### Hospitality and Service and Business of the Sommelier:

- How should this beverage be served and sold/described to a guest to taste best on a restaurant floor?
  - Ideal service temperature
  - Appropriate glassware
  - Decanting if needed and for what reason?
  - Where does it belong on a beverage list?
  - What is its price range?
  - How would you describe it to a guest?
  - What are some ideal food pairings?

## AREAS OF STUDY, continued....

**Non-Wine Related Subjects** - *Beer, Cider, Sake, Spirits, Liqueurs, Apéritifs, Digestifs, etc.*

### **Base Material:**

- What is the base ingredient of the beverage?
  - *Examples:* Fruit, grains, vegetables, or plants.
  - Apples, grapes, rice, barley, agave, sugar cane

### **Ingredients:**

- Are there any other ingredients allowed?

### **Location of Production:**

- Where is this beverage made?
  - Country or countries?
- Are there specific regions or sub-regions to note?

### **Distillation Techniques:**

- Are there specific distillation techniques used (if applicable)?
  - *Example:* Continuous or pot still

### **Non-Wine Law:**

- Are there laws regarding where this beverage can be made?
- Are there laws regarding how the beverage is made?
  - Distillation technique and number of times distilled
  - Aging requirements
    - *Example:* Añejo and Reposado

### **Label Terms:**

- Are there specific label terms associated with this beverage?
- Are the label terms part of the region's laws?

### **Non-Wine Types:**

- Are there types and sub-types of the beverage?
  - *Example:* Types of Sake or types of Scotch Whisky
- What are the colors, types, and sweetness levels?

### **Soil:**

- Are there important soil types to note that affect production of this beverage?
  - *Example:* Cognac

## AREAS OF STUDY, continued...

### **Vintage:**

- Are vintages allowed or important for this beverage?
- Are vintages considered ripe or unripe? Age-worthy or drink-now?

### **History and Lore:**

- Important historical timeline, historical figures, influential people, and their stories.
- Historical events that shaped the beverage and how it is enjoyed today.

### **Hospitality and Service and Business of the Sommelier**

- How should this beverage be served to show it in its best light on a restaurant floor?
- Ideal service temperature
- Appropriate glassware
- Associated cocktails (if applicable)
- Where does it belong on a beverage list?
- Price range
- How would you describe it to a guest?
- What are some ideal food pairings?

### **Important Producer Names at All Levels of Quality:**

- Not just the high-end producers but at all levels of quality