WHISKY TASTING QUIZ · 10 QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Whisky Tasting Quiz: Flavour Profiles, Peat, Casks & Notes

Test your palate and nosing expertise on Islay phenols, sherry cask dried fruit, bourbon vanilla, and flavour map science.

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. What chemical compounds produce the medicinal, iodine, bandage, and TCP aromas famously found in coastal Islay single malts like Laphroaig?

[A] Cresols and xylenols derived from maritime sphagnum moss and salt-spray peat

[B] Chlorine added to the steeping water

[C] Ferrous oxide from peat bogs

[D] Acids produced by copper still corrosion

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] Cresols and xylenols derived from maritime sphagnum moss and salt-spray peat

Behind the Glass: Islay peat is formed primarily from maritime sphagnum bog moss and decaying marine matter exposed to Atlantic salt spray. Kilning over this peat releases cresols, guaiacols, and xylenols, imparting the legendary medicinal, iodine, and TCP character celebrated by peated whisky fans.

Q2. What primary oak-derived chemical compounds contribute the sweet aromas of creamy vanilla and toasted coconut in American White Oak ex-bourbon casks?

[A] Lactic acid and methanol

[B] Vanillin (from thermally degraded lignin) and cis- and trans-whisky lactones

[C] Tartaric acid and glucose

[D] Sulfur dioxide and esters

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Vanillin (from thermally degraded lignin) and cis- and trans-whisky lactones

Behind the Glass: During cooperage toasting and charring, wood lignin breaks down into aromatic aldehydes (vanillin), while American oak staves release cis- and trans-whisky lactones, responsible for the signature coconut, sweet cream, and vanilla notes that define bourbon-cask maturation.

Q3. Whiskies matured in Spanish European oak casks previously seasoned with Oloroso or Pedro Ximenez sherry are famous for which classic flavour profile?

[A] Bright green apples, crisp lemon peel, and freshly cut grass

[B] Dark dried fruits (raisins, prunes, sultanas, figs), dark chocolate, and festive spices (nutmeg, clove)

[C] Heavy industrial diesel oil, burning tires, and black pepper

[D] Banana candy and bubblegum

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Dark dried fruits (raisins, prunes, sultanas, figs), dark chocolate, and festive spices (nutmeg, clove)

Behind the Glass: European oak (Quercus robur) has wide growth rings and rich tannin levels. When seasoned with dark, oxidative sherries like Oloroso or syrupy Pedro Ximenez, it infuses the whisky with luscious notes of Christmas cake, raisins, prunes, dark chocolate, and baking spice.

Q4. According to molecular dynamics research (Karlsson & Friedman, 2017), why does adding a few drops of water to a dram improve its aroma?

[A] It neutralizes alcohol vapours so they no longer irritate olfactory receptors.

[B] Water increases the polarity of the liquid, forcing hydrophobic flavour molecules like guaiacol and fruity esters to concentrate at the surface of the glass where they can evaporate into the nose.

[C] Water chemically transforms ethanol into sweet sugars.

[D] It cools the liquid down to room temperature.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Water increases the polarity of the liquid, forcing hydrophobic flavour molecules like guaiacol and fruity esters to concentrate at the surface of the glass where they can evaporate into the nose.

Behind the Glass: In high-strength whisky (50%+ ABV), aromatic compounds like smoky guaiacol and fruity esters remain bound among ethanol clusters throughout the liquid. Adding water pushes the mixture below ~45% ABV, driving hydrophobic flavour molecules to the liquid surface where they vaporize into the glass.

Q5. On the standard Scottish Whisky Flavour Map, which two perpendicular axes are used to plot and categorize single malt styles?

[A] Light to Rich on one axis, and Delicate to Smoky on the other axis

[B] Cheap to Expensive on one axis, and Young to Old on the other

[C] Sweet to Dry on one axis, and Bitter to Sour on the other

[D] Highland to Lowland on one axis, and Spring to Autumn on the other

CORRECT ANSWER: [A] Light to Rich on one axis, and Delicate to Smoky on the other axis

Behind the Glass: The classic Flavour Map plots single malts across two axes: Vertical (Light to Rich / Heavy body) and Horizontal (Delicate / Fresh to Peated / Smoky). This allows drinkers to navigate between styles like light delicate aperitifs and rich peated digestifs.

Q6. What is the flavour profile difference when a distillery uses "Virgin Oak" casks (brand new oak barrels) compared to traditional refill Scotch casks?

[A] Virgin oak releases no flavour because the wood is dormant.

[B] Virgin oak rapidly infuses raw wood sugars, heavy oak tannins, fresh cedar, pencil shavings, and aggressive baking spice, requiring short maturation to prevent over-oaking.

[C] Virgin oak only imparts salty maritime notes.

[D] Virgin oak completely bleaches all colour from the whisky.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Virgin oak rapidly infuses raw wood sugars, heavy oak tannins, fresh cedar, pencil shavings, and aggressive baking spice, requiring short maturation to prevent over-oaking.

Behind the Glass: Unlike refill casks whose active staves have already been depleted by prior fills, virgin oak staves possess 100% of their raw wood extractives. They extract rapidly, imparting intense cinnamon spice, toasted bread, raw wood sugars, and firm dry tannins.

Q7. Why is a dark mahogany or amber colour NOT a guaranteed indicator that a whisky is exceptionally old, rich, or high in quality?

[A] All single malt whisky is naturally clear like water when aged.

[B] Dark colour can be produced in months via artificial E150a caramel colouring or an aggressive first-fill wet sherry cask, whereas a 25-year-old single malt matured in a gentle refill hogshead may remain pale golden.

[C] Scottish distilleries are legally required to dye all whiskies dark.

[D] Age statements are only based on bottle weight.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Dark colour can be produced in months via artificial E150a caramel colouring or an aggressive first-fill wet sherry cask, whereas a 25-year-old single malt matured in a gentle refill hogshead may remain pale golden.

Behind the Glass: Colour is determined by wood type, fill history, and legal additives. A refill American oak barrel may yield a delicate pale-straw colour after 30 patient years, while a young 3-year-old whisky can appear deep mahogany through heavy E150a colouring or a wet first-fill sherry cask.

Q8. What flavour character does a "Port Pipe" or "Madeira Cask" finish typically contribute to a finished single malt?

[A] Crisp peppermint and menthol

[B] Stewed red plums, blackberry bramble, ruby red berries, walnut skins, and a subtle coppery or rose-tinted hue

[C] Pineapple juice and coconut milk

[D] Heavy coal smoke and charcoal

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] Stewed red plums, blackberry bramble, ruby red berries, walnut skins, and a subtle coppery or rose-tinted hue

Behind the Glass: Port pipes (seasoned with fortified red Portuguese wine) and Madeira drums impart rich, stewed red berry notes: dark cherries, black currants, plum jam, and nutty rancio complexity, often with a distinctive reddish-bronze or copper blush.

Q9. What happens to the flavour profile of a half-empty bottle of whisky left on a shelf for three to five years?

[A] The alcohol percentage increases by 10%.

[B] The large volume of trapped headspace air (oxygen) slowly oxidizes fragile esters and top notes, softening punchy peat smoke and muting crisp floral aromas.

[C] The whisky turns into white wine vinegar.

[D] The liquid coagulates into an undrinkable jelly.

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] The large volume of trapped headspace air (oxygen) slowly oxidizes fragile esters and top notes, softening punchy peat smoke and muting crisp floral aromas.

Behind the Glass: When a bottle has only a third or quarter of its liquid remaining, the extensive headspace of air permits slow oxidation. Delicate fruity esters and pungent smoky cresols gradually oxidize and flatten, making the dram taste softer and less vibrant over several years.

Q10. In whisky tasting terminology, what does the "Finish" of a dram refer to?

[A] The legal seal applied across the top of the bottle cap

[B] The enduring taste, warmth, mouth-coating sensations, and evolving aromas that linger on your palate and throat after you swallow the spirit

[C] The polish applied to the oak barrel hoops

[D] The final bottle in a limited production run

CORRECT ANSWER: [B] The enduring taste, warmth, mouth-coating sensations, and evolving aromas that linger on your palate and throat after you swallow the spirit

Behind the Glass: The "Finish" is the third sensory act of whisky tasting (after Nose and Palate). High-quality whiskies feature long, evolving finishes where wood spices, peat smoke, warming oils, and complex sweetness linger and develop for minutes after the dram is enjoyed.