WHISKY PUB QUIZ · 20 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Whisky Pub Quiz Questions and Answers

The ultimate 20-question pub trivia pack split into 4 rounds: Scottish distilleries, maturation science, famous blenders, and myth-busters.

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.

ROUND 1: SCOTTISH DISTILLERIES & GEOGRAPHY

Q1. Who designed the iconic Scottish pagoda kiln roof (the Doig Ventilator), and at which distillery was it first built in 1889?

[A] Thomas Telford at The Glenlivet

[B] Charles Chree Doig at Dailuaine

[C] Aeneas Coffey at Kilbeggan

[D] Alexander Walker at Cardhu

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Charles Chree Doig at Dailuaine

Behind the Glass: In 1889, Elgin architect Charles Chree Doig was summoned to Dailuaine to improve kiln ventilation. He designed a pyramid cupola with upturned eaves that harnessed passing winds to create a steady upward draft for peat smoke while keeping rain and birds out.

Q2. Mortlach distillery in Dufftown is famous for its intricate, idiosyncratic distillation system. Exactly how many times is Mortlach spirit distilled on average?

[A] Exactly 2.0 times (standard double distillation)

[B] Exactly 3.0 times (Irish triple distillation)

[C] 2.81 times (via the Wee Witchie still)

[D] 4.15 times (fractional column reflux)

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] 2.81 times (via the Wee Witchie still)

Behind the Glass: Devised in 1897 by Dr. Alexander Cowie, Mortlach splits its low wines and feints across three wash stills and three spirit stills. One small spirit still, nicknamed "The Wee Witchie", repeatedly distills heavily charged feints, yielding an average calculation of 2.81 distillations and creating Mortlach's famously meaty, sulfur-rich "Beast of Dufftown" profile.

Q3. Campbeltown was once the Victorian whisky capital with over 30 distilleries. Which three survivors keep it legally recognized as an official Scotch region today?

[A] Springbank, Glengyle (Kilkerran), and Glen Scotia

[B] Highland Park, Scapa, and Tobermory

[C] Oban, Talisker, and Bowmore

[D] Bladnoch, Rosebank, and Glenkinchie

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] Springbank, Glengyle (Kilkerran), and Glen Scotia

Behind the Glass: When the Scotch Whisky Association considered dissolving Campbeltown's regional status because only Springbank and Glen Scotia survived, Springbank reopened the defunct Glengyle distillery (producers of Kilkerran) in 2004 to satisfy the three-distillery minimum requirement.

Q4. Edradour was long famous as Scotland's smallest distillery, but which distillery operates the tallest copper pot stills in Scotland at 5.14 metres (16 ft 10 in)?

[A] Glenfiddich

[B] Glenmorangie

[C] Macallan

[D] Ardbeg

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Glenmorangie

Behind the Glass: Glenmorangie in Tain uses stills with necks as tall as a fully grown adult giraffe (5.14 metres). Only the lightest, most volatile alcohol vapours can reach the top, creating an exceptionally delicate, floral, and citrus-forward new-make spirit.

Q5. Which Speyside distillery fought an 1884 court battle that granted it the exclusive right to use "The" in its name, forcing dozens of rivals to hyphenate their labels?

[A] The Macallan

[B] The Balvenie

[C] The Glenlivet

[D] The Glenrothes

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] The Glenlivet

Behind the Glass: George Smith was the first illicit distiller in the Glen of Livet to obtain a legal license in 1824. Because Glenlivet became a regional hallmark of quality, dozens of Speyside distilleries appended "-Glenlivet" to their bottles. In 1884, Smith's son won a landmark trademark ruling granting exclusive rights to "The Glenlivet".

ROUND 2: OAK CASKS, CHEMISTRY & MATURATION

Q6. What does the cooperage acronym "STR" stand for, and who pioneered this wine cask rejuvenation technique?

[A] Steamed, Torched, Refilled (Richard Paterson)

[B] Shaved, Toasted, Re-charred (Dr. Jim Swan)

[C] Stripped, Treated, Rebuilt (Miguel Martin)

[D] Smoked, Tapered, Rolled (Aeneas Coffey)

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Shaved, Toasted, Re-charred (Dr. Jim Swan)

Behind the Glass: Pioneered by Dr. Jim Swan (d. 2017), the STR process takes spent European red wine casks, shaves away the harsh tannins on the interior to expose active wood, toasts the staves to release fresh sugars and vanillin, and re-chars the surface to create an active carbon filtering shield.

Q7. What is "Char Level #4" (the heaviest barrel burn, lasting roughly 55 seconds) commonly called in the cooperage industry?

[A] Dragon Breath

[B] Alligator Char

[C] Black Diamond

[D] Pitch Pine

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Alligator Char

Behind the Glass: Char Level #4 burns the oak until the wood fractures into shiny, cracked square scales resembling the rough hide of an alligator. This cracked charcoal matrix absorbs pungent sulfur compounds while unlocking caramelized wood sugars.

Q8. Why does whisky maturing in traditional Scottish dunnage warehouses generally LOSE alcohol strength over time, while bourbon in Kentucky GAINS strength?

[A] Scottish coopers use French oak, which absorbs ethanol molecules faster than American oak.

[B] Scotland has a cold, humid climate where water evaporates slower than alcohol, whereas Kentucky is hot and dry, driving water out through the staves faster than ethanol.

[C] Scottish law caps warehouse humidity at 95% by statute.

[D] Scottish warehouses allow direct coastal wind flow that dilutes the top staves.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Scotland has a cold, humid climate where water evaporates slower than alcohol, whereas Kentucky is hot and dry, driving water out through the staves faster than ethanol.

Behind the Glass: Maturation physics is dictated by relative humidity. In cool, damp Scotland (80% to 90% humidity), ethanol evaporates through the staves faster than water, causing ABV to slowly decline. In hot, arid Kentucky rickhouses, water evaporates much faster than ethanol, causing ABV to climb into the 60s and 70s.

Q9. What microscopic feature in American White Oak (Quercus alba) plugs the wood pores and makes barrels naturally liquid-tight without requiring sealant?

[A] Cellulose webbing

[B] Tyloses (balloon-like vessel outgrowths)

[C] Suberin resin deposits

[D] Lignin crystallization

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Tyloses (balloon-like vessel outgrowths)

Behind the Glass: Tyloses are balloon-like outgrowths from xylem cells that expand and completely dam the vascular tubes of American white oak heartwood. This biological plug prevents whisky from leaking through stave grain, allowing staves to be sawn rather than split.

Q10. What is Baudoinia compniacensis, commonly found coating the walls, trees, and roof tiles surrounding Scottish maturation warehouses?

[A] A harmless black fungus that thrives by feeding on airborne ethanol vapour (the Angel's Share)

[B] A toxic lichen prohibited near food and drink production

[C] A moss introduced from the Hebrides to control warehouse temperature

[D] A mineral precipitate formed when peat smoke condenses on stone

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] A harmless black fungus that thrives by feeding on airborne ethanol vapour (the Angel's Share)

Behind the Glass: Baudoinia compniacensis (warehouse soot fungus) is an ethanol-dependent microfungus that colonizes surfaces near maturation warehouses. It consumes the evaporated Angel's Share as an energy source, creating the trademark soot-stained patina across Scotland's distilling towns.

ROUND 3: BLENDERS, BRANDS & HISTORIC INVENTIONS

Q11. Which Edinburgh grocer is credited with creating the first commercial "vatted malt" blend in 1853, titled "Old Vatted Glenlivet"?

[A] John Walker

[B] Andrew Usher

[C] George Ballantine

[D] Arthur Bell

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Andrew Usher

Behind the Glass: In 1853, Edinburgh spirits merchant Andrew Usher married several casks of Glenlivet single malt of varying ages to create a uniform, branded product ("Old Vatted Glenlivet"), pioneering commercial whisky blending.

Q12. Why did Johnnie Walker originally introduce square bottles for its blended Scotch in 1860?

[A] Square bottles packed more tightly into shipping crates with far fewer breakages, while maximizing shelf prominence with their 20-degree slanted label.

[B] Scottish glassblowers paid less tax on four-sided molds.

[C] To disguise bottles inside hollowed-out book bindings for American smuggling.

[D] The square profile was requested by Queen Victoria for royal carriages.

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] Square bottles packed more tightly into shipping crates with far fewer breakages, while maximizing shelf prominence with their 20-degree slanted label.

Behind the Glass: Alexander Walker introduced the square bottle in 1860 because square bottles packed tightly together into export crates with minimal rolling and breakages during sea transport, while displaying the distinctive 20-degree angled label to stand out on retail shelves.

Q13. Before patenting his continuous column still in 1830, what was Aeneas Coffey's dangerous occupation?

[A] A deep-sea coal miner in Fife

[B] An Inspector General of Excise hunting illicit distillers in Ireland

[C] A gunpowder manufacturer in Glasgow

[D] A ship's surgeon in the Royal Navy

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] An Inspector General of Excise hunting illicit distillers in Ireland

Behind the Glass: Aeneas Coffey was an excise officer who spent years hunting illegal moonshiners in Donegal (even surviving multiple bayonet wounds in an 1810 ambush). He rose to Inspector General of Excise before retiring to perfect his continuous column still.

Q14. How did William Sanderson's famous blended Scotch "Vat 69" get its numerical name in 1882?

[A] It was blended from exactly 69 different single malt distilleries.

[B] Sanderson prepared 100 sample blend casks and invited an expert panel; cask number 69 was unanimously selected as the best.

[C] It was first bottled in the year 1869.

[D] It was proofed to 69% ABV for naval export.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Sanderson prepared 100 sample blend casks and invited an expert panel; cask number 69 was unanimously selected as the best.

Behind the Glass: In 1882, blender William Sanderson produced 100 sample blend casks and invited a panel of friends and blenders to judge them blind. Cask number 69 was voted the definitive winner, and entered commercial production as Vat 69.

Q15. Approximately what percentage of all Scotch whisky sold worldwide today is Blended Scotch (rather than Single Malt)?

[A] Around 25%

[B] Around 50%

[C] Around 90%

[D] Less than 10%

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] Around 90%

Behind the Glass: While single malts command collector interest and high-end retail shelves, blended Scotch (led by Johnnie Walker, Ballantine's, Dewar's, and Chivas Regal) accounts for approximately 90% of all Scotch whisky bottles consumed globally.

ROUND 4: WHISKY MYTHS & GLASS TRUTHS

Q16. What does the word "Single" legally signify on a bottle of Single Malt Scotch Whisky?

[A] The whisky was drawn from a single individual oak cask.

[B] The whisky was distilled entirely at a single distillery from 100% malted barley.

[C] The whisky was produced in a single batch on a single pot still.

[D] The bottle contains only a single strain of barley harvested in one year.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] The whisky was distilled entirely at a single distillery from 100% malted barley.

Behind the Glass: "Single" refers to distillery parentage, not a single barrel. A single malt is almost always a vatting of dozens or hundreds of casks from one distillery to achieve the signature house style. A whisky drawn from one individual barrel is labelled "Single Cask".

Q17. Under Scotch Whisky Regulations, what does an age statement (e.g., "12 Years Old") legally signify on the label?

[A] The average age of all whiskies blended into that batch.

[B] The age of the majority (51%+) component in the blend.

[C] The exact age of the youngest drop of whisky in the bottle.

[D] The number of years the whisky spent in first-fill oak before finishing.

CORRECT ANSWER: [C] The exact age of the youngest drop of whisky in the bottle.

Behind the Glass: The age statement is a legal minimum guarantee. Even if a bottle contains 99% 25-year-old whisky and 1% 3-year-old spirit, the label can legally only state "3 Years Old". Distillers are legally forbidden from printing component age breakdowns.

Q18. Which European country legally mandates that Scotch whisky labels must disclose if artificial spirit caramel colouring (E150a) has been added?

[A] The United Kingdom

[B] Germany

[C] France

[D] Italy

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Germany

Behind the Glass: While the UK and US do not require disclosure of E150a caramel colouring, German consumer protection law strictly requires the phrase "mit Farbstoff: Zuckerkulör" on bottles containing added spirit caramel, making German retail labels a favourite reference for enthusiasts.

Q19. Why does whisky bottled at or above 46% ABV generally NOT require chill filtration?

[A] At 46% ABV and above, long-chain fatty acids and esters remain naturally soluble and will not precipitate into a cloudy haze when chilled or diluted.

[B] 46% ABV is the legal definition of cask-strength where filtration is prohibited.

[C] Higher alcohol dissolves glass particles that cause sediment.

[D] Chill filtering is only physically possible below 40% ABV.

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] At 46% ABV and above, long-chain fatty acids and esters remain naturally soluble and will not precipitate into a cloudy haze when chilled or diluted.

Behind the Glass: When whisky is chilled or diluted with ice or water, naturally occurring fatty acids, esters, and proteins clump together and create a cosmetic haze. At 46% ABV or higher, the alcohol concentration keeps these flavour compounds in natural solution, making cosmetic chill filtration unnecessary.

Q20. Does Scotch whisky continue to age and improve once it has been sealed in a glass bottle?

[A] Yes, it continues slow anaerobic esterification for up to 20 years.

[B] No, whisky only matures through active contact with oak wood and atmospheric air; in glass, it remains essentially unchanged if properly sealed away from sunlight.

[C] Yes, but only if kept upside down so the cork stays wet.

[D] Yes, the alcohol slowly breaks down into complex fruit sugars.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] No, whisky only matures through active contact with oak wood and atmospheric air; in glass, it remains essentially unchanged if properly sealed away from sunlight.

Behind the Glass: Unlike vintage wine, distilled spirits do not mature in the bottle. Whisky requires the micro-oxygenation, extraction, and subtractive filtration of porous oak to age. Once bottled and sealed in inert glass, a 12-year-old whisky remains a 12-year-old whisky forever.