

# **Guidelines for Club Competitions – Organizing Wines in Flights**

Bob Stalder  
Chief Steward, AWO/WJC  
January 2016

Questions from members regarding the flighting and judging of wines at AWO have prompted me to provide the rationale behind how wines are grouped together for evaluation. Since wines in most competitions are evaluated in flights, it is important to select and arrange wines so that each wine within a flight is presented in the fairest way. Judges have affirmed that logical placement of wines in flights makes judging easier, more accurate and fairer. The following suggestions can be transferred to club competitions.

## **Class Descriptions**

Anyone organizing a club competition should be aware of the Class Descriptions that provide detailed guidelines on the composition of wines in each class. Particular care should be taken in the blended classes where the percentage of each component is important. If your club has any questions about class eligibility, please contact me (via email).

## **General Guidelines**

No matter what the wine colour or style, there are some general guidelines that will help to organize wine flights more effectively. Make flights no larger than 7 or 8 wines (6 is better maximum).

## **Varietal Grouping**

Group similar varieties together. Judges prefer to taste all of a particular variety in the same flight(s). If you have 3 or 4 wines of a single variety only, keep them as a separate smaller flight, or add a few similar blends if the total number of wines is low. Ask your judge before the competition how they would like to handle it.

## **Age**

Arrange wines from young to old. Older wines may have developed more complexity as well as tertiary aromas and flavours. Younger wines emphasize freshness and fruitiness. It is beneficial to both styles to have them grouped and tasted chronologically.

## **Residual Sugar (RS)**

This applies mainly to White Wine and Rosé classes. If the residual sugar level is known, arrange the wines from dry to sweet. This is mostly to help the dry wines not compete directly with the sweeter ones. AWO decided to split the Rosé class several years ago for this reason. Classes like Riesling can have wines that are very dry all the way to medium sweet. Knowing the RS for each wine will help with the flighting.

## **Arranging Wines Within each Class**

Take a look at all of the entries in each class and put them in order using the following criteria:

## **Whites**

### **Single Varietal Classes (Riesling, Gewurztraminer etc.)**

- Arrange the wines from dry to sweet first (if RS is known), then from young to old. If there are blends, ensure that the composition is in accordance with the Class Description.
- In the Other White class, group similar varieties together. At AWO, the most common wines in this class are Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris, Viognier and Kerner.

### **White Blends**

- Group wines that have a dominant varietal together, then group the blends that have more varietals in smaller percentages.
- Within each grouping, arrange the wines from dry to sweet (if RS is known) and young to old.
- Please ensure that the composition and percentages are in accordance with the Class Description.

### **Reds**

- As with the White Wine classes, red wines within any class and/or flight should generally be presented from light to heavy, dry to sweet and young to old.

### **Bordeaux Class**

- This is by far the largest class with over 100 wines, both single varietals and blends. Flight the single varietal wines first starting with Merlot, then Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Carmenère, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. If there are only 1 or 2 of a certain varietal they can be combined with others to make a flight, but ensure that all single varietals are grouped together in the flight.
- Group the blends that are similar in composition and divide them into flights.

### **Red Blend**

- As the name suggests, this class is for blended wines only. Care must be taken to ensure that the composition and percentage of each component in the blend are in accordance with the class rules. Please ensure that your winemakers are aware of the Class Description.

### **Social, After Dinner, Icewine Style**

- There can be a lot of variety in these classes, so just try and group them logically into flights. Again, try to keep wines with similar composition together, whether they are alone or with others in a flight.
- Pay careful attention to the sugar level of wines in these classes. Please refer to the Class Descriptions for more details.

### **Country Table and Social**

- Pay careful attention to the sugar level of wines in these classes as well. Table is intended for dry wines. Please refer to the Class Descriptions for precise details.
- Present Country Table first, then Social.

## **Planning for Success**

Putting wines in flights is really a logical process. Remember:

- Don't make flights too big
- Group similar varietals together.
- In blends, keep wines with similar composition together.
- In the Bordeaux class, flight single varietals first, then blends.
- Ensure that ALL wines comply with the Class Descriptions.
- Keep a record of all entries on a spreadsheet (use the AWO spreadsheet provided).
- Record the composition of each wine on the spreadsheet, as judges may ask for this information.
- Plan the order of classes to be judged. Start with the white classes then move to rosé, lighter reds, bigger reds, social and sweeter wines, country and aperitif wines. If you have sparkling wine or cider, it's a great way to end the competition. Your judge(s) can help make final decisions prior to the competition – ask them!