

Good sensory practices for assessing wines made from smoke-exposed grapes

AWRI

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The presence of elevated smoke markers can leave grapegrowers and winemakers with difficult decisions regarding the future of their wines, with high financial and emotional consequences. Predicting how 'smoky' a finished wine will taste based on chemical data alone is challenging. This is partly due to other flavours across different wine types that can mask 'smoke' character.

Outlined below are some of the key practices to achieve reliable, actionable results from sensory evaluation of affected wines, based on results of recent investigations at the AWRI.

Ongoing training

- Conduct practice sessions with smoke-affected wines
- Provide each panellist with positive, but honest, feedback on performance



Assessor qualification

- Screen volunteers for sensitivity to smoke phenol compounds
- Use at least eight assessors



Test room

- Well-ventilated area
- Avoid odours, noises and visual distractions



- Code bottles and glasses with unique 3-digit codes

Test results



- Assess panel performance
- Conduct statistical analysis compared to clean control wines
- Compare sensory data to chemical data
- Interpret results based on business risk tolerance

Evaluation



- Ensure independent, blind assessment
- Use a random tasting order for each judge
- Limit the number of wines (<20)



- Enforce 2-minute breaks between samples

Test set-up

- Include replicates
- Use standardised conditions
- Include a clean blind control in each set



- Present sets of similar styles/varieties



statistical support available

For more information on the importance of sensory testing in assessing the risk of smoke taint in wine, scan the QR code

