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INTRODUCTION

This report has been compiled with the primary aim of assisting those who are preparing to sit Diploma Examination Papers in the future. It will also be of benefit to lecturers, course co-ordinators, tutors and mentors. It aims to give brief comments on candidates' answers to each question, as well as highlighting common pitfalls and successes. It is designed to provoke constructive thought as much as to give all the answers. Comments on individual questions are preceded by some statistics and general comments. In some instances, guidance notes are supplemented by extracts from candidates' responses. Where appropriate, advice is given on where additional marks could have been gained. Whilst examples are not provided for every question set, there are examples of sections from each of the specific styles of question – coursework assignments, tasting questions and theory questions from closed book papers. In each instance, the scripts have been selected to illustrate good coverage of either the topic as a whole, or a specific section of it.

It should be borne in mind that these are not the definitive answer to any of the questions. Some may omit a number of facts, or in the case of the coursework assignments, may express a degree of personal opinion rather than fact. Nevertheless, they are reproduced here because they are a good representation of the standard required to pass or excel in the Diploma examination. In some instances, we have also included less than perfect answers. These illustrate the difference between a very good script and one that requires more work to reach the standard to justify a pass, or in some instances to illustrate what is not acceptable in an examination of this level.

Candidates' responses published in this report were actual submissions in the 2005-06 examination cycle and as such are anonymous and are reproduced as submitted to the examiner.

It is suggested that candidates revising and preparing for a particular type of question - tasting, paragraph, essay etc - read all comments on similar questions, as these often contain general advice, which is applicable across the board.

Janet Bangs
Director, WSET Awards
December 2006

DIPLOMA EXAMINATIONS 2005/06 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Paper	2006		2005		2004	Paper	2003	2002	2001
Unit 1	(1)					NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER			
Unit 2	84%		79%		79%	Section I (A)	48%	62%	53%
						Section I (B)	43%	44%	65%
Unit 3 tasting 1 & 2	JUNE 49%	JAN 55%	JUNE 62%	JAN 48%	JUNE 59%	Section IIA Tasting	60%	65%	68%
						Section IIB Tasting	51%	74%	75%
Unit 3 theory	JUNE 54%	JAN 42%	JUNE 41%	JAN 24%	JUNE 27%	Section IIA Theory	50%	52%	52%
						Section IIB Theory	59%	57%	56%
Unit 4	61%		69%		76%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER			
Unit 5	61%		58%		70%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER			
Unit 6	67%		45%		65%	NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER			
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER						Section III (A)	83%	64%	78%
NO DIRECT EQUIVALENT PAPER						Section III (B)	78%	68%	84%

NOTES:

- (1) Direct pass rates for Unit 1 are not given as this Unit is awarded on completion of all four coursework titles. Individual pass rates for each title are given within the body of this report.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Most of those reading this report will be studying for one of the six Units of the Diploma syllabus, either as a first or second year candidate or one of those re-sitting following an unsuccessful previous attempt

Pass rates for the coursework assignments that form the assessment methodology for Unit 1 (the Global Business of Alcoholic Beverages) are good, but there have been some instances where the authenticity of work has come into question. Where candidates have clearly committed plagiarism, the Examination Panel has had no option but to impose a fail grade for the work concerned. Fortunately these have been few and far between and the standard of work submitted, on the whole, has been high. There are nevertheless grave concerns that some candidates are not actually retaining the knowledge they demonstrate in the coursework assignments, with some extremely poor work submitted for the closed book theory questions in units 3, 4, 5 and 6. This raises questions regarding the validity and appropriateness of assignments as a method of assessment, and we are currently reviewing how we will assess this unit going forward with a view to implementing changes in August 2008.

Results for the multiple choice examination format for Unit 2 (the Production of Wine) generate by far the highest pass rate of all sections of the Diploma qualification, (see statistical analysis on page 2). However, this high pass rate is attributable to the format of the assessment rather than the actual content. A multiple choice paper clearly allows candidates to demonstrate their factual knowledge without the restriction of having to express this in an essay format – something which many foreign language candidates find too challenging. In addition, as this is the first assessment that Diploma candidates undertake, we feel it is reassuring for them to be faced with a format they are familiar with from previous WSET qualifications.

Unit 3 has generated mixed results. Pass rates for the tasting paper questions tend to differ greatly between Paper 1 and Paper 2, with Paper 2 showing better results in both January and June. This is still partly due to the fact that Paper 1 is sat by a larger percentage of first year candidates. This will continue to be the case until those candidates in transition from the former syllabus are out of the system (July 2008). There are also thoughts that the analytical nature of questions 1 and 2 in Paper 1 are more demanding than the Part Specified or Unspecified questions in Paper 2. We will therefore be replacing question 2 on Paper 1 with another Unspecified trio of wines in the January 2008 examination. The difference in performance between first and second year candidates was also very evident in the Unit 3 theory paper in January, where candidates were largely students in their first year of study or those re-sitting following a previous failed attempt. Nevertheless, the pass rate for the Unit 3 theory paper has increased significantly since the launch of the new syllabus in 2004, and this is now closer to the levels generated under the old Section 2A and 2B theory paper (which had in any event been showing a clear downward trend since reaching a highpoint in 2000). However, there is still evidence that some candidates vastly underestimate the level of this qualification and the amount of revision work required to

succeed in the closed book examinations. It cannot be stressed often enough – study of the course notes in isolation is not sufficient for a qualification of this level. The WSET and Approved Programme Providers must continue to ensure that candidates enrolling on the Diploma programme are fully aware of the standard required, and the level of commitment that they will have to demonstrate in terms of additional study and revision time. This is a professional qualification, which sits within the National Qualifications Framework at level 4 (roughly equivalent to a Foundation Degree) and requires sound background knowledge and the ability to analyse data rather than simply recall fact.

As with Unit 3, Units 4, 5 and 6 generated mixed results. Candidates generally tend to apply the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique (SAT) reasonably well when making their assessment. However, the level of factual knowledge displayed in the theory question still causes concern – in some cases, it falls even short of that required for Advanced Certificate. Candidates need to remember that these units are a test of all-round knowledge and the tasting and theory elements carry equal weighting in the examination. This means that candidates cannot count on passing this paper purely on the strength of their tasting skills alone.

The number of candidates electing to progress to the Honours Diploma qualification remains considerably lower than those completing the Diploma. However, this is as it should be. The Honours Diploma requires a considerably deeper level of study and research and not all candidates are able to fulfil this criteria because of personal ability or work commitments. Results for this qualification are very encouraging. Where candidates have accurately followed the brief in the Candidate Assessment Guide and have ensured that their work contains a significant amount of original research and analysis, high grades have been achieved. Those who have merely stated facts have either achieved a borderline pass or a fail grade. To date, there have been some highly original submissions and it has been encouraging to see the enthusiasm with which some candidates have approached this higher level qualification.

Now for some general comments on the issues and problems that come up year after year.

Supplementary reading

Candidates are reminded that the Study Guides issued by the WSET contain an overview of each section of the syllabus only and make frequent reference to additional sources of information. Candidates should be warned that the examination panel specifically refers to material listed as “required reading” when setting examination questions. Candidates who limit their study to the Diploma Study Guides in isolation run the risk of coming unstuck in the closed book examinations as a result. These additional sources of information should be just as much part of a study plan as the Study Guides themselves. In addition, there is clear evidence that candidates are not reading the Candidate Assessment Guide. This has been specifically written to help them prepare for assessment, and gives very clear guidance on the approach to assignment writing and the candidates’ obligations in this respect. Candidates

who do not study this document, may run the risk of gaining a fail grade for their work.

Commercial awareness

Unit 1, The Global Business of wines and other beverages specifically examines candidates' commercial awareness through the means of coursework assignments. There is some evidence that candidates are ignoring the fundamental fact that wine and spirit production and trading are business enterprises, and therefore fail to bring a commercial approach to their answers where appropriate. All coursework assignments have a distinct commercial focus and a pass cannot be achieved simply by reiterating facts relating to production methods. Titles for the 2006/07 coursework assignments are given on the WSET website under www.wset.co.uk. Titles for the 2007/08 academic year will be published at the end of May 2007.

The regulars

Taking note of these can make a big difference to your examination result.

- ? Answering the question as set.
- ? Writing legibly and presenting answers clearly.
- ? Avoiding careless errors such as mis-spelling a word contained in the question.
- ? Applying the Systematic Approach when answering tasting papers

In addition, we have noticed that candidates who take advantage of "examination preparation schemes" perform considerably better on the day than those who do not.

Finally, I would like to convey my gratitude to all those who contribute their time, and expertise to help the Awards team put the Diploma examination together and who contribute to the success of this qualification both in the UK and overseas.

To the internal and external members of the Examination Panel, the Moderating Panel, the examiners, the administration team in the WSET School and other examination centres, the examination invigilators and tasting teams who work so hard behind the scenes on the big day, the Results Panel and the Appeals Panel – my thanks to all of you!

Janet Bangs
Director WSET Awards

COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Unit I, The Global Business of Wines and other Beverages

The 2005/06 academic year saw the introduction of the "Assignment Brief" for this Unit. In previous years, candidates were given the assignment title, but no specific guidance on the allocation of marks for each section within the body of the assignment. As a result, candidates often failed to understand where the emphasis in the question lay. This meant that some achieved low marks because they concentrated on sections of only minor importance or strayed too far from the assignment title. The introduction of the "Assignment Brief" addressed this problem, giving the candidate very clear instructions on specifically what was required under each section, both in terms of content as well as emphasis. There is even guidance on what examiners will be looking for in an answer and candidates are advised what will determine the allocation of a fail grade. The trade off for this additional information, was the withdrawal of the fail/refer grade, which had offered a lifeline to many borderline candidates in the past.

Before commenting on each specific assignment title, here are some general comments about the grading of coursework assignments:

All assignments are graded out of 100 marks. Of this, 20 marks are available for the candidate's handling of the assignment. This includes the diversity of the bibliography, the presentation of the work in terms of spelling, grammar and legibility and the structure and style of the assignment. The latter incorporates issues of coherence, flair, fluency, use of illustrative examples and the candidate's method of approach to the assignment.

The allocation of the balance of 80 marks varies according to the individual assignment and will be detailed as appropriate under each Assignment Brief.

In terms of presentation, marks will be lost where work is presented with spelling and grammatical errors. With spell checkers on all PCs these days, there is really no excuse for sloppy work of this kind. Structure is also important, particularly if candidates do not follow the format dictated by the various sections of the Assignment Brief, as an automatic fail grade is awarded where any section is not addressed. The bibliography is an essential part of the assignment and those submitted without one are penalised as a result. This needs to draw on a variety of sources – books, magazines, internet, interviews – and certainly needs to have strong commercial evidence of the kind that can be obtained from trade journals such as *Harpers*, *Drinks Business*, or *Just Drinks*. These are vital for identifying trends and problems. The bibliography should also be correctly referenced throughout the body of the assignment – something far too few candidates actually do. Guidance on this is given in the Candidate Assessment Guide. Failure to follow this, will result in lower marks in this section of the Assignment Brief.

Next, a few words on the use of the SWOT analysis in coursework. Whilst these do have their uses, some candidates include them indiscriminately without really making any conclusion regarding their findings. At worst they can be repetitive, of limited relevance, and eat into the word-count with little to show for it. At best they can highlight key points, generate imaginative thought and clear the mind. **They should be used with caution** and should never form the bulk of the work. It has become evident that candidates from certain countries are relying too heavily on the inclusion of the SWOT analysis in their work.

Finally a general comment that applies to all assignment writing. Some pieces of work submitted show signs of collaboration or “leading” by the Approved Programme Provider, or in the worst cases, plagiarism or simply copying another candidate’s work. Candidates must remember that assignments are to be the work of one individual only and they should be in no doubt that it is always very obvious to the examiner where this is not the case. The penalties in such instances can be very severe indeed.

Assignment Title 1

<i>Importing and distributing a new range of inexpensive wines.</i>	
<p>Required content and suggested approach</p> <p>The candidate should formulate a strategy for the sourcing, marketing and distribution of a range of inexpensive still light wines from a country outside their domestic market. (In this context, the domestic market is defined as that of the country where the examination is being sat.) The strategy should include costings, buying terms and shipping requirements for the importation of the wine, marketing initiatives for the launch of the range, and an analysis of possible avenues for sale to the consumer/trade. (Candidates registered in countries where a monopoly market exists must consider alternative routes in addition to State Liquor Stores.)</p>	
<i>Answers: 170</i>	<i>Passes: 112 (66%)</i>

This assignment title generated the lowest pass rate at 66%. This was probably due to the fact that this was the most factual of the four titles and therefore the information that was required in an answer was a more clearly defined with less room for personal interpretation.

The following is a summarisation of the key points that should have been covered in each of the required sections of the assignment brief.

Introduction

The candidate was required to identify the range of wines they had selected, including provenance and rationale for this choice. Marks were allocated at the discretion of the examiner for any viable choice at a competitive, commercial price that was readily available in sufficient quantity to supply the market, eg a range of red, white and rosé wines from the South of France, Eastern Europe, the US Central Valley, South America, Australia etc. The key point here is that the wine must fit the profile of being inexpensive. In the UK market, this means below £5. Too many candidates failed to realise the significance of this and priced their choice of wine outside the remit of the assignment. For example, premium wines were not a valid option and where QWPSR was proposed, this should have been validated by a viable and logical rationale that justified that it was suitable for the target market. (ie inexpensive wines).

Sourcing of the wine

The section carried the bulk of the marks (40%), but was often given less coverage than the previous section. Far too many candidates gave considerably more emphasis to the rationale for their choice of wine than the 10% in the assignment brief indicated it should receive. In this section, the candidate was required to construct a costing template to include details of all likely costs to be incurred by the importer from the point of initial discussions with the producer up to, and including, delivery in the domestic market. All costings in the template were to be explained in full and should have included details of the various options available

for shipping with a clear rationale for the selection of the most appropriate method for their particular range of wine.

The examiner was naturally prepared for local variation from candidates submitting assignments through international Programme Providers, but was broadly looking for the following key headings:)

Ex cellars cost of wine from the producer – including consideration of the various options in terms of type of producer, eg co-operative, negociant, etc and acknowledgement of the impact this could have on price. At this stage, decisions also needed to be made regarding the style/blend of the wine, packaging, including bottle (or other container), closure, label and carton. Good candidates were also aware that exchange rates have an impact on costs.

Transport.

- ? Freight, insurance and shipping costs.
- ? RH&D (receipt, handling & delivery).
- ? Result: In Bond cost.
- ? Options in shipping (eg transport in bulk and bottle in the country of consumption, versus the option of bottling in the region of production, plus options of shipping in full load or groupage)
- ? Legal constraints in this respect, (eg bottling in the country of consumption may be possible for table wine or some new world wines but not for AC wines)
- ? Implications of shipping distance – transporting long distance by ship can be cheaper than a shorter distance by road but what implications can this have on the choice of origin for the range of wine, eg S France vs. Australia or Chile?
- ? Rationale for the choice in shipping – cost, delivery schedules, availability, convenience
- ? Administrative Accompanying Document

Duty and Taxes.

- ? Import licences
- ? CCT (Common Customs Tariff).
- ? Excise Duty, may be charged on volume or value, but will also vary according to the style of the wine.

Many candidates listed these, but far fewer actually explained them “in full”.

Marketing Strategy

This should have detailed the steps required for the creation and launch of the range of wine, including issues relating to design and packaging. This meant consideration and discussion of the following basic principles:

- ? the 4/5 P's
- ? People - analysis/identification of the target market – consumer demographics
- ? Product selection
- ? Placement within the market
- ? Price, selling price in context of target market, plus possible discounts
- ? Promotion – options available within a PR and marketing context

There were a number of simplistic approaches here, with some candidates simply stating that they would advertise the wine and explaining where this would happen, ie, TV, press etc.

Channels of distribution

The final section was the consideration of the various channels of distribution in the domestic market which would be most appropriate for the product range identified. The candidate was specifically told to consider options for distribution to other overseas markets besides the domestic market and to discuss the advantages of the channels of distribution selected. In terms of the channels of distribution themselves, most candidates considered the obvious ones such as the various options in the off-trade (multiple grocers, multiple specialists, independent specialists, cash and carry, mail order, internet, wine clubs, and monopolies in some markets), and in the on-trade (HoReCa) (hotels, restaurants, bars, cafes). They were less good at considering the advantages that might have led to their choice. The things to

consider here included aspects such as ease of access to target market, access to a wide distribution network, cost savings (eg, internet, mail order), promotional activity (brand building), extensive listing (supermarket). Almost universally, candidates did no more than “pay lip service” to the options of other overseas markets, with most simply stating that they “would aim to export to (enter the country of your choice) when possible”. This really is not what the examiner was looking for here. Candidates who did well here, showed more imagination, discussing options such as duty-free outlets, Airline distribution, overseas franchises (eg Oddbins/Majestic in Calais, supermarkets operating across European countries, eg Aldi, Marks & Spencer etc).

Most candidates discussed (too extensively) the reasons for their choice of wine, put together a template listing the projected costs involved in getting the product to their market (not always arriving at a sub £5 retail price), mentioned advertising and in store promotions and listed the outlets where their range would be sold. Where the coverage of this was sufficiently deep and broad, they achieved a pass grade, where it was superficial and simplistic, they did not.

Assignment Title 2

Re-thinking a marketing strategy	
<p>Required content and suggested approach</p> <p>The market for some fortified (liqueur) wines is a difficult one. At the same time, other sectors of the wine and spirit industry are enjoying growth, either across the board or in specific product ranges or markets. What lessons can the fortified wine industry learn from these successes and how can they be adapted to stimulate market growth for this sector of the industry? The candidate should also evaluate what other options exist for increasing sales in the fortified wine market.</p>	
<i>Answers: 178</i>	<i>Passes: 143 (80%)</i>

This generated the best results, probably because this is a topic that has gained considerable coverage in recent years with the re-launch of several well known brands. However, despite this high pass rate, it should be noted that only a handful of candidates achieved either merit or distinction grades. In other words, the majority of submissions were adequate but not exceptional.

It is important that candidates understand that assignments are not simply a test of their literary skills, or their ability to replicate facts assembled from a variety of textbooks and magazines. They are a test of their ability to research and present information within clearly defined parameters. This ensures that they give the examiner the information required for the question as set. The required sections in this assignment, were as follows:

Introduction:

The introduction is important in all assignment writing – it is your opportunity to grab the examiner's attention. In this case it should have included discussion of the problems encountered in the fortified wine market and identification of the products where these are particularly prevalent. The following are just some of the points raised in assignments:

- ? Old fashioned image (Sherry)
- ? Niche market – before/after dinner (all styles of fortified wines)

- ? Ageing demographic – customer profile (particularly Sherry)
- ? Confusion over various styles – (particularly Port)
- ? Perceived lack of versatility of product (all styles of fortified wines)
- ? Some products/styles not well known or misunderstood (eg Malaga relegated to cooking wine)
- ? Poor conception of quality by the consumer (all styles of fortified wines)
- ? Undervalued and under priced in many instances.

The following candidate, although only achieving an overall pass grade, made a valid and original point in their introduction, which showed logical analysis of the current situation in the fortified wine market:

“Port, Sherry and Vermouth are all primarily consumed in non-commercial environments (domestic surroundings). This means that the greatest share (around 80-90%) of fortified wines are bought in retail outlets. This is a major difference between the market for fortified wines and the much more successful markets for spirits, light wine and Champagne. Spirits, Champagne and wine also benefit from sales in the on-trade as a major market. As the fortified wine market relies virtually solely on off-trade business, the possibilities for increasing sales activities is rather limited.”

Successes

This required the candidate to identify what factors have led to success in the sale and marketing of white spirits, Champagne and branded wine. Candidates broadly covered the following:

- ? white spirits – led by the youth market, RTDs, cocktails, mixers, image led, versatile.
- ? Champagne – heritage, image of quality, wine for celebration, power of the Grand Marques, exclusivity, protection of the name “Champagne” (a “brand” in its own right), strong generic promotion, small producers can profit from the promotion of the Grand Marques “by association”.
- ? branded wine – customer loyalty, power of marketing, consistency in product specification, simplification of labelling, brand name is the focal point rather than where it comes from.

Good candidates made sure they illustrated their observations with reference to specific products.

Achieving market growth:

Most candidates were aware of the opportunities that exist for the fortified wine market to profit from the success of other sectors, by for example targeting the younger market, exploiting the adaptability of the product (sherry and tonic!?), focusing on the uniqueness and heritage of the product, simplified labelling etc but were less focussed in evaluating any chances of success of these initiatives. The examiner was prepared to award marks for any sensible and achievable initiative, but in many instances these were very simplistic with little in the way of analysis of their potential success. Candidates were also encouraged to consider other strengths this industry could call on in reviving growth, such as re-branding. Inevitably, this was often **all** they considered, with the bulk of this section devoted to extensive descriptions of the re-branding of Tio Pepe and the Warres Otima to the detriment of other options. This of course is what differentiates the candidate who achieves a low pass grade from those achieving higher grades for demonstrating flair and originality.

Conclusion and personal commentary:

The final compulsory section was the conclusion. As with all assignments, a good conclusion is essential – not just summarising the question, but something original, perhaps drawing together ideas, making some comment about possible future trends or personal opinion or recommendations. Far too many candidates simply repeat the key points of the question or list what they have covered in terms of sector headings.

Assignment Title 3

Mergers and acquisitions in the global drinks industry.

Required content and suggested approach

Over the last ten years there has been a series of large-scale mergers and acquisitions in the global wine and spirit industry. As a result, the ownership of most of the world's significant wine and spirit brands is now concentrated in a handful of large companies. The candidate should research three important mergers and acquisitions that have taken place within the last decade. Careful thought should be given to the factors that have driven this process of consolidation. An evaluation should be made as to whether this is a positive trend for product innovation and consumer choice, or not.

Answers: 237

Passes: 183 (77%)

This was a very topical question and clearly divided those candidates with sound commercial awareness of what is taking place in the industry from those who were less aware. The examiners were specifically looking for evidence that information for the assignment had been drawn from both the trade and financial press. There was also very specific guidance in the Assignment Brief regarding the number of mergers/acquisitions to be covered, the timeframe restricting the selection of these and the portfolio of products of the companies concerned (ie spirits was a compulsory element here).

The key points to be covered in this assignment included the following:

Introduction:

Most candidates used this to give an overview of the current climate in the "wine trade" and give their personal opinions on how this might develop further. This was certainly the right approach here. One candidate decided to take this as an opportunity to explain the difference between a merger and an acquisition – this was also a good use of the introductory section.

Research:

This section allocated 10 marks for each of three case studies. At least one of these should have included spirits in the portfolio. Not surprisingly, there was little variation in the choice of mergers and acquisitions covered here, with the "big boys" being mentioned by nearly all candidates – Constellation, Pernod Ricard, Diageo, Fosters. In a number of instances, these were reported in a very superficial manner – simply stating who took over whom, when it took place, and what brands were acquired in the process. In some cases, candidates really only described the "history" of the corporation in question rather than concentrating on the merger/acquisition. This is not the same as producing a **report on the details** of the acquisition, for example, why did it take place, was there opposition to the move and if so why, what were the financial implications? These are just some of the questions the candidate should have been asking at this stage.

One candidate approached this in a very focussed manner, taking each merger in turn and discussing it under the following headings:

- ? Acquiring company
- ? Acquired company
- ? Terms of acquisition
- ? The outcome.

This was very successful and provided key facts under each heading, but with far more emphasis on the terms of the acquisition and the outcome which is exactly where the focus should have been.

Factors driving global consolidation:

Using examples drawn from the three researched mergers and acquisitions and/or any others that were relevant, the candidate should have attempted to explain why there is so much consolidation taking place in the market at present. Examiners were prepared to award marks for any valid and reasonable observations such as:

- ? Financial failure, bankruptcy
- ? Off-loading of unprofitable portfolio of products, rationalisation
- ? Shift in focus to specialist market sector
- ? Acquisition of specific brands, eg protection of an existing brand through the acquisition of a competitor
- ? Elimination of competition, eg one wholesaler merging with another
- ? Diversification in terms of business focus – eg wholesaler buying retail chain, or Brand owner buying wholesaler (eg Constellation/Matthew Clarke)
- ? Diversification in product portfolio
- ? Penetration into other overseas markets

This is obviously not an exhaustive list, simply some examples of valid scenarios.

Large numbers of candidates referred to “synergies” and “economies of scale” with very little explanation, or in some cases, no evidence that they understood what this meant in real terms. The following candidate gave a very clear explanation of this as one of four headings in this section which included “synergies”, “fragmented nature of the wine industry”, “aggressive nature of large companies” and “potential for growth – expanding choice”.

“Synergies

This term is used mostly in the context of mergers and acquisitions and mostly refers to the creation of an entity which equals more than a sum of the individual parts of the two merged companies. For example, if Company A produces great wine but is hampered by poor distribution, whereas Company B has a great distribution system but makes poor wine, the companies could create synergy with a merger, maximising the potential of both. In the past 5 years this has happened most notably with Constellation's takeover of BRL Hardy in 2003 – a move designed to maximise the distribution potential of BRL Hardy to aid the aggressive expansion of Constellation Brands. CL World Brands' acquisition of Paragon Vintners in February 2004 was a similar move, with an improvement of logistics and distribution once more the central motivation.”

Product innovation and consumer choice:

This was another section that tended to be handled in simplistic terms. The candidate was asked to evaluate the effect of global consolidation on product innovation and consumer choice using examples to justify their findings. Most came up with examples of new products created to complement additions to the portfolio and cited this as leading to increased consumer choice. However, consolidation can also lead to a reduction in consumer choice within some segments because of rationalisation of competing products on the newly acquired portfolio. Not very many considered the effect of the new company re-branding a flagging product that was acquired through the merger. It is important in assignment writing to think beyond the obvious.

Conclusion and personal commentary:

Once again, a good conclusion can make a big difference to an assignment. This section may carry very few marks (only five in this case), but it often tells the examiner whether you really understand the subject or are merely paraphrasing text sourced elsewhere.

Assignment Title 4

Design and packaging in wines and spirits.

Required content and suggested approach

Elements of design and packaging such as bottle, label and closure are important in creating products suited to the target market. The candidate should consider how this is achieved and thereby demonstrate an understanding of the role of design and packaging and its impact on the consumer. The various options available for design and packaging and the effectiveness of re-packaging should also be considered.

Answers: 259

Passes: 188 (73%)

This was without doubt the most straightforward of the four assignment titles, yet was not answered as well as the examiners anticipated. This was largely due to the fact that candidates lost sight of where the allocation of marks rested – in this case, the section analysing the importance of design and packaging and the case study of a product having undergone a recent repackaging exercise. In a large number of assignments, candidates wrote considerably more when describing the various “options” for design and packaging, yet this attracted 10% fewer marks than either of the sections mentioned above. It does not matter how much you write for any section, the examiner will not allocate any more than the maximum marks available.

Introduction:

The five marks for the introduction were very easy marks indeed, yet a surprising number of candidates failed to do exactly what they were asked. The Brief stated that the candidate should “list the various elements of design and packaging in full”. This is fairly straightforward and with only a maximum of 5 marks available, a list is pretty much all that was required. Just in case there was any chance of the candidate not understanding what was meant by the use of the word “elements”, a couple of examples were given under the “context” section of the brief. The examples cited were bottle, label and closure. It follows then that the elements we were looking for in full were:

- ? The bottle itself
- ? The various types of closure
- ? The capsule covering the closure
- ? The labelling – both front and back
- ? The use of logos and brand images

The whole point of this particular exercise was to force the candidate to define the elements that would form the basis for the detail in the section looking at the options for design and packaging.

The importance of design and packaging:

In contrast, this section attracted a quarter of the total marks available. It was therefore one of the two most important sections and required the candidate to identify the purposes of design and packaging and then evaluate it's importance in the creation of brands and image. It is not only logical to approach this section in this order but also important to do so, as they are clearly two very different aspects and the second cannot really follow without first understanding the need for the first. Many candidates seemed unsure of what was required in this section and addressed it poorly as a result. Many of the purposes of design and packaging are really just common sense and quite obvious. Yet far too often candidates failed to consider these and relied purely on research from books or the internet. In this way,

they often ignore the very basic issues that are fundamental to understanding the assignment as a whole. The most obvious purpose of design and packaging is to contain and protect the product, yet barely any candidates even contemplated this as an option. Other purposes that could have been discussed are the need to conform with legislation (very important, but again mentioned by very few candidates indeed), and the more general issues relating to marketing etc, which most chose to focus on such as appealing to the target audience, providing information for the consumer about the contents, or creating a unique identity for the product. The second half of this section should then have considered how design and packaging can be used to create brands. It is vital in such instances to use examples of products to illustrate observations made. Some of the issues that should have been addressed are the importance of the reassurance that is provided through the consistency of brands or the way in which the right design can be used to imply a certain image. For example, traditional labels on high quality paper (such as many Bordeaux or Champagne bottles) tend to imply that the wine is a "quality product" in contrast to the sometimes brash designs of some inexpensive New World wines. However, this could also work in other ways, with the former implying an old fashioned image compared to the innovation of the latter – it really depends on who the target market is. Many candidates mentioned the impact of using catchy names for products, eg, "Cat's Pee on a Gooseberry Bush", "Great with Fish", commenting that although these may generate short term interest, they may not always instil brand loyalty

Options for design and packaging:

This section really did contain some easy marks and was again largely down to common sense rather than extensive research. The candidate was asked to consider the various options available and explain how they influence the consumer.

The best way to approach this section was to take the list that should have been put together for the introduction. The basic elements identified were bottle, closure, capsule, label and logo/branding. Taking each of these in turn, the various options to consider were:

Bottle

Colour - often an indication of the colour of the wine itself, eg red wine in a green or brown bottle, white wine in a green or clear bottle, fortified wine in a brown bottle. However, there have been a number of exceptions to this in recent years as a result of successful marketing campaigns such as Warre's Otima (clear glass) and Tio Pepe.

Shape – again, often an indication of the style of wine, eg the Bordeaux bottle for Bordeaux style wine, the Hock bottle for Germanic style wine, but of course, there is now also a strong movement away from this with the introduction of non standardised bottle shapes.

Size – a surprising number of candidates mentioned small 25cl bottles, but said nothing about the other end of the scale. For example, considering the way in which a litre bottle tends to suggest poor quality, yet Magnums suggest the reverse.

Weight of bottle – eg the implication that heavy bottles can imply quality wine.

Special treatments – eg frosting (white wines, Freixenet Cava etc), embossing (indication of quality as in Chateaufort du Pape), screen printing, which can imply cheaper wine or lesser quality, as it is often perceived as gimmicky, yet also works in the other extreme as with Perrier Jouët Champagne.

Other containers – The options to consider here are bag in box, tetra pack and cans.

Closure

The relevant options are obviously cork in all its guises, plastic, glass, crown cap, screw cap. Of course, it is not sufficient to just list or describe them. The Brief did ask the candidate to discuss how they influence the consumer. There is plenty of topical anecdotal evidence relating to the use of different closures that would have been relevant here.

Labelling

Again, there is plenty to say on the issue of labelling and how it influences the consumer.

Outer packaging

Very few candidates thought to include this as an option. The key options here and the way in which they influence the consumer are: cardboard cartons as standard, wooden crates for premium, high quality wines.

Re-packaging:

The candidate was instructed to present a case study of a wine or spirit product that has undergone re-packaging. They should also analyse the success of this exercise, using statistical evidence (such as sales figures etc.) to support claims made. Most candidates picked one of the obvious contenders here such as Tio Pepe, Harvey's Bristol Cream, Le Piat d'Or or Blue Nun. In general, this section was handled well – there was plenty of information readily available to assist here.

Conclusion:

Finally, the conclusion. Once again, these were often rather unimaginative.

Unit 2, Wine Production

This report is not able to give examples of questions used on the Unit 2 paper as these are live questions and not in the public domain.

Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that statistics continue to show a very good pass rate for this paper under its new format compared to the former essay style questions. Whilst the questions are certainly not easy, candidates have little to fear providing they study the recommended reading thoroughly.

Unit 3, Wines of the World

Tasting Papers

Firstly, some general comments about good and bad tasting notes. One way to lose marks on this paper is through loose, unquantified or vague application of the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique (SAT). Examples found on some scripts were “marked acidity” (this could imply medium or high and is not precise enough) and “tannic” (this simply implies that tannin is present, candidates need to specify whether it is high, low, medium, soft, harsh etc). Such comments do not specifically tell the examiner what he/she needs to know about the wines, and marks cannot be allocated. Examples of other terms to use with caution are “nice”, “good”, “some”, “fairly”, “reasonable”. In isolation, they convey nothing to the examiner, for example “nice tannins”, “good acidity”, “nice finish” – all far too vague to merit any marks. Many candidates use the term “balance” incorrectly. Consider the following comment “very balanced between alcohol, acidity and fruit/oak”. This tells the examiner nothing unless each of these attributes is defined in turn. They could all be “in balance” because they are all high or low or medium. On the other hand, the acidity could be high but the fruit intensity only medium yet still be “in balance”. This is precisely why such comments are not appropriate unless quantified using the parameters defined in the Systematic Approach.

Many candidates still do not appear to understand what is required in a professional, analytical tasting note. There is a general tendency amongst some to compare the three wines rather than describe them individually. This leads them to write imprecise comments such as “deeper than wine no 1”, “more intense than wines 1 and 3”, “higher acidity than wine 2”. This is not correct application of the Systematic Approach. Each wine must be assessed on its own merits with all attributes analysed according to the terminology defined in the SAT. This means that the acidity, tannin, body, alcohol etc must be quantified. It would be acceptable to describe a wine as having “high alcohol, but slightly lower than wine no 1”, as the level has clearly been defined at the outset. By comparison, a comment of “alcohol lower than wine 1” is sloppy and imprecise as it could mean the alcohol is medium or low in the case of wine 1 having “high” alcohol.

On the subject of alcohol, this is an area where candidates often fail to apply the Systematic Approach in the correct way. In the Diploma examination we do not expect candidates to state what the level of alcohol is in terms of abv %. Instead, you should aim to assess the perceived **level** of alcohol using the terms defined in the Systematic Approach – low, medium, high etc.

Another common reason for failure or a poor performance in the tasting paper is not using the WSET Systematic Approach in full. Missing out key features such as sweetness, acidity, body, alcohol etc is simply throwing marks away. With three marks available for the appearance, the candidate needs to make three valid observations. By simply correctly identifying the colour of the wine, the intensity of the colour, and any variation between the rim and core, the three marks are assured. Other observations that could be made where appropriate include comments on signs of development, viscosity or bubbles. Vagueness or inaccuracy in terms of colour will not guarantee any marks, such as describing a wine as “straw gold” in colour – two very distinct ends of the spectrum, one pale and the other usually deep. Even worse, are the candidates who simply use the term “yellow” or “red”. Candidates also lose marks by stating under the palate that “fruit is the same as the nose”. This is not sufficient to gain any marks. Candidates must state what the flavour characteristics are, as in some cases they do **not** mirror those on the nose exactly, and at this level candidates should be able to distinguish between these subtle differences.

Many candidates give insufficient information when assessing the quality of the wine and there is still confusion over what is meant by “state of maturity”. This report covers this every year – maturity is **not** the same thing as age. Maturity refers to the development of the wine. Is it immature and therefore not ready to drink as in the case of a top quality Bordeaux from a recent vintage that needs more time in bottle? Or is it fully mature and starting to decline as with many high volume, commercial wines, which are sold within a year of production, say a Vinho Verde or a Beaujolais Nouveau? Many candidates would incorrectly describe this latter wine as “young or youthful” rather than “mature”. Many give a vintage date under “state of maturity” – this is not the same thing and gets no marks. For example, a 1997 top quality White Burgundy would be at a very different stage in its maturity than say a Muscadet from the same vintage.

Finally, the most common problem is that of smelling and tasting the wine and deciding what it is before writing the tasting note. This inevitably means the candidate writes the tasting note “to fit” their (often incorrect) conclusion rather than concentrating on the basic elements in the glass and then drawing their conclusions based on this information. It is vital to keep an open mind when writing tasting notes.

Tasting Paper 1

Question 1: Wines from a single grape variety (not given)

The easiest way to lose marks in this paper is by failing to identify the grape variety. A number of candidates insist on giving a different variety for each wine despite being told in advance that one variety applies to all three wines. Another classic mistake is assuming the identity of the grape variety on the basis of the first wine tasted. It is easy to become distracted and attempt to make the remaining descriptions fit the variety chosen rather than use the information they contain to arrive at the correct identity. A number of candidates give two varieties rather than one. This is “hedging your bets” and earns no marks at all even if one of the varieties is correct. If asked to give one variety, that is what you must do. In addition, the candidate must give evidence of the logic behind their decision. It is not sufficient to simply recognise what the grape variety is, you must be able to demonstrate how you arrived at this conclusion. This section carries four marks, and you should therefore aim to give at least four valid reasons for your choice.

January 2006: Red wines from Cabernet Sauvignon	
<i>Answers: 80</i>	<i>Passes: 48 (60%)</i>

The three wines were Wynn’s Coonawarra Estate 2000, a classic Médoc with a bit of age (Château Cantelys Pessac-Léognan 1998) and a New World wine (Mondavi Oakville Napa Valley 1999).

There were a vast array of grape varieties named – some logical such as Syrah or Merlot, whilst others were clearly not contenders such as Pinot Noir (far too pale in colour) or Pinotage (far too distinctive). In many instances, where candidates identified the wrong variety, they also tended to lose additional marks in other sections of the tasting note, either through inaccurate identification of fruit character or in pinpointing country and region of production.

Of the 80 candidates sitting this paper, only 30 correctly identified this grape variety. This is rather disappointing, as this is arguably one of the easiest varieties to spot. In terms of the clues that should have guided candidates to this variety, these included the deep colour, the obvious blackcurrant fruit together with other classic notes such as the herbaceous and mint character, the use of oak, and in particular the classic cedar wood and tobacco notes on the Bordeaux and the Mondavi, and the firm structure (tannin and acidity) on all three wines. Good candidates were also able to detect the slightly hollow mid palate that is often found when this variety is used in isolation.

On a general note, the examiner noted that many candidates missed out on marks by not justifying their comments on quality. When defining this, you need to consider elements such as balance, length, complexity, intensity and typicity. However, any comments need to be justified. For example, the following candidate gained high marks for the quality assessment of all three wines:

Wine No 1 - "Well balanced between fruit and tannins, and very clean and correct, but fruit flavours are slightly one-dimensional (not especially complex), so this is probably an acceptable, high price Australian Cabernet, but not premium quality."

Wine No 2 – "Complexity and elegance point to high quality, as do well-integrated, classy oak flavours. A very good Cru Bourgeois or even a classed growth."

Wine No 3 – "Very impressive levels of fruit, and not too aggressive when it first hits the palate. Showing some complexity, but the high alcohol tips it slightly out of balance. An acceptable, premium Napa Cabernet. The mid-palate is rather raw and hollow, but I suspect this is part of the style of this wine."

This candidate has picked up on the slightly jammy and commercial style of wine no 1. They could also have commented on the slightly heavy use of new oak which was not fully integrated. They have clearly recognised the classic structure of wine no 2, and have judged wine no 3 perfectly – this was certainly a "big" wine with structure and depth, but the alcohol was definitely on the dominant side.

Other common reasons for low marks are notes which are contradictory, "hedging their bets", or applying the scatter gun approach in the hope of a few correct observations amongst the incorrect ones. Consider the following extracts from scripts which are all guilty on these counts:

"Ripe plum, prune and dark cherry, hints of pepper and vegetal notes, jammy and boiled sweets, hint of vanilla. A developing wine, Simple."

This candidate is describing two very different styles of wine in this one note, one complex and aged and the other basic, simple and youthful.

"This wine is from Italy, although it could also be from California or Australia."

Obviously hedging their bets here!

June 2006: White wines from Sauvignon Blanc	
Answers: 231	Passes: 136 (59%)

Despite a reasonably good pass rate and a large number of candidates in the merit grade band (22%), there were very few exceptional responses to this question with only 4 candidates gaining distinction.

The three wines were Domaine Vacheron Sancerre 2004, Robert Mondavi Napa Valley Fumé Blanc 2003 and Kim Crawford Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2005. In all tasting papers the examiners aim to select one wine which will be the “benchmark” of the three wines, another that is fairly obvious but requires a bit more analysis to reveal its origin, and one wine that will provide a challenge and differentiate the excellent candidates from the mediocre. In this paper, the final wine was the benchmark. This was the wine that would give candidates all the right clues to enable them to identify the grape variety. This was classic Sauvignon Blanc in its purest form and most candidates did recognise it as such. The Sancerre, whilst still showing strong varietal character, was a little more complex and therefore the candidate had to focus on the fruit rather than the creamy edge, whilst the Fumé Blanc style required sound tasting skills to identify the fruit behind the oak.

Common errors in this question, were poor responses to the assessment of quality and the age of the wines. In terms of the quality assessment, many simply do not write enough and do not explain **why** a wine is judged to be of a certain quality level. With 4 marks available for this section of the tasting note, candidates need to make an analysis of comments made in the tasting note itself (but not simply repeat them, which many do). For example, wine no 1, the Sancerre was clearly a well made wine, but the assessment of quality needs to demonstrate why this is the case. A good assessment of quality here would have been:

“A good quality wine with plenty of primary fruit character to balance the acidity. The wine falls away disappointingly on the mid palate. Mineral undertones give the wine a little complexity but the finish is disappointing, bitter and shorter than expected.”

Compare this with the following, which also mentions balance, but is not as analytical and far more vague.

“A good quality, mid-priced wine showing good fruit and good balance between the acidity and alcohol.”

The first example gained all four marks available, the second only two.

The following candidate was even more vague, focussing more on whether the wine was ready to drink.

“Good. Drinking well now. This wine should be enjoyed over the next two years. Designed for drinking young, this is a mid-price category wine, about €12.”

This is not analytical in terms of quality. The best way to assess quality is to consider the elements that contribute to it. These are characteristics such as balance, elegance, complexity or length. This note considers none of these, but simply states when the wine should be drunk.

Some candidates lose marks because they do not read the question properly. In this case, they were advised that “wines 1 – 3 are all made from the SAME grape variety”. There is no point therefore identifying a different variety for each wine. Worse still was the candidate who having incorrectly identified the variety as Gewurztraminer (difficult to conceive in any case), then went on to identify the three wines as Muscadet, Meursault and Chilean Gewurztraminer. It is simply unacceptable at this level not to know what variety is used to produce Muscadet and Meursault, two classic French wines. This candidate is not ready to attempt this qualification at this stage.

The Fumé Blanc also caused problems for many candidates, who confused the oak with excessive development, and therefore believed the wine was oxidised or out of condition and wrote poor tasting notes as a result.

Question 2: Wines with a common theme

Despite being given information in the question regarding the common theme, an alarming number of candidates ignore this. For example, in June having been told the link was geographical, one candidate decided all three wines were “oak aged”. The importance of reading the question cannot be stressed enough. There is often information in the stem that is there to help and guide you in your assessment of the wine – ignoring this is careless and simply throws marks away unnecessarily.

January 2006: White wines with a common link in respect of style	
<i>Answers: 80</i>	<i>Passes: 38 (48%)</i>

The three wines in this instance were a classic Sauternes from the 1997 vintage and therefore showing considerable development, a fresh, vibrant Coteaux du Layon, and a very sweet and slightly heavy botrytised Semillon from Australia. The Examination Panel felt this was a relatively easy selection of wines and the low pass rate is particularly disappointing as a result. In fact, not a single candidate achieved the top grade for this question.

The majority of candidates correctly identified that these wines had been made from botrytised grapes, and were reasonably adept at explaining why they believed this to be the case. However, it seems that far too many were misled by the age of the Sauternes, dismissing this as either poor quality or oxidised. A large number therefore mistakenly believed this to be a Tokaji. In fact, the colour was not deep enough to reach such a conclusion. Having discounted this wine as the Sauternes, and assuming that one of the three would be, the majority plumped for the Australian Semillon as the most likely contender. This wine really did not have the elegance and complexity of Sauternes, being far too simple, ripe and raisined in character.

Students struggled particularly in terms of assessing the palate, assessment of quality and state of maturity. In many instances, only one word responses were given for the latter two, such as “good quality”, “2 years old”, “1999”. Every year, this report explains the difference between “age” and “state of maturity”, and points out that with between 4 to 7 marks available for the assessment of quality, an analytical, reasoned response is required.

The examiner also commented that some candidates used vague terminology such as “rich brassy yellow” (does this mean amber?), “lingering finish” (how long?), “marked acidity” (medium or high?), “will keep for years” (how many?), or simply contradicted themselves, eg “deep intensity of pale gold”.

Compare the notes for the palate for all three wines from the following candidate who failed this paper with the descriptions from the control key used to mark this paper.

Fail grade candidate:

Wine No 4: Semi sweet, fresh acidity, full bodied with a long length. Pronounced intense flavours of pineapple, lychee and ginger on mid palate, botrytis notes.

Wine No 5: Semi sweet with low acidity on the mid palate, full bodied and medium intense fruit aromas of pineapple, exotic fruit and botrytis. Medium alcohol levels and a medium-long length driven by sweetness and a oiliness.

Wine no 6: Semi sweet, medium acidity, full bodied, medium intense flavour of exotic fruit and pineapple. Medium alcohol level with a long length.

The most noticeable thing about these descriptions is that they are all very similar, - all indicating that the wines were semi sweet (incorrect) with pineapple fruit and botrytis notes.

Control Key

Wine No 4: Sweet, balanced by fresh crisp acidity and medium plus body. Medium plus intensity of botrytis and ripe fruit, grapefruit, citrus, orange, orange peel, pear with syrupy, honeyed, waxy note to balance. Evidence of creamy vanilla oak, lanolin, oily. Medium plus warm spicy alcohol gives way to a medium plus length.

Wine No 5: Medium sweet with medium plus vibrant acidity. Medium body with medium intensity of rich juicy ripe fruit, peach, pear, orange peel, grapefruit, green apple, wet wool, creamy, oily, honey, earthy, botrytis tang, mineral, chalky. Medium plus, spicy alcohol. Long length.

Wine No 6: Sweet to luscious with very oily mouth feel, crisp acidity, rich, full body. Intense dried fruit, raisin, sultana, orange peel, citrus, orange, marmalade, honey, caramel, toffee, botrytis, tropical fruit, with quite a lot of oak giving a slight bitter edge. Medium alcohol that leads to a medium plus length with a rich, honeyed finish.

These wines differed in all respects, but particularly in the case of sweetness and fruit character.

<i>June 2006: Red wines with a common link in respect of geographical origin</i>	
<i>Answers: 231</i>	<i>Passes: 90 (39%)</i>

This was a poor pass rate with candidates making the usual errors in respect of assessment of quality, state of maturity or reasoning for the common link. There was also widespread use of vague terminology such as “acidity present”, “rich tannins”, “good intensity”, noticeable body”, “generous length”. These are all too imprecise to merit any marks and are pointed out in this report year after year. More alarming were the errors that demonstrated weaknesses in some candidates’ factual knowledge, such as the one who described a wine as Chianti made from 100% Cabernet Sauvignon and produced in France.

The three wines were a Chianti Classico 2001, Tedeschi’s 2001 Amarone della Valpolicella and a simple, fruity Dolcetto. Candidates were told that all three wines came from “the same country” – obviously Italy in this case. The clues that would have led candidates to this conclusion were the typical high acidity and tannin (apart from the last wine), the use of indigenous varieties (obviously the candidate needed to be able to recognise what they were to make this connection), warm alcohol pointing to possible Mediterranean (or hot) climate, typical Old World style, traditional winemaking, volatility on the first 2 wines (very typical of the style) and classic red cherry fruit on all three wines. This was certainly a challenging question, but the clues were all there if the candidate looked for them and used them correctly.

The Amarone caught many candidates out, with very few recognising that this was not totally dry. This is a classic case of writing what you expect to find rather than what is actually there. It is a natural reaction to expect red wines to be dry, it takes an open mind to curb this prejudice.

Compare the following note for Amarone which gained high marks in all sections with the second example, which seriously misjudged this wine in all sorts of ways.

Example 1 – high scoring note

Appearance: Bright, opaque garnet core with a narrow garnet rim. Noticeable legs.
Nose: Clean, developing nose of medium plus intensity. Deep, dark fruits, both fresh and dried and rich Christmas cake aromas. Dark cherries, tar and liquorice. Very concentrated and smokey.
Palate: Medium dry, crisp acidity, high levels of firm but ripe tannins, full body, slightly dried fruit, damsons, plums, spice. High but balanced alcohol and a slight earthiness on the long, perfumed finish.
Assessment of quality: Very good quality as shown by intense concentration of fruit and long powerful finish. Nicely integrated oak and very ripe intense and complex fruit is complemented by the powerful body.
State of maturity: Drinking now but will keep, probably for up to 5 years.
Grape variety(ies): Corvina, Rondinella, Molinara
Region of origin: Veneto – Valpolicella Classico Recioto

This wine was actually more accurately described as off dry rather than medium dry and this candidate did not comment on the classic slightly rubbery, volatile note that was particularly noticeable on the nose. They have slightly misjudged this as a Recioto rather than an Amarone, but this does not matter as this information was not specifically asked for, and they are correct in identifying it as a Valpolicella from the Veneto. This tasting note was just a couple of marks short of full marks.

Example 2 – poor note

Appearance: Clear, with medium intensity, ruby core fading to a pink rim with significant legs.
Nose: Clean, with pale aromas of cooked red fruits but appears youthful.
Palate: Dry with high acidity and high, hard tannins. Light fruit intensity of plums and cooked stoned fruit. It is medium bodied, with medium length and medium alcohol.
Assessment of quality: Average quality, commercially produced wine where the tannin overpowers everything else.
State of maturity: Drink now, probably won't improve.
Grape variety(ies): Corvina
Region of origin: Veneto, Valpolicella

Whilst there were some correct observations in this note, it is largely inaccurate. I should also point out that this is reproduced exactly as written including observations such as “pale aromas” and “stoned fruit” – obviously a wine keen on illegal substances! On a more serious note, this candidate underestimates the intensity of the colour, the fruit intensity, body, alcohol and length. This wine was certainly not youthful and in terms of fruit character the only observations were “cooked red fruit, plums and stoned fruits”. This was a very complex and elegant wine with plenty of valid descriptors such as meaty, earthy, leather, smoke, tobacco, gamey, vanilla, dark berries, sour cherry, sour raspberry, sweet chocolate, rubber, volatility. The assessment of quality is completely wrong – this is an extremely expensive wine. However, the candidate is also being illogical in their conclusion. They obviously think this was a cheap, simple Valpolicella. However such a wine would not have the “high, hard tannins” which this candidate describes as “overpowering everything else.” This is a classic example of the candidate not using the information in the tasting note to arrive at a logical conclusion. They are correct that this is a Valpolicella but it is not the wine they believe it to be, but a far more superior one.

Tasting Paper 2

Question 3: Partly-Specified Wines

As the focus of this question is to test the candidates' ability to differentiate between the quality levels of the three wines, this assessment is a powerful tool. Unfortunately many are confused or not precise enough when it comes to the quality assessment. Comments such as "average quality" will not gain marks unless some reference is made to the quality level the wine is pitched at. For example, is it "average" for a Grand Cru or for an entry level £3.99 wine? This section of the paper carries 7 marks and comments such as "good" or "AC level" are simply not detailed enough. What the examiners are looking for here is a statement of the quality of the wine that is supported by well argued reasoning and analysis that demonstrates an understanding of the elements of a wine that contribute to its quality.

This paper also requires the candidate to demonstrate an awareness of the commercial value of wines based on their quality. In some instances, this is woefully lacking, or candidates hedge their bets and give an answer that spans a wide range of prices. Whilst we do not expect candidates to pinpoint the price exactly to gain the 2 marks available, we do expect them to identify this as closely as possible. It is perfectly acceptable to price a £5.99 wine at, say, £5 - £6 or £6 - £7, but the candidate who prices it at £5 - £10 is not precise enough to gain the marks.

January 2006: White wines made from the Viognier grape	
<i>Answers: 82</i>	<i>Passes: 36 (44%)</i>

The format of this question allows us to select wines, which, in a blind tasting, could be considered too much of a challenge. In this case, we were able to consider a grape variety that may be less familiar to some candidates. Removing the pressure of needing to "identify" the wine, means that candidates can concentrate on writing accurate tasting notes describing the wine and focus on relating the evidence they extract in this process to an evaluation of the possible quality level. In reality, for many, quality assessment is a significant area of weakness. In addition, there seems to be increasing evidence of candidates confusing rich, ripe fruit, with quality in wine – the two do not necessarily go hand in hand. Far too many candidates dismiss subtlety, restraint or development in favour of "power".

The key to success with this question is being able to recognise the characteristics that point to quality in wine. Once the premium wine has been identified, the other two should fall into place. Samples for this paper are always chosen to clearly reflect the three different quality levels. In this case, we selected a top quality classic Viognier from the Rhone – Pierre Gaillard's Condrieu with a retail price of around £30 (wine no 7). This was contrasted against a medium priced, rich, oily, weighty New World wine from California (wine no 9) and an inexpensive (£5) and very simple Vin de Pays d'Oc (wine no 8). Unfortunately, far too many failed to appreciate the attributes of the Condrieu that singled this out as the premium wine, instead being misled by the overt, New World style of wine no 9.

One candidate went so far as to describe the Condrieu as "*everyday white for easy drinking. Quite light and easy going. Would have tasted better cooler.*" Not only has this candidate completely misjudged the quality of this wine (they priced it at £4 - £5), but they also do not give a good, analytical assessment of quality for the wine they believe it to be. There is no indication of why they think it is an "everyday wine". In reality this was displaying noticeable

high quality, with acidity well balanced with the concentrated fruit character. It clearly showed complexity of fruit, balanced structure and elegance with a long length. The only criticism was that the oak was not yet fully integrated and therefore rather too dominant at present.

In contrast, candidates who underestimated the quality of the Condrieu tended to describe the California Viognier as “excellent”, “lots of complexity”, “classic Viognier from a quality producer”, and other similar exaggerations. This was certainly a good quality wine, but was distinctly commercial in style. The fruit was very confectioned and simple and one-dimensional. The fruit was intense, but the overall impression was of a rather clumsy wine.

June 2006: Red wines all produced in the Rioja DOC	
Answers: 235	Passes: 128 (54%)

This tasting partnered a fully mature, £26 CVNE Imperial Gran Reserva with a commercial, simple, crianza from the 2005 vintage and good quality, medium priced Reserva.

As with the majority of these tasting papers, the tasting notes themselves were better than the assessment of quality, state of maturity or estimation of price. Guidance on how best to approach these can be found in the general notes on tasting papers on page 18, under the reports on other tasting questions and in previous Examiners' Reports.

Most candidates were able to pick out the simple wine, but a great number reversed the other two in terms of quality assessment. There was a tendency to misinterpret the considerable age on the Gran Reserva (from the 1996 vintage) as poor structure and quality with a number of candidates even describing it as faulty. Candidates need to ensure that they taste not only a wide spectrum of wine styles, but also different ages, as there is evidence at present that their exposure to this style of wine is very limited.

The following candidate wrote a weak assessment for the Gran Reserva wine:

*“Appearance: Clear, dull, medium to full intensity of a black/mahogany core vs. mahogany/orange rim. Good legs.
Nose: Just clean. Developing wine, medium intensity, baked fruits, jammy, deep liquorice (aged). Quite closed and suggests it is past its best.
Palate: **Dry, crisp acidity, medium+ intensity, medium++ body, ripening/softening tannins, baked jammy black and red fruit, liquorice, spice, vegetal, oak, vanilla.** Integrated fruit but jammy. Medium alcohol, moderate length.
Detailed assessment of quality: A well made wine that shows good integration of fruit and evidence of good acidity. However the accessibility and baked nature of the fruit to me is not appealing. Perhaps past its best.
State of maturity: drink up now – past its best already.
Estimated off-premise retail price per bottle including all taxes: **£30**”*

The sections of this note in bold indicate observations for which marks were awarded. As can be seen, these were rather sparse. The note on the appearance is vague. Describing a red wine as “black” is not correct, and hedging your bets by giving more than one option as in the case of colour intensity (medium to full) will not generate a mark. In addition, use of the word “good” in this way is also bad practice as already explained in the general guidance on answering tasting questions on page 18.

The note on the nose was extremely poor and generally contradictory with the wine described as “developing” at one point and later as “aged”. The fruit descriptors were also at odds – jammy is a term usually used to describe a simple fruit driven wine, not a complex wine such

as this with multi layers of fruit and ageing aromas. This candidate picked up more marks on the palate than in any other section, but the description was still not convincing. However, it was the assessment of quality that was really poor. The comments are vague at best and inaccurate at worst. In contrast the following candidate hit the nail on the head, recognising the elegance and high quality of this wine:

“A very good quality wine displaying complexity, balance and elegance. The oak use is integrated and balanced with the intensity of the fruit character. The structure is balanced and sound. Complex layered palate from dusty oak to red fruits”.

The author of the previous note has also underestimated the potential of this wine to continue to age. This may have been a 20+ year old wine, but it was not past its best yet – it has far too much in terms of fruit and structure to be written off so soon. Although this candidate was close to the estimated retail price, this was really not as convincing as it appears in isolation here. This candidate also felt the entry level £6 wine had a retail price of £15 and would keep for up to 10 years. The Reserva wine with a price of £9 was vastly estimated at £50. This additional information shows that getting the correct price for the Gran Reserva was nothing more than a lucky guess.

Question 4: Unspecified Wines

It is a common misconception amongst candidates that if they identify the wines correctly, they will pass this paper. This is simply not the case. If you total up the marks available for the conclusion compared to marks awarded for the sections on the appearance, nose and palate of each wine, you will see that the tasting note itself generates the bulk of the marks, (20 marks for the description, 8 marks for the assessment of quality and state of maturity and only 5 marks for identifying the wine). This means it is quite feasible for someone to write accurate tasting notes, yet not identify the wines and still pass (sometimes even with a high grade), whilst someone else can identify all three wines yet fail because their tasting notes are inaccurate and short. It is not enough to simply recognise what the wines are (anyone can do this if they taste a wine often enough). The candidate needs to be able to strip the wine down to its component parts, describe these and make judgements based on this information. This is what professional tasting is all about. Without an extensive and accurate tasting note, the examiner has no way of knowing whether the correct identification was anything more than a lucky guess or the result of tasting something familiar – no tasting skills have actually been demonstrated. The answer lies in the accuracy of the tasting notes themselves and in the assessment of quality.

Candidates often fall prey to the common error of deciding what the wine is having smelt or tasted it, and then write a tasting note to match their conclusion, which in many instances may be incorrect. This is easy to do under examination conditions and very tempting when you think you know what the wine is. However, it is always a bad move as the tasting note is invariably less accurate as the candidate tends to describe how they “expect” the wine to taste rather than how it actually does taste. It is vital to keep an open mind until the tasting note has been completed and re-read.

January 2006: Red wines – Beaujolais Villages, Sonoma County Old Vine Zinfandel, Conterno Barolo

Answers: 82

Passes: 64 (78%)

This was a very good result, but the examiner did comment that there were few really exceptional scripts despite the high pass rate. Once again, many of the comments made in respect of preceding tasting questions apply equally well here. In addition, in this instance, the issue of colour was particularly important in terms of identifying these grape varieties. This is an area where many candidates appear to get muddled. A large number use the terms ruby and garnet indiscriminately – there is a very clear distinction between the two. Garnet heads more towards the brown end of the red spectrum rather than the blue/purple side, which applies more to ruby.

For this question, the Beaujolais was the wine the examiners commonly refer to as “the banker” – the one that we expect all candidates to identify and describe with no difficulty at all. There is usually one wine that requires a little application of logic to get to the correct information. In this case, the Barolo. The Zinfandel was chosen to provide a vehicle for the exceptional candidate to shine yet still allow other candidates to gain marks in the descriptive section of the tasting note. The application of a little logic and good, unbiased adherence to the Systematic Approach to Tasting Technique would have helped to lead the candidate to a viable conclusion here. The very ripe fruit, use of new oak and high alcohol all point to a warm climate, and probably a New World wine rather than Old World.

I have chosen to reproduce below a good example of a script which scored high marks. Each heading has been addressed in full, assessments of quality are analytical and logical, and conclusions are correct.

WINE No. 10

Appearance: Clear and bright. Medium ruby core fading to a narrow pink rim with watery edges. Medium viscosity.

Nose: Clean, fresh, youthful and simple. Medium intensity confected bubblegum, peppery, juicy red fruits, strawberry, raspberry, redcurrant, but also fresh citric tang. Slight metallic edge. Carbonic maceration aromas. Boiled sweets, pear drop, banana.

Palate: Dry, mouth-watering crisp acidity, low soft tannins with a slight grip. Medium bodied with medium intensity of soft red fruits, redcurrants, tinned strawberry, raspberry, very confected, bubble gum and a touch of pepper. Medium alcohol and a simple medium/short finish.

Assessment of quality: Well made, correct but simplistic. Evidence of carbonic maceration, commercial style of wine made to be drunk young with attractive fresh red fruit but no complexity or evidence of oak ageing. A good quality basic Beaujolais.

State of maturity: Mature, ready to drink now and over coming year.

Approximate age of wine: 1-2 years

Country of origin: France

Region of origin, if applicable: Burgundy, Beaujolais

Predominant grape variety / varieties: Gamay

WINE No. 11

Appearance: Clear and bright. Deep opaque ruby core fading to a ruby/pink rim. Legs are visible.

Nose: Clean, youthful, intense aromas of juicy jammy ripe fruit, red fruits, raspberry, mulberry, cranberry, bramble, slightly plummy, dried fruit, black fruits, medicinal, menthol note. Marked oak, vanilla, buttery, savoury and some tea. A touch spicity.

Palate: Dry but ripe, crisp acidity and medium well integrated ripe/chewy tannins. Medium plus body with a rich mouth feel. Intense sweet ripe red fruits, redcurrant, cranberry, mulberry, raspberry, bramble, creamy, vanilla, oak, savoury, minty, menthol, inky. Sweet and sour. High alcohol giving a long spicy/peppery finish with nice balance.

Assessment of quality: A good quality wine with simple jammy fruit. Not top quality but well made wine with good structure balanced by ripe fruit. Balanced use of oak, which appears to be new. Rather simple and one dimensional in style, indicating that this is not premium quality.

State of maturity: Mature. Drinking now and over the next 3-4 years.

Approximate age of wine: 4-6 years

Country of origin: USA

Region of origin, if applicable: California, Sonoma

Predominant grape variety / varieties: Merlot

WINE No. 12

Appearance: Clear and bright. Medium garnet/mahogany core fading to a brick/orange rim. Obvious viscosity.

Nose: Clean, clear signs of development. Medium intensity, perfumed, dried cherries and cranberries, fruit cake, meaty, tar, liquorice, spicy, smoky, tobacco, leather, oak, slight oxidative volatile note, tea, slightly metallic, caramel, medicinal, herbal. Complex.

Palate: Dry, crisp acidity and firm dry chewy medium plus tannins. Medium body. Pronounced intensity of dried fruit but still fresh, red fruits, cranberries, bramble, plummy, fragrant, perfumed, violets, meaty, tobacco, cigar box, cedar, smoky wood, oak, chocolate, spice. High hot alcohol. Elegant, aromatic fruity long finish.

Assessment of quality: A top quality DOCG wine, very good intensity and structure points to careful winemaking and restricted yields. Wine has clearly undergone extensive oak ageing but good fruit intensity and structure have ensured that the wine has not dried out.

State of maturity: Mature, can drink now but obviously has structure to improve further (tannins will soften) over next 3-4 years.

Approximate age of wine: 4-6 years

Country of origin: Italy

Region of origin, if applicable: Piemonte

Predominant grape variety / varieties: Nebbiolo

Despite identifying the Zinfandel as Merlot, this made very little difference to this candidate's overall result as the quality of the tasting note itself was still very accurate.

Compare the note above for wine No. 11 with the following note for the same wine, which is inaccurate, vague, and makes no real attempt to "analyse" the wine under the assessment of quality:

WINE No 11

Appearance: clear and bright with medium intensity. Rich, dark ruby colour with slight hint of orange on the rim. Short legs.

Nose: clean with intense flavours and ripe fruit – New World. Some age or slight herbaceousness.

Palate: dry with medium acidity and high tannins, not particularly well integrated. Full body with ripe fruits – red berries. Alcohol high.

Assessment of quality: well made wine which needs more time to integrate. But good quality with some complexity.

State of maturity: 3 years, still needs 2 – 4 years to marry together.

Approximate age of wine: 2 years.

Country of origin: New Zealand

Region of origin, if applicable: South Island

Predominant grape variety / varieties: Pinot Noir

There are certainly some correct observations here, and the candidate is correct in assuming this is a New World wine, however there is a world of difference between a California Zinfandel and a New Zealand Pinot Noir. To start with, the first is intensely deep and opaque at the core while the latter would be really quite pale. This note is also weak at identifying fruit character.

June 2006: White wines – Chilean Chardonnay, Australian Riesling, Alsace Gewurztraminer	
<i>Answers: 235</i>	<i>Passes: 135 (57%)</i>

These were three very different wines, each very distinctive in style and made from mainstream grape varieties that should have been easy to identify. Even if candidates were unable to locate the area of production, they should have had no problem with the grape varieties and the styles should have made it easy to write good tasting notes and pick up the bulk of the marks in this section of the paper.

A number of candidates who correctly identified the first wine as a Chardonnay, placed it in Burgundy rather than the New World. It was really too overt and fruity for a classic white Burgundy. It was also surprising how many candidates failed to pick up the oak on this wine.

Not surprisingly, most candidates gained high marks for their assessment of the Alsace wine. The other two wines were more of a challenge but allowed the examiners to differentiate between good and exceptional candidates.

In a similar vein, although many recognised the typical Riesling aromas on the nose and palate of the second wine (petrol, plastercine, citrus, white stone fruit, floral character), they immediately jumped to the conclusion that it must therefore be German. Those who relied on the accuracy of their tasting note itself used the observations made (very intense lime fruit, and ripe fruit rather than delicate fruit, together with warm alcohol) to work out that this was more likely to come from Australia than Germany.

Theory Paper

There is definitely a technique to the Unit 3 theory paper. With a requirement to answer five questions, some candidates obviously did not pace themselves appropriately, producing three answers of reasonable length, then two (or in some cases only one more) that were skimpy or rushed. More practice at writing essays precisely, and within the time allowed is essential examination practice.

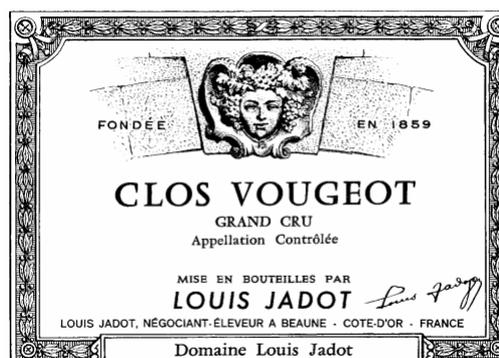
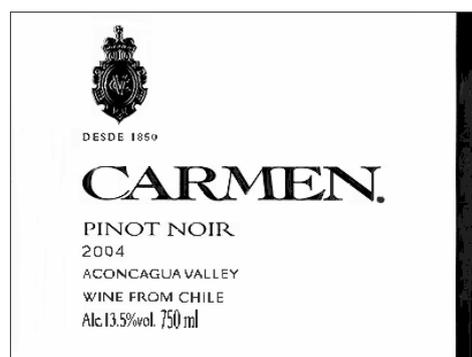
There was also very little evidence of candidates planning their responses. It is always a good idea to make a quick essay plan before starting to write. This ensures that the key points are covered in a logical way. Those who didn't follow this advice sometimes failed to address specifically the key words in the question. A number of others wrote generally "around" the question, without actually answering it as set. Candidates should remember that questions are set with a purpose – none of them are phrased "write all you know about ..."

January 2006

Group A: Compulsory Question

Describe the two wines below under the following headings:

- a) *Climate*
- b) *Viticulture*
- c) *Vinification*
- d) *Assessment of quality*
- e) *Target market*



Answers: 108

Passes: 59 (55%)

This was a compulsory question and clearly highlighted those candidates who had not studied the whole of the Unit 3 syllabus. This is, of course, the reason for the compulsory question – to differentiate those candidates who have good all round knowledge from those who may know a great deal about a few areas only. The purpose of this question was to test the candidate’s knowledge of two wine producing regions, their knowledge of the specific wines depicted and their powers of observation by using the information shown on the labels to provide relevant facts to help them answer the question.

This was judged to be a fair choice for the compulsory question, covering both a classic region and the New World. Inevitably candidates felt more comfortable writing about Clos Vougeot than the Chilean Pinot Noir. Nevertheless, there were also some appalling demonstrations of ignorance at this level with five candidates describing Clos Vougeot as a white wine and one even thinking it was a Chablis. There was also a tendency to generalise about the regions as a whole, rather than limiting comments to information specific to the wines depicted. For example, the Burgundy is a single vineyard, domaine bottled wine (as shown on the bottom of the label) and not therefore a negociant’s blend as many of Jadot’s other wines are. This is an important detail that should have been captured as it is particularly pertinent in terms of the assessment of quality.

In many instances, scripts lacked detail, particularly in the important sections on viticulture and vinification. These sections should have included detail on issues such as soil, vine training, yields, possible problems (pests and diseases) and how these are managed, how wines are fermented, how and for how long they are matured, how they are prepared for bottling. In many instances this detail was missing. The following candidate was particularly weak and vague in identifying the target market for these wines, stating that the Jadot is “for export to all major luxury markets.....and also for domestic consumption”. In other words, they are simply saying its target market is “all markets”. This was not a good analysis for this wine. In fact, this candidate’s comments made no real distinction between the target markets for these two wines at all, as they also described the Carmen wine as being “aimed at a foreign export market”. In fact, the target market for these two wines could not be more different. What candidates should aim to identify here is a likely price bracket for the wines (around £5-8 for the Chilean and £60+ for the Burgundy – two extremes of the price scale), the kind of people who would buy it (everyday drinking for the Carmen, premium market for the Jadot), with some explanation as to why they are appropriate for these two different markets.

Group B: 4 questions to be answered from a choice of 6

What does blending other varieties with Chardonnay achieve? (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question.)	
Answers: 69	Passes: 28 (41%)

I am sure many candidates felt this was an easy question. However the low pass rate shows that it was not as straightforward as it appeared, with only one candidate achieving a Distinction grade.

Despite the warning that this question specifically required an essay format answer, some candidates still chose to ignore this instruction. They were penalised in the marking process as a result. In addition, many candidates wrote about Champagne, forgetting that this examination focuses exclusively on still light wines and comments on sparkling wines would

therefore attract no marks as this lay outside the scope of this paper. Many essays were also “one-sided”, only thinking in terms of how other varieties could “make Chardonnay better” rather than including observations on what contribution Chardonnay can bring to other varieties in a blend.

In general, candidates made a good job of describing the general characteristics of Chardonnay, although these were seldom linked to consideration of how it would therefore perform in a blend. Some candidates failed to provide a rounded argument – considering only quality wines and ignoring the commercial aspects such as supplying large volumes of wine, meeting specific price points etc. Another criticism of the examiner was that many essays seemed too “free form”, without any real structure. The best submissions had clearly labelled or distinct paragraphs that explored one idea or example fully in turn before moving on to the next.

Whilst the actual content between the introduction and conclusion forms almost all of the marks for this style of question, candidates should not underestimate the importance of the introductory and concluding sections when adopting an essay format. In some instances, the examiner is able to allocate bonus marks for style and clarity, particularly if the candidate is able to show that they have a good understanding of the focus of this question.

A good essay plan for answering this question would have included the following key points:

The introduction – setting out how the question will be answered and making a few key observations.

Making a wine – considering what other varieties can contribute to Chardonnay and what it can contribute to them. What works and what does not? What are the advantages of blending?

Marketing/selling a wine – what are the advantages of blending from a commercial point of view?

Conclusion – what have you deduced as a result of your discussion of the topic?

As always with this sort of question, it is vital to support observations with specific examples of actual wines, and to consider the whole spectrum from inexpensive to premium.

Italian wine making south of Rome has been transformed in recent years and the wines now represent very good value for money. Give details of red and white wines that support this statement. (An essay format is NOT necessary for this question.)

Answers: 48

Passes: 20 (42%)

This was a topical question and one which identified those candidates who had up-to-date, detailed knowledge of Italian wines from these regions which are currently undergoing considerable change. At the other end of the scale, it was very depressing to discover how many were ignorant of where exactly Rome is in relation to other areas in Italy.

Far too many candidates simply described a variety of wines with no explanation of why they might represent value for money and no discussion of what has led to the recent revitalisation of the area.

The following candidate showed they understood the purpose of this question by setting out some fundamental points in the introduction.

“South of Italy, the climate is Mediterranean with many hours of sunshine and assured ripening of grapes. Sea breezes temper the climate and prevent fungal diseases, but until the 1990's it was largely ignored as a decent source of quality wine. With EU funding, flying-winemakers (especially from the New World), and increasingly sophisticated cellars, we are now seeing some of its potential”.

They then took a regional approach to the question, using examples of wines from Campania, Puglia, Basilicata and Sicily to illustrate points made. They made some good observations regarding winemaking practices, but were weaker in their evaluation of viticultural improvements but were one of the very few candidates to achieve a distinction grade.

The two key sections to concentrate on with this question were changes taking place in the vineyard and those taking place in the winery. These could be summarised as follows:

Changes taking place in the vineyard

Reduction in yields and planting density. Replanting of vineyards with better quality vines (including better clonal selection). Better siting of vines. Remodelling of vineyards to allow for mechanisation. Use of modern vineyard equipment, but not necessarily for mechanical harvesting (in many areas it is not possible). Change in pruning and training systems – (eg from bush to Cordon etc. and increasing the height of grape clusters). Use of consultants - viticultural expertise from other regions and countries.

Changes taking place in the winery

Introduction of modern vinification techniques – temperature controlled cellars, vats, presses etc. Better quality control in all stages of the process. Use of consultants' expertise to improve quality/cost ratio – flying winemakers from other regions and other countries. Involvement of consultants producing wines for a particular market segment, eg major supermarkets producing own label wines. Production of different wines for different markets – easy drinking, clean, fruity styles vs. good quality, traditional, oak aged wines.

Good candidates used a variety of wines of differing styles and quality levels to illustrate these developments.

With reference to Germany, Alsace and/or Austria as appropriate, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

- a) Pinot Gris**
- b) Halbtrocken**
- c) Grand Cru**
- d) Eiswein**
- e) Verband Deutscher Prädikatsweingüter (VDP)**
- f) Steiermark (Styria)**

Answers: 80

Passes: 30 (38%)

Candidates rarely do well in paragraph questions and this was a really poor performance with only two candidates achieving distinction whilst 50 failed to gain more than 54%. Candidates should take note of the advice given in this document on how to approach this style of

question, as it will continue to feature heavily in the closed book examination for Unit 3, Wines of the World and also in the theory section of Units 4, 5 and 6.

The essence of a good paragraph answer is plenty of relevant facts in clear, simple English, rather than opinion or argument. Leave these for the more discursive style essay questions. To do well in a paragraph question you need to get as many facts down as possible in a short space of time, making sure that you can provide sufficient facts for all sections of the question. You should aim for around 5 or 6 key points with explanatory detail for each paragraph. A paragraph should equate to roughly one third to half a page of average handwriting. Do not assume that you can gain enough marks by writing a great deal about a few subjects only. Each section of a paragraph question carries equal marks and by failing to answer one section only, you forfeit one fifth of the marks available in this instance. It is easy to see how missing out sections or providing weak answers will affect the candidate's overall chance of success. **It cannot be over emphasised – these questions do not offer the easy option!**

The sections on Pinot Gris, Grand Cru and Eiswein caused the least problems, and responses on "halbtrocken" were adequate, but candidates struggled with the VDP and Styria where knowledge was much more shaky. Some candidates also overlooked the fact that the question asked them to consider each paragraph with reference to Germany, Alsace **and/or** Austria as appropriate. Those who ignored this instruction inevitably submitted answers with a very narrow approach and lost marks as a result.

Taking each paragraph in turn, the examiner made the following observations:

Pinot Gris: This section was generally answered quite well, although there was a general failure to comment briefly on Germany or Austria where this variety is also found.

Halbtrocken: Responses here were very simplistic. Although very important, only a few candidates mentioned that this is linked to residual sugar and few were able to give the actual figure in gm/litre even though this is taught at Advanced Certificate level. Very few also acknowledged that this could be applied to Austrian wines as well.

Grand Cru: A significant number failed to mention that this term can be applied to the sites where grapes are grown or to the four grape varieties permitted in Grand Cru wines. However, on the whole, this section was answered well with some even going into considerable detail of the German equivalent.

Eiswein: Answers were surprisingly basic with only a few mentioning the risks involved or the inevitable fermentation difficulties. Even fewer included mention that these wines may also be produced in Austria.

VDP: Candidates who attempted this paragraph clearly struggled. Several were aware that it was a growers' organisation and gained a basic pass as a result, but virtually no-one gave accurate additional information. Some mistakenly thought the VDP administered wine law.

Styria: Quite a number of candidates attempting this paragraph were guessing wildly. At best, they knew it was in Austria, but little else. However, at the other extreme were a small number of candidates who were well informed and gained high marks as a result.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of South Africa as a wine producing country? (An essay format is NOT necessary for this question.)

Answers: 90

Passes: 38 (42%)

Responses to this question were generally either poor (58% failing) or really quite good (33% gaining merit or distinction). Those who failed did so because they either failed to write a balanced assessment of the situation covering both advantages and disadvantages, or because their submission lacked detail or hard facts. Many scripts were simply too short. In the time available for each question (1/2 hour), the examiner expects about two sides of A4 paper, yet many scripts were barely one side or even less, resulting in an inadequate answer.

This was really quite a large subject with far more to consider than just viticulture and vinification. A good response was one that considered the following:

Advantages

Climate and weather and the effect on vintages. Good candidates also mentioned some of the areas particularly valued for their mesoclimates such as Stellenbosch, Paarl and Walker Bay.

Soils and topography – what are they, what effect do they have on wine quality?

Grape varieties – which ones are being planted, where are they planted and why?

Viticulture/vinification/maturation and the effect on wines produced. This should have included discussion of size of vineyards, availability of labour, availability of expertise, openness towards research and development etc.

Historical/cultural/social/financial issues – these show commercial understanding, such as understanding of the importance of brands and price points but also the increase in small, boutique wineries.

Disadvantages

Climate – not all good news, some areas are simply too hot and some marginal areas are planted simply to keep up with demand for wine irrespective of quality.

Grape varieties – again, there is another side to the argument here – South Africa has greater potential for red wine but there are more white grapes planted than red, the most widely planted varieties (Pinotage and Chenin Blanc) are not generally highly regarded in export markets.

Viticulture/vinification/maturation – what are the problems arising from the hang over from the apartheid years?

Historical/cultural/social/financial – again, this shows commercial awareness, eg exchange rate issues, logistical issues due to location, cultural aspects associated with apartheid etc.

“Greece and Portugal are countries that have largely resisted the charms of international grape varieties”. For both countries, give examples of wines made from indigenous grape varieties that illustrate this statement. (An essay format is NOT necessary for this question.)

Answers: 35

Passes: 16 (46%)

Questions on minority countries rarely generate good results and candidates should not assume they can pass by waffling or generalising in the hope of picking up a few valid marks. This question clearly divided those who really knew about these regions and those who knew a few basic facts about a couple of wines. In the case of the latter, many scripts covered barely half a side of A4 paper. This is seriously inadequate for this level of qualification. This question was deliberately vague in terms of indicating how many wines should be covered from each country. However, the use of the phrase “For both countries, give examples of wines ...”, implied that a **minimum** of two wines from each country was required. The examiner was advised therefore to allocate marks based on the level of detail contained in each case – where only four wines were discussed, this required more depth and detail than the script that covered six or more wines.

In general, candidates appeared to know more about Portugal than they did about Greece. Most candidates mentioned Retsina, but not always with the correct grape variety. Vinho Verde was another popular choice.

There was one script that stood head and shoulders above all others. This candidate not only knew a great many indigenous varieties and the styles of wines produced, but could also spell the names correctly. If candidate number 1214 is reading this, congratulations – your script was flawless.

With reference to the wines of France, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

- a) **Pomerol AC**
- b) **Tuffeau**
- c) **Tannat**
- d) **Cru Bourgeois**
- e) **Hermitage AC**
- f) **Vinexpo**

Answers: 104

Passes: 70 (67%)

This was expected to be a popular choice of question, and it certainly was – with just under half the candidates sitting this paper selecting it. The high pass rate also suggests that candidates tend to focus their revision on the classic regions. Nevertheless, there were some sections that were certainly less well understood such as Cru Bourgeois, and more surprisingly, Pomerol which many confused with Pommard. Many candidates hoped to get by on some general waffle on Vinexpo. Knowing that this was a trade fair was simply not enough. There were also a considerable number of candidates who threw marks away by writing a paragraph on all six topics rather than five. In such cases, marks were calculated based on the top five scores only.

For those who struggled to know what to write for Cru Bourgeois and Vinexpo, the key points are summarised below:

Cru Bourgeois

A category for red wine properties in the Médoc.

Individual producers whose wines are less grand than Cru Classé properties and usually made in less famous appellations such as Bourg or Blaye.

Properties vary in size from simple smallholdings to large estates.

Introduced in 1932, updated in 1978 and 2003, and to be reviewed every ten years.

In 2003; 247 Chateaux were selected from 490 registered, based on terroir, winemaking techniques, quality control and history.

Three levels are defined by the Syndicat des Crus Bourgeois de Médoc.

These are: Cru Bourgeois Exceptionnel, Cru Grand Bourgeois and Cru Bourgeois, but only the latter is formally recognised by the EU.

It is a controversial category – the best wines rival some Cru Classé wines, but the worst are little better than Bordeaux AC.

It has considerable commercial significance as the wines generally offer very good value for money.

Vinexpo

A bi-annual 5 day international trade fair in Bordeaux at Parc des Expositions.

Regarded as very important within the wine and spirit trade worldwide.

Attended by all sectors of the trade.

Showcase for wines of the world not just Bordeaux.

Established in 1981 by the Bordeaux Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Since 1990 it has had a more international focus.

Now there are other offshoots of Vinexpo in other parts of the world: e.g. the Americas, Asia-Pacific.

It has had its share of controversy in 2005: - NZ Winegrowers, Wines of South Africa and Australian Wine Bureau pulled out because of high cost of stands, ICE and Moët & Chandon cancelled their stands.

Theory Paper June 2006

Group A: Compulsory Question

<i>Describe how the factors in the vineyard and winery determine the style and quality of Syrah or Syrah dominated wines from Northern Rhône, Barossa and one other country.</i>	
<i>Answers: 262</i>	<i>Passes: 194 (74%)</i>

This was a very good result, particularly as this was a compulsory question and was answered by all candidates, both good and bad alike. In addition to the high pass rate, there was also a significant percentage of candidates (39%) achieving either merit or distinction grades.

Knowledge of the Northern Rhône was largely solid with appropriate detail on the key points such as climate, soil and winemaking techniques. However, far too many answers suggested Syrah was barrel fermented, when they presumably meant fermentation in wooden vats. A number also thought that Syrah was pressed prior to fermentation. Detail was sometimes lacking in respect of the Barossa, where candidates tended to generalise and many missed the fact that this region also produces many premium wines, not just “bulk” wine. Coverage of the third region was often very brief and occasionally was missing entirely. This was very costly in some cases and usually resulted in a fail grade being awarded. Some candidates were very arbitrary in their choice of country. Whilst it is true that Syrah is planted in just about every country, the examiners were looking for evidence of knowledge of its use in the region, not just generalisations based on the characteristics of the grape variety. This meant selecting a country with significant or increasing plantings of Syrah, where a particular style has evolved over time that differentiates it from the wines of the Northern Rhône or the Barossa. Without specifically spelling this out in the question, the examiners were looking for another contrast here. Some of the valid alternatives suggested by candidates were California (the Rhône Rangers), Chile, Argentina, South Africa, Portugal (particularly in the Alentejo and Borba) and Italy.

One candidate achieving a high scoring distinction grade, took the time to write a short essay plan which preceded their response. This is reproduced below:

“N Rhône – high trellis, limestone and gravel soil, Mistral, continental climate, rain, Cote Rotie slopes (Bruin/Blonde) St Joseph, handpicking, Cornas, Hermitage, Crozes.

Barossa – canopy management, pruning, irrigation, heat – climate, rain, different parts, Lindoch – Seppeltsfield – Eden Valley, St Hallett, Peter Lehmann. S Italy – Heat!, bulk cheap wine, limestone soil, mechanisation.”

This was an excellent idea. It would have taken very little time indeed, but pulled out the key differences between the regions. This candidate then went on to write four pages exploring the detail outlined in the plan. This was prefixed by a short, well written introduction explaining the rationale behind their choice of Southern Italy as the third country.

“Syrah is one of the most popular grape varieties of our time. Over the course of the past five years, its popularity has astonished many in the wine trade. Part of its rise to fame has been the fervour with which the Australians have taken the “old” Rhône varietal to their hearts. In this essay, we will look at the Northern Rhône – the homeland of Syrah, and then at the Barossa Valley in South Australia. These two regions both are renowned for their quality Syrah or Shiraz. So we will then look at a contrasting country which has begun to have limited success with Syrah – Italy, and particularly Southern Italy.”

Group B: 4 questions to be answered from a choice of 6

Contrast the regions of Rheingau and Baden with specific reference to climate, soil, grape varieties and wine industry structures.	
Answers: 64	Passes: 19 (30%)

This was clearly not a popular question, with very few opting to answer it. For some reason that I have never been able to fully understand, candidates rarely seem to do well on questions on Germany. This was further compounded by the fact that they were also required in this case to contrast these two regions rather than just describe them, which is what most did. This question was very specific in terms of scope (climate, soil, grape varieties and wine industry structures). The important thing to remember here is that in order to **contrast** as requested, the candidate needed to identify how the two regions differ. It is not enough to simply describe them in isolation. The best way to approach this question therefore is to take each of the four specific headings in turn, and explain how these differ in the two regions.

The following is a breakdown of the key points the examiner was looking for:

a) Climate

Rheingau has a Continental climate in EU Viticultural Zone A, but is protected from cold northerly winds by the Taunus Mountains. In contrast, although Baden also has a Continental climate, it lies in Viticultural Zone B, making it the warmest of Germany's wine regions, resulting in wines with higher alcohol, lower acidity and fuller body. In terms of rainfall, this amounts to just over 600mm/yr in the Rheingau, but around twice as much in Baden, up to 1,200mm/yr. Growers in the Rheingau make the most of the climate by planting vines where possible so they enjoy a southerly aspect on the right bank of the River Rhein. From Rudesheim to Lorchhausen, vineyards are on steep slopes along the valley where they benefit from the best exposure to the sun and can therefore maximise the potential of this marginal climate. In the central part of the region, and around Hochheim, vineyards are on flatter, rolling land and therefore less well appointed from a climatic point of view. In contrast, Baden has less influence from the river Rhein, but does enjoy a special mesoclimate around Bodensee (Lake Constance) and in Tauberfranken, spring frosts are a particular danger.

b) Soil

Rheingau has a predominantly slate soil, with a combination of weathered slate, loess and loam on the upper slopes and gravel and sandy loam in the valley. Good candidates even mentioned the special dark blue slate that is particular to the vineyards around Rudesheim. They also explained the significance of the slate soil which absorbs the heat of the sun by day and gives warmth to the vines at night. The key point relating to soils in Baden is that these differ considerably from the slate in the Rheingau, being predominantly granite in northern Baden with a mineral rich volcanic soil in Kaiserstuhl-Tuniberg which is particularly suited to the production of red wines.

c) Grape varieties

The key point here is that the Rheingau focuses on only two grapes (Riesling and to a lesser extent, Spätburgunder), whilst Baden has planted a host of varieties, some not really found in other parts of Germany. Good candidates pointed out that Riesling accounts for more than 80% of total plantings with Spätburgunder providing 10% of plantings (found around Assmannshausen which is famous for red wine production). The balance is made up of a mix of lesser varieties in small quantities. The mix of varieties found in Baden comprises Spätburgunder, Riesling, Grauburgunder, Müller-Thurgau, Gewürztraminer, Chasselas, Weißburgunder and Silvaner. However, simply listing the varieties is not sufficient at this level. Candidates should discuss them in more detail, such as commenting on the styles of wine produced, any particular attributes of the grapes that makes them suited to the region etc. For example, yields in Rheingau tend to be lower than in other areas in Germany (around 70-80hl/ha for good producers), the Riesling thrives on the slatey soils with high mineral content producing all styles of wine from Trocken to Eiswein. In contrast, the wines of Baden differ from those of Rheingau, not simply in terms of grape varieties used, but also as a result of climate and soil. Candidates should certainly have made some mention of the use of the more aromatic varieties as these tend to demonstrate well how the wines differ, as well as the Spätburgunder from Kaiserstuhl - full bodied and fruity and often aged in new oak barriques.

d) Wine industry structures

A significant number of candidates misunderstood what this section was all about. Those who did understand what was required here, realised that they should focus on the contrast between the single estate wines of the Rheingau and the co-operative wines that tend to dominate in Baden.

The key points relating to the Rheingau were:

- ? predominantly estate bottled wines
- ? mostly private and state owned estates.
- ? Schloss Johannisburg and Schloss Vollrads are famous castles with vineyard holdings
- ? the best estates with the finest wines come from the villages of Rudesheim, Geisenheim, Johannisberg, Winkel, Oestrich, Erbach, Eltville and Hochheim
- ? good producers maintain lower yields than the legal limit of 100hl/ha
- ? co-operatives play a very minor role, accounting for only approximately 10% of the harvest
- ? approximately 33% of the area under vine is owned by part-time or hobby winegrowers.

In comparison, the key points relating to Baden were the following:

- ? the region is broken down into 9 "Bereich" or districts
- ? co-operatives dominate (unlike Rheingau) and are responsible for 85% of Baden's production
- ? village co-ops encourage lower yields than the max. legal limit of 90hl/ha

With reference to France, write a paragraph on FIVE of the following:

- a) **Muscadet sur Lie**
- b) **Hospice de Beaune**
- c) **Madiran**
- d) **Coteaux du Languedoc**
- e) **En Primeur (futures)**
- f) **Petit Chablis**

Answers: 205

Passes: 107 (52%)

Considering that this question focused on one of the major wine producing countries of the world, this was a poor result. However, this was almost certainly due to a number of candidates falling foul of the effect of not being able to answer all five sections well. Every year, this report warns candidates not to attempt this style of question unless they can confidently write a good paragraph (around 12 – 15 lines of text) on ALL FIVE sections.

There were clearly sections were candidates hoped to get by on a combination of “intelligent guesswork” and generalisations – most notably on the Hospice de Beaune, Coteaux du Languedoc and En Primeur. In each case, many candidates knew the key facts (Hospice de Beaune = wine auction, Coteaux du Languedoc = AC wine in Languedoc, En Primeur = buying wine in advance of its release), but were unable to provide the detail that this level of qualification dictates.

In other sections there were some worrying misconceptions such as confusing Muscadet with Muscat, and assuming Petit Chablis does not form part of the AC system for this region. A number of candidates located Madiran in the wrong part of France.

When answering paragraph questions, the trick is to get as much information across as possible within the “paragraph” format. This means sticking to hard facts rather than prosaic descriptions. For example, in the case of Muscadet sur Lie, the candidate should explain what this is, where it comes from (as precisely as possible), what it is made from, how it is made, what it tastes like. For each of the remaining sections, the issues to consider are:

Hospice de Beaune – what it is, where it is, when it takes place, what it produces, why it is significant, who the beneficiaries are etc.

Madiran – what it is, where it is, what it produces, how it produces it, what the style of wine is, details of the region that contribute to this (grape, climate etc).

Coteaux du Languedoc – a similar approach to the previous section.

En Primeur (futures) – what is it, what the process involves (ie the key stages), where it is practiced and why (ie the advantages/disadvantages for both the buyer and the seller).

Petit Chablis – This really divided those with sketchy knowledge from those who really understood the region. The facts the examiner was looking for were:

The most northerly of Burgundy's vineyards.

Accounts for approx. 23% of the total Chablis AOC (1562 ha).

Lowest level of AOC in Chablis.

Wines come from lesser vineyards sites - hill tops or north facing.

Yields restricted to 60hl/ha.

Climate: semi-continental with no maritime influence, danger of spring frosts.

Soil: Portlandian limestone.

Training method: variation of Guyot-Taille Chablis.

Wine-making: Fermentation in stainless steel, no oak used, 100% Chardonnay.

Style of wine - dry, high acidity with citrus fruit character.

Simple, easy drinking, lacks minerality and complexity of higher AOC Chablis wines.

Describe Argentina as a wine producing country with specific reference to altitude, grape varieties, viticulture and export markets.

Answers: 195

Passes: 126(65%)

This was clearly a question that those who answered it felt comfortable with. In general, there were few exceptionally good or exceptionally poor scripts with the bulk of candidates (73%) scoring between 50% and 70%.

Where candidates used the subheadings defined within the question (altitude, grape varieties, viticulture, export markets), these helped to structure the essay and ensure that no key points were missed. Those who failed, did so either because their submission was factually incorrect, lacked detail or was simply too short. It is extremely unlikely that a single side of text will contain enough detail to gain 55% of the marks available. This is equally the case where the candidate writes more, but pads their answer out with information that has not been asked for, such as historical background or descriptions relating to winemaking. Once this superfluous information has been eliminated, there is rarely enough of real merit to justify a pass grade.

The majority of candidates were good on the basics such as listing the grape varieties grown, describing the two key varieties (Malbec and Torrontes), and irrigation in general, but most lacked the extra detail necessary for achieving a high grade. For example, there was little awareness of the problems encountered with hail and the need for netting. There was also a misconception or lack of awareness of the importance of the local market with only a handful aware of the fact that Argentina only exports around a quarter of its production, (and maybe even less than this in reality). A large number of candidates described how vines are planted on the "slopes of the Andes" to improve drainage or sun exposure. This is a vast oversimplification as most vineyards are on flat land or very gentle slopes at most, (not unlike the topography in Burgundy), and if anything, water retention rather than drainage and shading of grapes rather than sun exposure are more desirable. Most overemphasised the influence of the Andes on the climate, describing this as "cool". It is certainly **cooler**, but is still regarded as warm. A surprising number of people mentioned the "Pacific influence" – there is none! Another oversimplification was the declaration that there "is no phylloxera". It is there, but is impeded by the sandy soil. Only a few candidates fully appreciated the effect of altitude on the style of wine produced such as acid retention, fruit profile and anthocyanins.

Finally, there is often little evidence that candidates read through their scripts once they have written them. This often results in careless errors such as the candidate who described Argentina as the "4th biggest wine producing country in the world behind France, Italy, Spain and the USA". Maths is clearly not this candidate's strong point.

<p>Select FOUR of the following cool climate regions and discuss the wines produced:</p> <p>a) Casablanca Valley b) Rías Baixas c) Canterbury, New Zealand d) Ontario e) Walker Bay f) Wachau</p>	
<p>Answers: 181</p>	<p>Passes: 69 (38%)</p>

Many candidates come unstuck when answering this style of question as the statistics above illustrate all too plainly. They mistakenly think this is an easier option than, say, a question that requires a full essay-style answer such as the previous one. This is simply not the case. As all sections of this question carry equal weighting, it is important to be able to cover them all. It only needs one poor section to result in a mediocre pass grade. Two poor sections (unfortunately all too common) are likely to result in failure, as this leaves very little room for error in other sections of the question.

There were a number of other reasons for failure here. In the first instance, candidates were asked to write about FOUR regions only, not all six. In cases where candidates did not follow instructions, the marks for the four highest scoring sections were taken when calculating a total mark. Secondly, too many candidates failed to study the question carefully enough before committing pen to paper. The precise wording was chosen for a very specific reason. The key word here is **discuss**. This is not the same as “describe”, which is what the vast majority of candidates did. This question required the candidate to know what the wines of the four regions tasted like and to discuss why they taste the way they do. In other words, to identify the factors that influence the style of the wines of the regions in question. The other way in which candidates lost marks was in limiting their observations to one wine only from each region. This meant their responses were very one-dimensional. The question asks about the regions in general, not about specific wines, so for example, under Rias Baixas, the candidate should at least acknowledge the fact that the region does produce red wine as well as white.

The sections on Rias Baixas and Wachau generated the best responses, although a number of candidates confused Rias Baixas with Vinho Verde. Canterbury, Walker Bay and Ontario were the weakest sections and a number of candidates wrote about Chile in general terms rather than focusing on the Casablanca Valley in particular.

<p><i>“If I hear anybody order another bottle of Merlot, I’m walking out.” (The movie “Sideways”.) Does Merlot only appeal to the mass market or can it achieve greatness? Discuss. (An essay format is COMPULSORY for this question.)</i></p>	
<p>Answers: 172</p>	<p>Passes: 104 (60%)</p>

Once again, although the pass rate for this question was quite good, there were very few really outstanding answers and only one candidate achieved Distinction. In fact, the examiner

commented that “like Merlot itself, many essays achieved adequacy, but few if any achieved true greatness.”

In a compulsory essay style answer, structure is important in order to present a coherent argument that explores both sides of the equation – Merlot's mass appeal and its potential as a great wine.

The examiner was aware that there would be many different ways to approach this question and was therefore prepared to be flexible in terms of the allocation of marks. However, as an essay format was compulsory, any responses submitted in other formats such as separate, disjointed paragraphs or bullet points were graded as fail. In addition, since the question asked candidates to “discuss” the statement, both sides of the argument needed to be presented to really do well in this question. The following is one example of the key points to cover this question well in a balanced fashion.

Introduction – a throwaway line in the film “Sideways”, however appears to have adversely affected sales of Merlot in markets like the USA.

Why merlot appeals to the mass market - eg through examination of Merlot's characteristics, the fact that it is valued for its fruitiness, forwardness and softness, producing wines that mature early, yet still have good if not great structure (tannins, acid). Consideration of the regions that support the concept of ‘mass appeal’ for Merlot - Often found in generic Bordeaux and Bordeaux satellites, but also grown almost everywhere eg South of France (“improver” variety), Italy and the New World. It is a naturally high cropper – making it commercially attractive for the grower, is easy to market and sell and is fashionable. Candidates should have used examples of specific wines to illustrate points made.

Argue that merlot can be great –

Definition of a great wine as one that is complex, intense, great length, long-lived. Exploration of potential “great” Merlot wines such as Chateau Pétrus - one of most famous and expensive wines in the world (usually 100% Merlot), some high quality St Emilion “garagistes” wines (eg La Gomerie.) However, “great” single varietal wines are rare

Acknowledge Merlot's weaknesses and deficiencies and discuss how these can be overcome to achieve “greatness”.

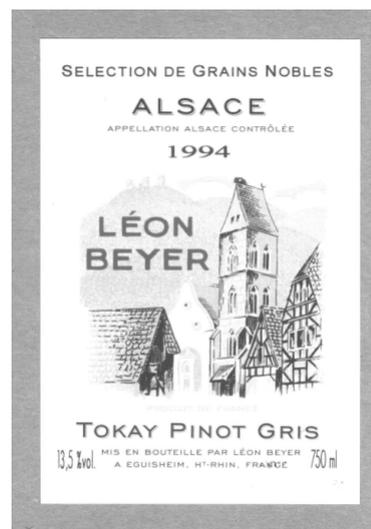
Weaknesses- Soft tannin, lack of structure, indistinct aromatics, tendency to overcrop etc
How these can be overcome (climate, soils, blending etc)

- ? **Climate** – cool climate to restrict over cropping, jammy style (classic Bordeaux climate)
- ? **Soils** – choice of soil to bring out the best in the grape, giving examples where appropriate
- ? **Blending** - Mostly not great as a single varietal, except Pomerol

Conclusion is that it can achieve “greatness” when part of a blend. In the Medoc and Graves when blended with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec, it fills the “hole” in Cabernet Sauvignon and adds complexity. In St Emilion and Pomerol it dominates the blend with Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon. Further examples from elsewhere in the world - eg, California (Meritage) etc would have given more weight to this argument.

Describe the two wines below under the following headings:

- a) **Climate**
- b) **Viticulture**
- c) **Vinification**
- d) **Assessment of Quality**
- e) **Target Market**



Answers: 217

Passes: 135 (62%)

This is proving to be a popular format of question amongst candidates sitting the Unit 3 exam. The purpose of this question is to test the candidates' commercial awareness of the wines depicted in addition to their factual knowledge regarding production. The two wines were selected to provide a clear contrast under all the headings. The Italian Pinot Grigio - well made but clearly not an exceptional wine, aimed at the bulk market in the £5 - £8 price bracket, and the Léon Beyer - a very different wine altogether. This was premium quality from an excellent vintage (1994) and made from botrytised grapes (SGN) making it expensive, of limited availability and highly desirable.

Too often with this type of question, candidates fail to pay close enough attention to the labels, simply describing the wine in generic terms rather than concentrating specifically on the actual wine shown. This is particularly important from the point of view of vintages, producers and other small print that might have a bearing on the answer required.

There was far more potential for detail in all sections on the Alsace wine, and the marking key reflected this in the allocation of marks. However, in many instances, this detail simply was not there, for example the effect of botrytis on yields, the problems associated with fermentation of must which is so rich. At this level of qualification, detail is expected and required for a pass grade.

Unit 4, Spirits of the World

The examination for Unit 4 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2005/06, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was:

Answers: 514

Passes: 313 (61%)

For the 2005/06 academic year, the weighting of the two questions in this unit was equally divided. This was to ensure that candidates achieving a pass grade, did so as the result of all round ability rather than on the strength of their tasting skills alone. An overall pass rate of 61% is therefore very commendable given the changes to the question weighting. It seems that separating the coursework assignments from units 3, 4, 5 and 6 has ensured that candidates devoted more time to revision for these units prior to the examination. This is very gratifying, as this was precisely what the changes were intended to achieve.

The questions and individual pass rates for each of the three examination dates were as follows:

October 2005

Question 1 - Calvados Ch du Breuil VSOP, Jack Daniels Whiskey, Bombay Sapphire London Dry Gin	
Answers: 136	Passes: 86 (63%)

Many candidates struggled to identify the Calvados – the apple character was definitely there, but it took a keen nose to spot it. A number of candidates clearly recognised the Jack Daniels, and this certainly helped to boost their overall score. However, quite a few mistook this for rum. This was not totally illogical, but the clues candidates should have identified were the very characteristic smoky, charcoal aromas. The Gin was by far the easiest of the three spirits in terms of identifying what it was. However, this also generated some of the least accurate tasting notes as candidates simply wrote a text book description for Gin rather than concentrating on what was actually in the glass. This resulted in long lists of all the botanicals found in gin from the obvious juniper, coriander and orange peel to those that simply were not detectable on this spirit such as orris root and cinnamon.

Question 2 – Describe the various part of a Patent (continuous) still and explain their roles in the distillation process.	
Answers: 136	Passes: 59 (43%)

There were some excellent answers to this question, but equally some clear evidence of guess work. Inevitably there were plenty of diagrams, again some excellent and clear, others

scrappy, confused and not really serving any purpose at all. The majority of candidates were aware of the fact that it consisted of two columns, and the positioning and function of the plates was reasonably well understood, together with an awareness of the economics and efficiency of the Patent still over the pot still. However, far too many candidates were very confused in terms of what actually took place in each of the columns and many simply failed to describe the function of the still in sufficiently accurate detail.

March 2006

Question 1 - Poire Williams Eau de Vie Grande Reserve, Remy Martin VSOP Cognac, Jose Cuervo Tequila Especial Reposado	
Answers: 96	Passes: 60 (63%)

It was surprising how many were unable to identify the Eau de Vie as such even if they could not pin this down to the specific fruit. Many also missed the grapey character of the Cognac and mistook the salty, smokiness of the Tequila for Islay Malt. In general, there was a tendency in this exam (and on the other dates in November and June also) towards verboseness and vagueness (far too much use of words such as “good”, “present” etc.)

Question 2 – What are the maturation options available to producers of brown and white spirits? What effect do different approaches have on the flavour and price of the resulting spirit?	
Answers: 96	Passes: 79 (82%)

Some candidates lost sight of the question and forgot to include white spirits in their response. It really is worth spending just a couple of minutes before starting to write, in jotting down some key headings while the question is in front of you. In a similar vein, many candidates simply listed the ageing requirements for Cognac and Armagnac without linking these to the effect they have on flavour and price. A short essay plan could have easily prevented this. Despite these points, there were some very good scripts here and candidates clearly felt reasonably comfortable with this question.

June 2006

Question 1 - Laphroaig 10 year old Malt Whisky, Mount Gay Rum, Grappa di Moscato	
Answers: 87	Passes: 63 (72%)

As with the previous paper, there was plenty of evidence of candidates deciding what the spirits were and then writing their tasting note to match. This resulted in quite a few of the tasting notes for the Grappa including observations such as juniper berries, angelica and coriander which simply were not there, just because this fitted the candidates pre-conception. However, slightly more worrying was the candidate who mentioned juniper and then concluded that the spirits must be rum (it was the Grappa incidentally not the Mount Gay that they were describing here).

Question 2 – Describe the various production processes for the different styles of vodka.

Answers: 87

Passes: 37 (43%)

This was a very poor set of scripts, largely because the majority of candidates simply failed to do what the question asked them to. The majority described the distillation process for Vodka in general terms (ie distilling in a continuous still), but completely ignored the finer points of the question such as the **production** process rather than distillation, and the issue of the different styles. A number of candidates mistook “styles” to mean “quality levels”, others only considered standard Vodka and flavoured Vodka. The styles that were key to this question were:

- ? Western style – eg grain based such as Smirnoff, Grey Goose or Ketel One
- ? Eastern style – eg wheat, rye or potato based such as Chopin, Wyborowa or Stolichnaya
- ? Scandinavian style – eg wheat based such as Absolut or Finlandia
- ? Flavoured Vodka – both traditional (macerating ingredients in spirit) and modern (flavoured with concentrates or by cold compounding)

Unit 5, Sparkling Wines

The examination for Unit 5 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2005/06, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was:

Answers: 476

Passes: 292 (61%)

For general comments relating to the unit as a whole, see the previous comments under Unit 4.

The questions and individual pass rates for each of the three examination dates were as follows:

October 2005

Question 1 - Pol Roger 1996, Derose NV Champagne, Freixenet Cordon Negro	
Answers: 136	Passes: 88 (65%)

The emphasis in this question was very much on quality. Candidates were advised in the question stem that all three wines were “traditional method sparkling wines from Europe”. Despite this, many talked about New World wines or wines produced by other methods. This was foolish for two reasons, it showed that the candidate had not read the question, and because this information was not specifically asked for in any event. For each wine, candidates were required to write an accurate tasting note, assess the quality and give an estimate of the retail price.

Once again, many appeared to struggle to recognise the quality of the vintage Champagne, which was often described as “poor” or “out of condition”. Candidates often seem to confuse age/maturity with poor quality/dirty winemaking. There was also considerable evidence of lack of commercial awareness when it came to pricing these wines. There also still seems to be confusion over what is required for a good assessment of quality. Take the following assessment for the Pol Roger for example:

“Good quality traditional method sparkling wine to drink this year. Brut Champagne, France AOC.”

To start with, this is not an assessment of **quality** but an assessment of **maturity**. Secondly, this candidate is simply repeating information they have already been told in the stem of this question – that this is a “traditional method sparkling wine”. Thirdly, saying what you think the wine is, is not assessing it from a quality perspective. This candidate should have explained **why** they thought this might be Champagne.

The following **is** an assessment of quality – it analyses those elements that contribute to the quality of a wine:

“A good to outstanding quality sparkling wine with elegant fruit, delicate mousse, complex aged character and long length. The acidity and dosage are in balance giving the wine structure and the ability to age further.”

Question 2 – Write a paragraph on each of the following:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Prosecco DOC b) Sparkling Shiraz c) Blanquette de Limoux AC 	
Answers: 136	Passes: 68 (50%)

This style of question requires good all round knowledge for the candidate to do really well, but also allows those who may know enough about two sections to pass the paper as a whole, providing their tasting paper achieves high marks.

Prosecco seemed to pose the least problems, although there were quite a few candidates who confused this with Asti. There were some candidates who believed that Sparkling Shiraz was produced in the Rhône, and a lot of guesswork when it came to Blanquette de Limoux, with various options being offered regarding area of production, grape variety and method of production. The approach to this question is no different to that for paragraph questions in the Unit 3 examination, you should aim to get as many facts down as possible – in fact these are just about the only type of question where it is acceptable to write “all you know”.

There was widespread confusion regarding the production method for Blanquette de Limoux (it is traditional method), and many got in a muddle over the difference between Blanquette de Limoux and Cremant de Limoux (not the same thing). Some candidates thought Limoux was in the Rhône or the Loire, (and even Burgundy), and amongst the grapes listed were Grenache Blanc, Viura, Sauvignon Blanc, Rousanne and Sémillon. None of these were correct as Blanquette is a synonym for the Mauzac grape which accounts for 90% of the blend with the rest being Chardonnay and/or Chenin Blanc. Although Sparkling Shiraz was fairly straightforward, very few candidates were aware of the connection between method of production and quality of wine produced, with most thinking it was always “cheap and nasty”.

March 2006

Question 1 - Asti Martini, Veuve Clicquot NV, Deinhard Lila Riesling Sekt	
Answers: 72	Passes: 54 (75%)

This was a very good result with more candidates gaining Merit grades than any other. Undeniably, the Asti Martini was an easy wine here, but the Sekt certainly had quite a few candidates stumped. Marks were lost in the usual places - by putting the vintage instead of assessing the state of maturity, through contradictory terminology (“*medium intensity of pale gold*”, *youthful development*) or by comparing the three wines rather than assessing them individually (“*wine 2 deeper than wine 1*”).

Question 2 – When producing traditional method sparkling wine, how may costs be reduced and what effect do these have on quality?

Answers: 72

Passes: 32 (44%)

After the good results in the tasting question, this was disappointing. There were many reasons for low marks here. Some candidates did not read the question carefully enough and included comments on the transfer method. There was also a tendency to focus only on disgorgement rather than considering all stages of the production process from choice of grape variety, viticulture, first vinification, lees aging, remuage and disgorgement to the final packing of the product and the supply chain. There were savings to be made in all these stages, but far too many candidates failed to think beyond Champagne.

June 2006

Question 1 - Lindauer Rosé, Malard Rosé NV Champagne, Banrock Station Sparkling Shiraz

Answers: 86

Passes: 53 (62%)

This was a good pass rate with a high number of candidates gaining Merit, but only one Distinction. Not surprisingly, most candidates knew what the third sample was, but many simply wrote their description to match the conclusion rather than sticking to what was actually in the glass. It was patently obvious where this had occurred because the candidate listed aromas that one would expect to find in a Sparkling Shiraz, but which were not actually detectable in **this** instance. Quite a few candidates thought this could be a Lambrusco – it was too intense and tannic for this.

On a general note, there are still far too many vague comments being used, such as “youthful aromas which show some developing”, “good length”, “normal acidity”, “some tannins”. It has been said many times before – comments such as these will not gain any marks at all.

Question 2 – Describe how Cava DO is made, including regions, grape varieties and ageing regulations.

Answers: 86

Passes: 24 (28%)

This was really quite disastrous. Of those who did pass, these were clearly split between those who just scraped through and those who really did answer the question well, but by far the largest percentage of candidates fell within the 45 – 50% grade band. Some candidates took the question too literally, only commenting on regions, grape varieties and ageing requirements, others ignored some or all of these and simply described the traditional method of sparkling wine production.

An indicative answer should have included the following:

Method of Production

Must be Traditional Method.

Large volume means the process is usually highly mechanised.

- ✍ Pneumatic pressing
- ✍ Settling (debourbage)
- ✍ Fermentation (of first pressing only) in stainless steel at 16-18°C
- ✍ Different grape varieties fermented separately.
- ✍ Malolactic usually prevented.
- ✍ Blending base wines in December / January
- ✍ Addition of yeast and sugar then sealed with a crown cap.
- ✍ Second fermentation takes 6-8 weeks at 13-15°C
- ✍ Ageing on lees.
- ✍ Riddling – either by hand, girasols or gyropalettes
- ✍ Disgorging after freezing the neck.
- ✍ Dosage:
- ✍ Inserting mushroom cork
- ✍ Resting to allow dosage to “marry”
- ✍ Labelling

Regions

Unique DO, in that it is not restricted to one region only.

Most Cava comes from Catalonia (approx 98%), particularly Penedes (over 85%), around the town of Sant Sadurni d'Anoia.

Can also be produced in Navarra, Rioja, Aragon, Pais Vasco (Basque Country), Valencia and Badajoz

Grapes

Principal grapes (all white) are Parellada, Maccabeo (Viura) and Xarel-lo, but also Subirat Parent (Malvasia Riojana).

Chardonnay is a “permitted” grape.

(Note: of the 2 principal producers, Codorniu are pro-Chardonnay and Freixenet favour traditional varieties).

Principal Grapes (red) – Garnacha (also spelt Garnatxa) and Monastrell

Trepat & Pinot Noir are “permitted” grapes.

Red grapes are used for rosado only (including Pinot Noir)

Ageing Requirements

Minimum of 9 months on the lees before disgorgement for non-vintage wines.

Minimum of 3 years on the lees before disgorgement for vintage wines.

Reserva wines spend 18 – 30 months before disgorging, and Gran Reserva in excess of thirty months.

Unit 6, Fortified Liqueur Wines

The examination for Unit 6 was run on three separate occasions in the academic year 2005/06, in November, March and June. The overall pass rate for the unit as a whole for all these dates combined was:

Answers: 672

Passes: 452 (67%)

For general comments on this Unit, see previous comments on Units 4.

The questions and individual pass rates for each of the three examination dates were as follows:

October 2005

Question 1 - Tesco Tawny Port, Rutherglen Muscat, Lustau Los Arcos Amontillado	
Answers: 170	Passes: 116 (68%)

Once again, there was evidence that candidates did not read the question before writing their tasting notes. In this instance, they were told in advance that the three wines were from three different countries or regions. There was absolutely no point therefore in one candidate deciding that they were Tawny Port, Sweet Sherry and Oloroso Sherry, or in the case of another candidate, Rivesaltes, Cream Sherry and Amontillado Sherry, as neither of these conclusions concurred with the question as set.

Candidates also really tied themselves up in knots in identifying the colour of these three wines. The Systematic Approach gives very clearly defined options here – in the case of white wines - lemon/green, lemon, gold, amber and brown, for rosé wines - pink, salmon, orange and onion skin, and for red wines - purple, ruby, garnet, tawny and brown. The correct observations in the case of these three wines were, garnet for the Tawny Port (a cheap Tawny rather than a premium one which had spent a long time in oak), tawny or brown (more accurately mahogany brown) for the Rutherglen and amber for the Amontillado. One candidate described the Tawny Port as *“pale ruby with a hint of brick”*. Since garnet is the recognised description for a red wine that has progressed beyond the “red” stage of ruby towards “brown” this is exactly the term they should have used here instead of their cumbersome, far less precise and rather subjective alternative. The same candidate described the Rutherglen as *“russet red”*. This really was far too vague in the case of this deep brown wine. Compare the following accurate note on the appearance of the Rutherglen Muscat to that of a candidate who is making similar observations but in a far less precise manner:

Good note:

“Appearance: Clear and bright, deep mahogany/tawny core fading to a narrow tawny rim. Thick long legs.”

Poor note:

“clear and bright, deep intensity, dark orange mahogany to yellow rim, high legs.”

A number of candidates consistently lose marks by failing to state the obvious – legs or viscosity for example on the appearance.

Question 2 – Describe the processes used to extract colour, tannin and flavour during the fermentation of Port.	
Answers: 170	Passes: 89 (52%)

This was a reasonably good pass rate, but the examiner did comment that there were very few outstanding answers. This was a classic example of the danger of not reading the question carefully enough. The key word in this question is **processes** as opposed to “process”. Far too many candidates only discussed the treading of grapes in lagares. This was certainly a major factor, but there was far more to this question than this.

The key techniques the examiner was looking for were the following:

- ? Use of lagares
- ? Robotic treading
- ? Autovinification
- ? Rotovinification
- ? Remontagem
- ? Movimosto
- ? Mechanical pigeage vats (or other methods of punching down)

Of these, the most notable were lagares (both traditional and robotic), autovinification and rotovinification, and these therefore attracted the bulk of the marks.

March 2006

Question 1 - Ramos Pinto 20 year old Tawny, Gonzales Byass Fino Elegante, Henriques and Henriques 10 year old Sercial	
Answers: 128	Passes: 103 (80%)

The examiner was quite exasperated by the amount of vague comments in these papers, such as “rusty orange”, “fox brown”, “vibrant nose”, “dried flowers in a florist shop”, “good acidity”, “normal alcohol”, “interesting nose”. None of these are specific enough to generate marks.

As in most other tasting examinations, the weakest sections were the assessment of quality and the state of maturity. It simply is not sufficient to give one word answers in either case. The other problem is making statements which show no reasoning, for example:

“A standard, generic Fino, not a Manzanilla. A reasonable quality wine.”

This is not an assessment of quality, but a conclusion regarding the identify of the wine. There is no discussion of **why** this wine might be “reasonable quality”.

Question 2 – Describe the factors that account for the style of Rutherglen Liqueur Muscat.

Answers: 123

Passes: 67 (54%)

The discrepancy between the number of candidates answering this question and the tasting question, indicates that five candidates either spent the entire hour on the tasting or were unable to attempt this question at all. This meant an automatic fail grade for the Unit as a whole as they would have been unable to achieve an overall 55% mark.

This was a straight forward question, but did require solid knowledge of this wine which many candidates did not have. In addition to those who simply did not attempt the question at all, there were quite a few who, unable to provide the detail required, wrote everything they knew about fortified wines in general, no matter how tenuous the link, in the hope of getting some marks. This meant there was often more information on Madeira and Sherry, or similar wines in other countries, Muscat wines produced elsewhere and all sorts of other Australian wines. Candidates really need to understand that marks will only be allocated for information that is relevant to the question specifically as worded.

In order to answer this question well, the candidate needed to demonstrate that they had a solid understanding of what this wine tastes like. This could either have taken the form of a stand alone tasting note in the introductory section, or through the means of references to the attributes of the wines throughout the course of the essay.

The key factors the examiner was looking for were grape variety, climate, viticulture, winemaking and maturation. Very few candidates covered all of these and there was considerable confusion in many submissions. Some candidates simply mentioned that the wine “is fortified” without giving any detail as to when, how or with what. Similarly, many commented that the wine was matured in oak, but were unable to give any indication of the time spent in wood (it varies between the different styles such as regular wine, Classic, Grand and Rare), or did not make the link between this ageing and the effect it has on style. There was widespread confusion on whether the grapes are botrytised, dried on mats or raisined on the vine. Two candidates wrote that the wine is fortified before fermentation, and one that fortification is carried out “towards the end of maturation”. At the very least, candidates should have been aware that this wine is fortified in the Port style.

June 2006

Question 1 - Ramos Pinto 20 year old Tawny, Taylors LBV 2000, Domaine Des Bernadines 2004 Muscat Beaumes de Venise

Answers: 217

Passes: 139 (64%)

This was a good result with a good percentage of merit grades but very few distinctions. A number of candidates simply did not read this question, which stated that all three wines were “fortified wines made by the same method”. This meant there was absolutely no logic in identifying them as a mixture of Ports and Sherries.

The LBV caused few problems, but many failed to identify the Tawny Port and a surprising number simply did not pick up the grapey aromas of the Beames de Venise. Some candidates really do not apply logic to their responses, irrespective of whether they are correct or not. As a result, there were tasting notes where the wine was identified as LBV from the Douro, yet described as dry, or described as having low acidity yet originating from Madeira. This really is not using the information in the tasting note in the proper way.

There were some very poor or illogical conclusions in many cases such as attributing Madeira to Spain, describing Tawny Port as originating from Madeira, or identifying a wine as "LBV Ruby Port". These are fundamental errors that should not be made at this level.

Question 2 – Describe the Solera system in the production of Sherry. Why is it used?	
<i>Answers: 217</i>	<i>Passes: 169 (78%)</i>

This question was an absolute gift and most candidates also agreed judging by the high pass rate. Most were able to write enough to pass even if they were unable to provide the detail necessary for a high grade. Nevertheless, there were also some excellent, comprehensive responses.

The role of flor was generally well understood, including the effects of fortification and time spent in the solera system on its development, growth and demise, but there was inevitably some confusion when it came to describing the various stages in the solera system. Another common problem was that of answering one half of the question but not the other. In other words, describing the various stages of the solera system, but making no comment on why it is used or why it is integral to the style of all Sherries.