

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis is a sensory method by which the attributes of a product are identified and quantified, using panelists specifically trained for this purpose. The analysis can include all parameters of the product, or it can be limited to certain aspects, for example, aroma, taste, texture and aftertaste. Many descriptive analysis methods are currently employed by sensory professionals.

All descriptive analysis methods involve the detection and description of both the qualitative and quantitative sensory aspects by a trained panel of judges. Qualitative aspects of a wine combine to define the wine and include all of the appearance, aroma, flavor and texture properties of a wine which differentiate from others. In addition, panelists differentiate and rate the quantitative or intensity aspects of a sample and define to what degree each characteristic or qualitative note is present in that sample. Two wines may contain the same qualitative descriptors, but they may differ markedly in the intensity of each, thus resulting in quite different and easily distinctive sensory profiles or “fingerprints” of each product.

Descriptive analysis is used when detailed information is required on individual characteristics of a wine. Some examples of applications of descriptive analysis would be:

- Determine distinctiveness compared to competitor or icon wines
- Document product sensory changes during aging
- Identify and quantify sensory characteristics related to vineyard or winemaking treatment
- Track vintage to vintage consistency
- Identify attributes common to specific geographic areas

In many cases this powerful method provides information that cannot be obtained by other analytical means. For example, analysis of pH does not indicate how sour a wine may taste to a consumer. Nor is it usually possible to monitor subtle changes in shelf life or packaging stability using analytical instruments. The only effective way to monitor complex changes in oxidation or flavor intensity is by using descriptive analysis methods.

Descriptive analysis techniques are used when there are large sensory differences among wine samples and can be used to compare your wines against your competitors' wines.