SCOTCH WHISKY QUIZ · 12 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Scotch Whisky Quiz: Test Your Scottish Single Malt Knowledge

Test your mastery of Scotland's 5 regions, Single Malt regulations, peat PPM, copper still chemistry, and historic distilleries.

HOST GUIDE & COMPLETE ANSWER KEY: Designed for pub quiz masters, whisky tastings, and society trivia nights. Questions include full multiple-choice options, marked correct answers, and 'Behind the Glass' factual explanations.

Q1. Which of the following lists the five officially recognized, legally protected Scotch Whisky regions defined under the Scotch Whisky Regulations 2009?

[A] Highlands, Lowlands, Speyside, Islay, and Campbeltown

[B] Highlands, Lowlands, Speyside, Hebrides, and Orkney

[C] Speyside, Islay, Skye, Jura, and Mull

[D] Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western, and Central Scotland

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] Highlands, Lowlands, Speyside, Islay, and Campbeltown

Behind the Glass: Under the Scotch Whisky Regulations 2009, the five statutory protected geographical regions are Speyside, Islay, Highlands, Lowlands, and Campbeltown. While the "Islands" (Skye, Orkney, Jura, etc.) are culturally celebrated, legally they are classified under the Highlands region.

Q2. What single grain must be used exclusively to produce Single Malt Scotch Whisky?

[A] Unmalted cereal rye

[B] 100% malted barley

[C] A 51% blend of barley and maize

[D] Scottish winter wheat

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] 100% malted barley

Behind the Glass: To legally carry the title Single Malt Scotch Whisky, the spirit must be batch distilled in copper pot stills at a single distillery using 100% malted barley, water, and yeast, with no other grains permitted.

Q3. What is the absolute statutory minimum time Scotch spirit must mature in oak casks in Scotland before it can legally be called "whisky"?

[A] At least 1 year

[B] At least 2 years

[C] At least 3 years

[D] At least 5 years

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] At least 3 years

Behind the Glass: First established by the Immature Spirits (Restriction) Act of 1915 and reiterated in modern law, Scotch spirit must mature in oak casks in Scotland for at least three full years before it can be legally sold as Scotch whisky.

Q4. What is the statutory minimum alcoholic strength by volume (ABV) at which Scotch whisky can legally be bottled?

[A] 37.5% ABV

[B] 40.0% ABV

[C] 43.0% ABV

[D] 46.0% ABV

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] 40.0% ABV

Behind the Glass: Under both UK and EU law, Scotch whisky must have a minimum alcoholic strength by volume of 40.0% (80 proof). Spirits bottled below 40% cannot legally bear the label Scotch Whisky.

Q5. What is the maximum legal cask capacity permitted for maturing Scotch whisky in Scotland?

[A] 250 litres

[B] 500 litres

[C] 700 litres

[D] 1,000 litres

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] 700 litres

Behind the Glass: The Scotch Whisky Regulations explicitly stipulate that oak casks must not exceed 700 litres (185 US gallons) in capacity. This ensures a sufficient ratio of wood surface area to liquid during maturation.

Q6. What is the legal definition of a "Blended Malt Scotch Whisky" (formerly referred to as a "vatted malt")?

[A] A vatting of single malt whiskies from two or more different distilleries, with no grain whisky added

[B] A blend of malted barley whisky and continuous column-distilled wheat whisky

[C] A single malt finished in two different types of oak cask

[D] Whisky distilled from equal parts barley, rye, and wheat

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] A vatting of single malt whiskies from two or more different distilleries, with no grain whisky added

Behind the Glass: A Blended Malt (such as Monkey Shoulder or Johnnie Walker Green Label) is produced by marrying single malts from two or more distinct Scottish distilleries. If column-distilled grain whisky is introduced, it becomes a "Blended Scotch Whisky".

Q7. Which progressive Islay distillery produces the celebrated "Octomore" series, renowned for producing the most heavily peated single malts in the world (often exceeding 100 to 300+ PPM)?

[A] Ardbeg

[B] Laphroaig

[C] Bruichladdich

[D] Lagavulin

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] Bruichladdich

Behind the Glass: Bruichladdich produces three distinct single malt profiles under one roof: unpeated Bruichladdich, heavily peated Port Charlotte (40 PPM), and super-heavily peated Octomore, whose single-field expressions have reached over 300 PPM of phenols.

Q8. Why is copper universally required for the construction of Scottish pot stills?

[A] Copper conducts heat 10 times faster than iron and requires less fuel.

[B] Copper is malleable and can be beaten into decorative shapes.

[C] Copper chemically reacts with volatile sulfur compounds (like dimethyl trisulfide) during distillation, stripping out vegetal and eggy off-notes.

[D] Scottish law banned stainless steel in 1823 to protect local coppersmith guilds.

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] Copper chemically reacts with volatile sulfur compounds (like dimethyl trisulfide) during distillation, stripping out vegetal and eggy off-notes.

Behind the Glass: Copper is a sacrificial chemical filter. During boiling and reflux, alcohol vapours react with copper to precipitate out smelly, harsh sulfur compounds (dimethyl trisulfide, hydrogen sulfide). Without copper contact, the new-make spirit would smell like rotten vegetables and boiled cabbage.

Q9. Where is the phenol "PPM" (parts per million) level officially measured when distilleries describe the smoke level of a peated whisky?

[A] In the smoke escaping from the pagoda kiln stack

[B] On the kilned malted barley grist, prior to mashing and distillation

[C] In the low wines collected from the wash still

[D] In the finished bottled whisky after cask maturation

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] On the kilned malted barley grist, prior to mashing and distillation

Behind the Glass: PPM is almost always measured on the dry malted barley after kiln smoking. During mashing, fermentation, distillation (where heavy phenols are held back in the pot), and cask aging, roughly 60% to 75% of those phenols are lost, meaning a 50 PPM malt yields roughly 15 to 20 PPM in the final glass.

Q10. Which Scottish region contains more than half of all operational malt distilleries in the country, clustered along the River Spey and its tributaries?

[A] The Highlands

[B] The Lowlands

[C] Speyside

[D] Campbeltown

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] Speyside

Behind the Glass: Speyside is home to over 50 malt distilleries (including Macallan, Glenfiddich, Glenlivet, and Balvenie). Its abundance of pure granite-filtered snowmelt, proximity to fertile barley fields, and 19th-century railway links made it the beating heart of Scotch production.

Q11. What is an "Independent Bottler" (such as Gordon & MacPhail, Cadenhead's, or Signatory Vintage) in the Scotch whisky trade?

[A] A retailer that blends discarded leftovers from supermarket shelves

[B] A company that purchases casks directly from distilleries, ages them in independent warehouses, and bottles them under its own label without corporate chill filtration or colouring

[C] A foreign company prohibited from selling single malts in Scotland

[D] A bottler that only sells miniature 5cl tasting drams

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] A company that purchases casks directly from distilleries, ages them in independent warehouses, and bottles them under its own label without corporate chill filtration or colouring

Behind the Glass: Independent bottlers purchase mature or new-make casks from distilleries and curate them under their own independent label. They are venerated by enthusiasts because they frequently bottle at natural cask strength, without chill filtration, and without added E150a colouring, offering unique single-cask variations.

Q12. Why do Scottish single malts undergo batch distillation in copper pot stills, whereas grain whisky is distilled continuously in Coffey column stills?

[A] Pot stills retain a high concentration of aromatic congeners and heavy esters from barley, while column stills distill to 94%+ ABV, creating a light, smooth spirit ideal for balancing blends.

[B] Pot stills are only capable of running wheat wash.

[C] Column stills cannot operate in cold Scottish weather.

[D] Scotch Whisky Regulations outlaw pot stills for anything except corn.

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] Pot stills retain a high concentration of aromatic congeners and heavy esters from barley, while column stills distill to 94%+ ABV, creating a light, smooth spirit ideal for balancing blends.

Behind the Glass: Batch pot stills distill spirit to roughly 68% to 72% ABV, carrying over rich esters, higher alcohols, and malt congeners that give single malts their deep character. Column stills distill continuously to nearly 94.5% ABV, producing a cleaner, lighter grain spirit designed to carry and balance heavy malts in blended Scotch.