



## MASTER SOMMELIER DIPLOMA THEORY EXAM

### A RESOURCE GUIDE

#### Purpose Statement

Candidates pursuing Master Sommelier Diploma certification must first successfully complete the Theory portion of the exam. Compared to the Advanced Sommelier Exam, the Master Sommelier Diploma Exam represents a significant step up in difficulty, demanding a far deeper and broader knowledge base. To succeed, candidates need substantial industry experience and a well-structured study plan that covers all topics with the necessary breadth and depth.

The purpose of this document is to help Master Sommelier Diploma Theory candidates understand the range of resources available for study and preparation.

#### Overview

Creating a study plan begins with understanding yourself as an adult learner. Your methods of gaining understanding now can differ greatly from those of high school or college. Recognizing your unique learning style is key to building an effective strategy.

There is no singular successful method — what works for one candidate may not work for another. The exam relies heavily on foundational knowledge gained at the Introductory, Certified, and Advanced levels. Success comes from mastering and building upon these core principles rather than focusing too heavily on obscure or esoteric details. Try to discover what works best for you and focus on creating study tools and preparation strategies that align with your methodology.

Preparing for CMS upper-level Theory exams demands more than memorizing facts, it requires combining industry experience with extensive research into a variety of resources to gain a well-rounded understanding of each topic. While no single resource can cover everything, a thoughtful mix of books, regional websites, producer insights, and wine media provides essential context and depth.

It is important to stay updated, as alcohol beverage constantly evolves with new trends, producers, styles, maps, and laws; even the best books on any subject can be outdated upon publication. It is essential to balance them with reliable, current sources like government regulation and marketing bodies, importer and producer websites, and respected educational platforms.

The following list is a starting point to support your studies. You do not need to know every single detail they provide! They support a strong learning outline in different ways. Some are more foundational, academic, and encyclopedic (ex, GuildSomm.com, the Oxford Companion to Wine, Decanter, Wine Scholar Guild, etc.). Some are more specific (Wines of South Africa, ChampagneGuide.net, The Oxford Companion to Beer, etc.). Some are more complimentary to confirming trends or other information

(various importer books like Kermit Lynch, blogs like WineAnorak.com, beverage media like The Wine Spectator, etc.). Some focus more on cause and effect (CMS, WSET, Guildsomm.com, etc.), while others support tableside theory investigation (wine lists of the best restaurants worldwide, Oz Clarke's Vintage, etc.). Generally, if there are conflicting reports or facts presented by different resources, rely upon the most established, academic, and contemporary sources. If something is not confirmed or agreed upon by at least four of them, we would not feel it fair to test to.

There are so many resources at our disposal - it is easy to feel overwhelmed. However, themes, trends, and facts that are truly relevant to the sommelier profession become clear relatively quickly with organized research into this comprehensive set of material. Stay patient, be curious, and enjoy the journey!



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### Suggested Resources

This is not an exhaustive list, but a solid foundation. The breadth and depth indicate the type of research required to support masterful learning. A curious, investigative mindset is necessary.

As you will see, it is a combination of types of resources, including:

- Books (indicated in bold type)
- Online Tools:
  - ✓ Magazines in print or online
  - ✓ World Wine Regional Websites
  - ✓ Subscription-based website content
  - ✓ Podcasts/Webinars
  - ✓ Top Global Wine Lists
  - ✓ Top Producers in Each Region and their websites
  - ✓ Top Importers and their Websites (some with links)
- Apps
- Academic Institutions

### CMS-A Resources

#### Advanced Sommelier Course Lectures

- Revisit lectures from your Advanced Course to examine the holistic approach to study. Note the level of knowledge, the wines tasted, the Hospitality and Service aspects, and the Business of the Sommelier.

#### Introductory, Certified, and Advanced Sommelier Theory Exam – Question Comparison

- Located under the General Standards Theory section in the resources library
- This guide will be helpful for looking through the example questions from Introductory Level to Certified Sommelier to Advanced Sommelier knowledge to remind Master Sommelier Candidates of the progression of knowledge and how necessary that base knowledge is to success at the Master Sommelier Level.

#### Hospitality and Service Standards

- The Hospitality & Service standards published by CMS-A are the only accepted service standards for any CMS-A examination.

#### Mentorship Program Office Hours

- Take advantage of this to get definitive answers to questions.
- The link to sign up is on the CMS-A website in the Resources Library under Mentoring Resources

#### Theory Illustrative Examples

- Examples of questions and the answers examiners were looking for can be found in the Resource Library of the CMS-A website under **CMS-A Exams by Level -> Master Sommelier Exam.**
  - Upper-level Theory Illustrative Examples-2023
  - Master Sommelier Theory Illustrative Examples-2024

## Websites / Blogs that offer Expertise and Comprehensive Coverage

*\*Most are subscription-based for the most detailed information.*

- GuildSomm.com
- JancisRobinson.com
- Vinous.com
- Decanter <https://www.decanter.com/>
- Wine Spectator <https://www.winespectator.com/>
- World of Fine Wine <https://worldoffinewine.com/>

## Beverage Alcohol-Related Magazines (online and print)

- The Beer Connoisseur
- Decanter
- Draft (Beer)
- Food & Wine Magazine
- Imbibe (Cocktails, Beer, & Spirits)
- Sip
- Wine Spectator
- The World of Fine Wines
- Vinous
- The Wine Advocate
- Wine & Spirits
- Wines & Vines
- Wine Enthusiast (defunct 2025)

## General Information Atlases and Encyclopedias

- **The World Atlas of Wine, 8th Edition**, by Hugh Johnson and Jancis Robinson
- **The Oxford Companion to Wine, 4th Edition**, by Jancis Robinson
- **The New Sotheby's Wine Encyclopedia**, by Tom Stevenson
- **Oz Clarke on Wine/Oz Clarke's Companion to Wine**, by Oz Clarke
- **Vintages**, by Michael Broadbent (out of print)

## History

- **The History of Wine in 100 Bottles From Bacchus to Bordeaux and Beyond**, by Oz Clark

## Viticulture & Vinification

- **Understanding Wine Technology**, by David Bird
- **Flawless: Understanding Faults in Wine**, by Jamie Goode
- **The Science of Wine**, by Jamie Goode
- **Knowing and Making Wine**, by Emile Peynaud
- **Wine Grapes: A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, Including Their Origins and Flavours**, by Jancis Robinson

## France

- **Champagne**
  - **Champagne**, by Peter Liem
  - **Christie's World Encyclopedia of Champagne & Sparkling Wine**, by Tom Stevenson & Essi Avellan
  - [www.champagne.fr](http://www.champagne.fr)
  - ChampagneGuide.net

- **Alsace**
  - <https://www.vinsalsace.com/>
- **Bordeaux**
  - **Inside Bordeaux**, by Jane Anson
  - **Bordeaux**, by Robert Parker, Jr.
  - <https://www.bordeaux.com/>
- **Burgundy**
  - <https://www.bourgogne-wines.com/>
  - **Inside Burgundy**, by Jasper Morris
  - **Côte d’Or: A Celebration of the Great Wines of Burgundy**, by Clive Coates
  - <https://www.burghound.com/>
- **Loire**
  - <https://www.vinsvaldeloire.fr/>
- **Rhone**
  - <https://www.vins-rhone.com/>
  - **Wines of The Rhone**, by John Livingstone-Learmonth
- **Provence, Languedoc, Roussillon, Southwest France**
  - Provence: <https://www.vinsdeprovence.com/>
  - Languedoc: [paysdoc.com](https://paysdoc.com)
  - Roussillon: [www.winesofroussillon.com](https://www.winesofroussillon.com)
  - Southwest: [www.vignobles-sudouest.fr](https://www.vignobles-sudouest.fr)

## Italy

- Wine Law: <https://www.federdoc.com/en/>
- Consorzio/official websites for all major regions:
  - Alto Adige: [www.altoadigewines.com](https://www.altoadigewines.com)
  - Barbaresco: [www.langhevine.it](https://www.langhevine.it)
  - Barolo: [www.langhevini.it](https://www.langhevini.it)
  - Brunello di Montalcino: [www.consorziobrunellodimontalcino.com](https://www.consorziobrunellodimontalcino.com)
  - Chianti: [www.chianti.com](https://www.chianti.com)
  - Chianti Classico: <https://www.chianticlassico.com/en/>
  - Etna: [www.winesofetna.com](https://www.winesofetna.com)
  - Franciacorta: [www.franciacorta.us](https://www.franciacorta.us) OR [www.franciacorta.wine](https://www.franciacorta.wine)
  - Prosecco: [www.prosecco.wine](https://www.prosecco.wine) OR [www.prosecco.com](https://www.prosecco.com)
  - Valpolicella: [www.consorziovalpolicella.it](https://www.consorziovalpolicella.it)
- **The New Italy: A Complete Guide to Contemporary Italian Wine**, by Daniele Cernilli & Marco Sabellico
- **Native Grapes of Italy**, by Ian D’Agata
- **Native Terroirs of Italy**, by Ian D’Agata
- **Barolo and Barbaresco**, by Kerin O Keefe
- **Brunello di Montalcino**, by Kerin O Keefe
- **Chianti Classico**, by Bill Nesto & Frances di Savino
- **The Wines of Sicily**, by Bill Nesto & Frances di Savino
- **Barolo Terroir**, by Agata & Longo
- **...Maps and Books**, by Alessandro Masnaghetti
  - Barolo MGA
  - Barbaresco MGA
  - Chianti Classico

## Germany

- <https://www.germanwines.de/>
- **Wine Atlas of Germany**, by Braatz, Sautter, Swoboda

## Austria

- <https://www.austrianwine.com/>

## Greece

- <https://winesofgreece.org/>

## Spain

- **The New Spain**, by John Radford
- **Sherry, Manzanilla, and Montilla**, by Peter Liem
- Consejo Regulador websites for all major regions:
  - Bierzo: [www.crdobierzo.es](http://www.crdobierzo.es)
  - Cava: [www.cava.wine](http://www.cava.wine)
  - Priorat: [www.doqpriorat.org](http://www.doqpriorat.org)
  - Rioja: [www.riojawine.com](http://www.riojawine.com)
  - Ribera del Duero: [www.riberaruedawine.com](http://www.riberaruedawine.com)
  - Rueda: [www.riberaruedawine.com](http://www.riberaruedawine.com)

## Portugal

- <https://www.winesofportugal.com/en/>
- <https://www.dourovalley.wine/>

## South Africa

- <https://www.wosa.co.za/>
- **The Wines of South Africa**, by Jim Clarke

## New Zealand

- <https://www.nzwine.com/>

## Australia

- <https://www.wineaustralia.com/>

## Chile

- <https://www.winesofchile.org/en/>

## Argentina

- <https://www.winesofargentina.org/en>

## USA

- **Napa Valley Then & Now**, by Kelli White
- General: <https://www.ttb.gov> <https://www.ttb.gov/images/AVA/>
- Napa: [www.napavintners.com](http://www.napavintners.com)
- Paso Robles: <https://pasowine.com/>
- Washington State Wine: <https://www.washingtonwine.org/>
- Oregon: <https://www.oregonwine.org/>
- Santa Barbara: <https://sbcountywines.com/>
- Sonoma: <https://sonomawine.com/>

## Canada

- **The Wines of Canada**, by Rod Phillips
- <https://winesofcanada.ca/>
- <https://winebc.com/>
- <https://winecountryontario.ca/find-vqa-wine/>

## Beer

- **Tasting Beer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: An Insider's Guide to the World's Greatest Beverage**, by Randy Mosher
- **The Oxford Companion to Beer**, by Garret Oliver
- BJCP Style Guidelines: <https://www.bjcp.org/beer-styles/beer-style-guidelines/>

## Sake

- <https://www.sake-world.com>
- **A Comprehensive Guide to Japanese Sake**, by Japanese and Sochu Makers Association
- 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
- Podcast: Sake On Air: <https://sakeonair.com/>

**Spirits & Cocktails:** *many great books cover the world of spirits and cocktails. At the Master Sommelier level, it is important to research each type of spirit and liqueur individually.*

- **The Oxford Companion to Spirits and Cocktails**, by David Wondrich and Noah Rothbaum
- **Cocktail Codex: Fundamentals, Formulas, Evolutions**, by Alex Day, Nick Fauchald, David Kaplan
- **The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create the World's Great Drinks**, by Amy Stewart
- **The Complete Book of Spirits: A Guide to Their History, Production, and Enjoyment**, by Anthony Dias Blue
- Producer/Brand Websites

## Top Wine Bloggers, Writers, and Retailers:

- [www.wine-searcher.com](http://www.wine-searcher.com)
- [www.wineanorak.com](http://www.wineanorak.com)
- [www.thewinecellarinsider.com](http://www.thewinecellarinsider.com)
- [www.wine.com](http://www.wine.com)
- [www.winefolly.com](http://www.winefolly.com)
- [www.kermitlynych.com](http://www.kermitlynych.com)
- [www.rarewineco.com](http://www.rarewineco.com)
- [www.timatkin.com](http://www.timatkin.com)
- [www.jancisrobinson.com](http://www.jancisrobinson.com)
- [www.illdrinktothatpod.com](http://www.illdrinktothatpod.com)
- [www.vinography.com](http://www.vinography.com)

## Importer Websites (United States)

- [www.kermitlynych.com](http://www.kermitlynych.com)
- [www.vineyardbrands.com](http://www.vineyardbrands.com)
- [www.viasimports.com](http://www.viasimports.com)
- [www.empsonusa.com](http://www.empsonusa.com)
- [www.frederickwildman.com](http://www.frederickwildman.com)
- [www.vintus.com](http://www.vintus.com)
- [www.demaisonselections.com](http://www.demaisonselections.com)
- [www.winebow.com](http://www.winebow.com)
- [www.dallaterra.com](http://www.dallaterra.com)
- [www.pasternakimports.com](http://www.pasternakimports.com)

**Other Educational & Certifying Bodies:**

- Court of Master Sommeliers, Europe Chapter: [www.courtofmastersommeliers.org](http://www.courtofmastersommeliers.org)
- Wine Scholar Guild: [www.winescholarguild.com](http://www.winescholarguild.com)
- Wine & Spirits Education Trust: [www.wsetglobal.com](http://www.wsetglobal.com)
- Institute of Masters of Wine: [www.mastersofwine.org](http://www.mastersofwine.org)

**Wine Auction Houses**

- Acker Merrall & Condit
- Christie's
- JJ Buckley
- Sotheby's

**Food Menus, Beverage Lists, and Cocktail Lists of the world's best restaurants...**