

2026 Upper-Level Hospitality & Service

Illustrative Examples

The three main categories of consideration in Hospitality & Service are Mechanics, Theory, and Hospitality & Salesmanship.

MECHANICS

The mechanics of sommelier service encompass the technical skills, etiquette and efficiency required to deliver exceptional service in a tableside hospitality setting. These mechanics ensure precision, professionalism, and an elevated guest experience. Refer to the Advanced and Master Sommelier [Hospitality & Service Exam Standards and Guidelines](#) resource. The bullets below summarize analysis of recent exam data.

From 2022 to 2025, the following Mechanics standards required greater attention:

- Efficient mise en place and sommelier movement throughout tableside service
- Repeating orders completely prior to leaving and upon returning to the table
- Avoiding drips during decanting, taste pouring, and glass pouring
- Consistent placement of stemware
- Upkeeping table, side station, gueridon, and cocktail cart:
 - Tracking and clearing unused or dirty items and/or equipment
 - Executing in a cleaning and orderly manner
 - Organizing service areas upon completion of tasks
- Considering sediment when decanting:
 - Avoiding glugging
 - Aiming for a slow and purposeful decant
 - Leaving an appropriate amount of “sediment-laden” wine in the bottle based upon age and type of wine
- Performing of the more complex mechanics - such as use of cheesecloth, double decanting, equipment priming, handling large format bottles, splash decanting, Coravin service, and bottle opening devices (beyond the corkscrew) - comfortably
- Tableside pouring from a tray: glass and flight pours of wine, spirits, beers, sake, apéritifs, and/or digestifs (including bottle and flight presentation)
- Consistent placing of stemware: within .5 inch or 1.25 cm of stem placement at other settings
- Even pouring for the entire table: each glass within .5 inch or 1.25 cm of all other stems

- Handling distracting guest requests during mechanics; keep track of and complete the task at hand at the appropriate time
- Performing mechanics with confidence, grace, and panache – while being able to engage with guests without undue stoppage

In 2025, the following Mechanics skillsets were very strong:

- Cocktail production and service
- Sparkling and still wine pouring
- Bottle presentation
- Sparkling wine opening: the mechanics of opening the bottle

Master Sommelier exam Mechanics performance data comparisons between 2024 and 2025:

Notable improvements:

- Order repetition (producer, bottling, vintage, tracking which guest ordered what): **29% to 58%**
- Low overall score average for Hospitality & Service **rose by 12%**

Notable decreases:

- Decanting: **78% to 63%**
- Sparkling Pour: **47% to 41%**

Advanced Sommelier exam Mechanics performance data comparisons between 2024 and 2025:

Notable improvements:

- Cocktail building: **81% to 95%**
- Presentation: **74% to 83%**
- Food descriptions: **73% to 86%**
- Sparkling pour: **60% to 72%**
- Salesmanship: **58% to 66%**

Notable decreases:

- Order repetition: **96% to 49%**

Master Sommelier-level H&S Mechanics Summary:

Some of the most important Mechanics have higher rates of success at the Advanced Sommelier Exam than the Master Sommelier Exam, specifically Tableside Pouring, Decanting, and Sparkling Wine Pouring. While some of this is due to more complex and challenging scenarios at the Master Sommelier level, this reinforces the importance of regular, deliberate practice of core mechanics at all levels. Muscle memory is required for success at the Master Sommelier Exam.

HOSPITALITY & SERVICE MECHANICS SCENARIOS

The following set of illustrative scenarios are a combination of actual and hypothetical examination situations; the examples provided are not exhaustive.

1. REPEATING ORDER SCENARIO

The host's sister at a table is celebrating her birthday and ordered a "perfect Manhattan with Rittenhouse Rye and nothing special for the vermouths." Another guest ordered a dirty Martini with Hendrick's and three olives. The host ordered a Macallan 18 stirred briefly with one ice cube.

Mechanics tested:

Does the sommelier repeat the table's order, indicating who ordered which beverage, prior to leaving the table?

Does the sommelier confirm requests, such as a specific brand of spirit, additional ingredients, production methods, or production location?

Does the sommelier confirm similar details to guest(s) when presenting the beverages?

Why does the sommelier repeat guest orders?

- Ensures order accuracy
- Enables efficient cocktail service
- Eliminates the possibility of an incorrect cocktail being made and wasting ingredients

Topics broached:

- Repeating Order Completely
- Tracking Order Correctly

2. SPARKLING TABLE: EVEN POURS SCENARIO

The host at a table of 9 guests orders a 750 mL bottle of 2014 Louis Roeder, Cristal to be brought to the table as quickly as possible for a toast to celebrate the sale of their company. Two of the guests order half-glass pours of Sancerre for the toast because they “don’t like sparkling wine.” The sommelier serves two half glasses first, then sets stems for the Champagne. After approving the bottle, the host requests that the bottle be poured out completely, “so there isn’t any awkwardness regarding who ‘gets’ the remaining amount.” Flutes – not white wine glasses – are requested. After the sommelier starts pouring the bottle, one of the guests asks questions about the pre-ordered appetizers.

Mechanics tested:

Does the sommelier track how many flutes to bring and which guests receive them?

Can the sommelier calculate how much Champagne to pour each guest, with consideration for the number of guests drinking Champagne and the amount poured for the host’s taste?

Does the sommelier accurately gauge the size and shape of the flutes to understand pour height?

Can the sommelier pour the accurate amount for each guest drinking Champagne in one pass around the table?

Does the sommelier arrive at the table able to answer questions about the pre-ordered appetizers while pouring without undue interruption?

Other considerations while pouring:

- Pouring without dripping or touching the stems with the bottle
- Clockwise pouring order:
 - Starting with either guest(s) of honor per the host's request or guest to the left of the host
 - Then pouring without regard to presenting gender unless requested
 - Then finishing with the host
- Potential questions about beverage lists or menus:
 - Pouring may be briefly paused so menus can be referenced if necessary to answer questions
 - Track pouring progress and resume with the correct guest after pausing
- Emergency interruptions that pull the sommelier away from the table are rare, but the sommelier must track pouring progress and resume with the correct guest
- Anxious guests wanting to toast quickly, requiring the sommelier pour as efficiently as possible while indicating situational understanding

Why does the sommelier plan for and execute even pours?

- Ensures each guest feels served equally and the host enjoys an equal pour
- Instills confidence in the sommelier's skills for the rest of the evening, encouraging more beverage orders and higher sales.

Topics broached:

- Pouring Evenly
- Pouring in Correct Order
- Tracking Orders

3. DECANTING TABLE: MISE EN PLACE, DECANTING MAGNUM FOR SEDIMENT, AND APPROVAL TASTE

A table of 4 guests pre-ordered a magnum of 2000 Antinori Tignanello, requesting that it is stood up for 48 hours prior to the group's reservation. After initial greetings and cocktail service, the host asks the sommelier to decant the bottle "to allow it to open up" while the table enjoys the first courses and various beverages. The hosts requests to approve the bottle but that the sommelier should wait to place stems for the other guests "so to the table is not

crowded.” There is a rolling gueridon and the sommelier is directed to use it to decant tableside.

Mechanics Tested:

Mise en Place:

Does the sommelier maintain the bottle’s vertical placement and handle it gently until it is decanted?

Can the sommelier locate their gueridon near the table according to the directions?

Decanting:

Can the sommelier prepare and complete the decanting on the gueridon while showing great care to not disturb the settled sediment?

Can the sommelier decant a magnum-sized bottle as efficiently and expertly as with a 750 mL bottle?

Can the sommelier pour an approval taste from a magnum-sized bottle as efficiently and expertly as with a 750 mL bottle?

Why does the sommelier plan for and execute proper mise en place, decanting, and tasting approval pours?

- Ensures expedient completion of this complex service mechanic
- Guarantees the wine is in the best possible condition for the guests
- Creates confidence in the sommelier’s skills of the sommelier for the rest of the evening, encouraging more beverage orders and sales

Topics broached:

- Mise en Place
- Situational Understanding
- Decanting
- Still Wine Pouring

THEORY

The Theory of sommelier service, sales, and hospitality encompasses:

- Most tableside topics such as vintage style and/or quality reputation, producers and proprietary beverages, label terms, history and lore, styles of beverage alcohols, established foodstuff, regional global dishes, food and beverage pairings, and cocktails
- A minority of cause-and-effect topics, especially as guests become more knowledgeable about what they are consuming
- Understanding, and being able to explain, why specific service mechanics standards exist

The sommelier's goal is to demonstrate Theory knowledge while graciously performing mechanics with hospitality and sales in mind.

From 2022 to 2025, the following Theory standards required greater attention:

- Non-wine theory:
 - Foodstuff and regional ingredients
 - Beer, spirits, sake, and other beverages
- Food and beverage pairing:
 - Accurate (and appetizing, see Page 10) descriptions of why a given pairing does or does not work well
- Producers & proprietary blends
 - Detailed knowledge of specific producers and bottlings, including but not limited to, place of origin, grape variety or other base material, history & lore, and characteristics in the glass

In 2025, the following Theory skillsets were very strong:

- Cocktail ingredients and building steps
- Vintage style and reputation of major regions
- Foundational regional classic dishes

HOSPITALITY & SERVICE TABLESIDE THEORY EXAMPLES

Topics broached in examples below:

- Theory: Food Knowledge
- Food & Wine Pairing

Q: What is the *nước chấm* sauce that comes with the jellyfish?

Acceptable Answer:

Fish sauce-based sauce with two of the following: sugar, lime, chili. It's a ubiquitous flavor combination Vietnam and Southeast Asia

Q: What is *sabayon*?

Acceptable Answer:

Sauce of egg yolks and sweet marsala/white wine and sugar. It's a foundational sauce used in French cooking

Why does the sommelier need to be able to explain sauces and their ingredients?

Knowledge of menu items is key to a sommelier's skillset because it is key to proper beverage pairings and avoiding guests' allergens. Both examples are foundational sauces in their respective food regions/cooking styles.

Topics broached in the examples below:

- Theory: Beverage Production
- Theory: Leading Producers & Proprietary Brands

Q: This Cocchi is great. I heard they brown the sugar used to sweeten it. Do you know why?

Acceptable Answer:

Both for toast/caramel flavor and for amber color

Why does the sommelier need to know how the sugar in Cocchi Torino is processed?

This distinctive production method of fire-caramelizing the sugar defines the beverage's style, from visual and taste perspectives.

Topics broached in the examples below:

- Region of Origin – Country: Mexico
- Non-Wine: Spirits
- Food & Wine Pairing

Q: How would the Del Maguey “Ibérico” Pechuga pair with the Chalupa?

Acceptable Answer:

Graciously explanation of how the high alcohol of the Mezcal may amplify the spice of the chili sauce.

Why does the sommelier need to understand the interaction/effect of Mezcal and chili spice?

Mezcal is a distilled spirit with ABV of at least 40% and chili spice is present in the Chalupa sauce. The elevated ethanol levels of Mezcal enhance and amplify the perception of chili heat on the palate, resulting in generally unpleasant pairings if for those who are sensitive to heat sensations.

HOSPITALITY & SALESMANSHIP

Sommelier service, sales, and hospitality encompass:

- Warm, approachable, gracious tableside presence
- Situational understanding
- Understanding of guest preferences and expectations – with the skill to exceed them
- Making restaurant and pairing suggestions sound appetizing
- Strong communication skills

From 2022 to 2025, the following Hospitality & Salesmanship standards required greater attention:

- Appetizing descriptions
 - Describing dishes, wines and other beverages, and food & beverage pairings in ways that are guest-facing and appealing
- Recognizing and incorporating price point preferences from guests

In 2025, the following Hospitality & Salesmanship skillsets were very strong:

- Situational understanding
 - Recognizing guest(s) of honor
 - Recognizing host of the table v. orderer of beverage (not always the same person)
 - Avoiding unsuitable topics of discussion
 - Understanding and communicating pace concerns
 - Tracking allergies
- Gracious carriage
 - Tableside presence, warmth, and charisma