



THE INSTITUTE OF  
**MASTERS**  
*of* WINE

# MW Study Programme Syllabus

## The MW exam overview and purpose

The MW exam is designed to assess key elements of mastery in the profession of wine. The purpose of the exam is to qualify new members of the IMW best suited to advancing its mission of promoting excellence, interaction and learning in the global wine industry.

On successful completion of the programme and its three-part exam, you will have a deep understanding of a broad range of wine-related subjects. In particular, you will be able to:

- demonstrate expertise in determining quality, identity, maturity and commercial potential in a wide range of wines
- communicate effectively an understanding of wine and the wine industry across a broad range of topics as well as in depth on a topic of your choice
- think critically in areas of the practice and theory of wine
- demonstrate agility and originality of thought.

## The MW exam

Admission to membership of the IMW requires success in all parts of the MW exam – the theory exam at stage two, the practical exam at stage two and the research paper (RP) at stage three – as well as a commitment to abide by the IMW code of conduct. Only after successfully passing the theory and practical components of the MW exam can you progress to stage three of the study programme, the research paper.

**The practical exam:** This closed-book written exam consists of three papers taken over the course of three consecutive days. To be successful in this part of the exam, you must be able to:

1. accurately assess key visual, olfactory, taste and physical aspects of a wide range of wines
2. use your judgment (in combination with general and technical wine knowledge) to draw logical conclusions about quality, origin, grape varieties, maturity, winemaking techniques employed, commercial potential and other relevant attributes of a wine
3. communicate your analysis in writing, in a concise and persuasive way, in a time-limited environment.

**The theory exam:** This closed-book written exam consists of five papers taken over the course of four consecutive days. To be successful in this part of the exam, you must:

1. demonstrate an in-depth applied understanding of a broad range of wine subjects

2. be able to communicate that understanding effectively in writing in a time-controlled environment
3. demonstrate critical analysis and originality of thought supported by relevant examples.

**The research paper (RP):** This is an open-book, research-based exam, consisting of a 6,000 to 10,000 word original piece of work involving in-depth study and original analysis in an area of your choice. Its purpose is to test your ability to contribute to the body of knowledge in the world of wine.

To be successful in this part of the exam, you must:

1. demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the current state of knowledge in your chosen area
2. use research and information to provide original analysis and critical thinking around a clearly-defined set of key research questions
3. communicate your analyses and conclusions in an effective, credible and professional way.

**Important note:** Any irregularities – for example, cheating, plagiarism, enabling cheating, submitting work of others as one's own etc. – in any part of the exam, admissions or education process will be sanctioned, including the possibility of permanent removal of candidacy for membership of the IMW.

## The practical exam

The purpose of the practical exam is to assess your organoleptic competencies and understanding of wine through tasting. You should be able to demonstrate wide knowledge of the world's wines using analysis, evaluation, and judgment in a time-constrained environment.

You will be expected to make objective, reasoned assessments to draw logical conclusions about key aspects of a wine such as quality, origin, grape variety, winemaking, maturity (i.e. how old is the wine and what is its potential for future ageing?), and commercial potential (i.e. where, how, and when do you see the wine being sold and to whom?). Arguments must always be based on the evidence in the glass.

## Method of assessment for practical papers

Three written exam papers of two hours and 15 minutes in duration. Each paper consists of 12 wines, served blind.

Wines from any wine-producing region in the world and any price point or quality level can be shown in the practical exam. You are expected to demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding of wines from classic, fine wine regions and grape varieties (such as Bordeaux, Rioja, Nebbiolo, Chardonnay), as well as a clear awareness of lesser-known or up-and-coming examples (such as Swartland, Leyda Valley, Carricante, Godello). The number of marks per question will give a sense of the detail required.

Traditionally, paper one covers white wines, paper two covers red wines and paper three covers a wide range including rosé, sparkling, fortified and sweet wines. The list of wines included in past

exam papers is available in the student area of the website. However, the questions and formats of the practical exam can always change; any wine may be included in any paper.

Answers must be written in English and can be typed or handwritten. If you handwrite, your responses must be legible, otherwise examiners may award few or no marks for your answer. Proper spelling of wine terms is expected.

## The theory exam

The theory exam is made up of five papers:

**Paper one – Viticulture:** examines your knowledge and understanding of viticulture up to the completion of the harvest and grape transportation to the winery reception area.

**Paper two – Vinification and pre-bottling procedures:** examines your knowledge and understanding of the vinification of still, sparkling and fortified wines from the arrival of grapes at a winery through all of the production steps that yield a wine that is ready for bottling<sup>1</sup>.

**Paper three – Handling of wine:** examines your knowledge and understanding of bottling<sup>1</sup> processes, quality assurance, quality control, packaging options, transport and regulatory requirements.

**Paper four – The business of wine:** examines your knowledge and understanding of current financial, commercial and marketing aspects of the international wine industry.

**Paper five – Contemporary issues:** examines your ability to demonstrate communication skills, personal insights, and understanding by writing authoritatively on subjects that are of relevance to today's global wine industry.

In all parts of the theory exam, you are expected to provide critical analysis of the subjects covered, including relevant examples, thereby demonstrating understanding rather than simply knowledge of the subject matter in question.

## Theory exam papers one, two and three: The production of wine

The purpose of these papers is to assess your knowledge and understanding of wine production.

Your understanding of the processes of grape growing and winemaking should be complemented by knowledge of the underlying science as well as the practical issues faced by vineyard and winery professionals. You should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the implications for wine style, quality, and cost of the decisions taken at each stage of wine production, and have an awareness of areas of active research in topics relevant to wine production.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this syllabus 'bottling' refers to the broad set of options for packing finished wine for safe delivery to the end consumer – bottles, bag in box, kegs, cans etc. – and is not limited to glass containers and their closures.

Answers should demonstrate your familiarity with a broad variety of the world's wine regions and wine styles. You should also have a solid, practical understanding of how broader concerns such as economics, regulation, consumer trends, management issues, quality assurance, quality control and the environment have a bearing on wine production.

You will be expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following in each paper:

### **Theory paper one: Viticulture**

- **The characteristics of the vine:** vine species; vine varieties; clones; the development of new vine varieties; vine propagation; rootstocks and grafting; the growth cycle of the vine; the life cycle of the vine.
- **The establishment, re-planting and acquisition of vineyards:** the qualitative, practical, regulatory and economic issues of planting or re-planting vineyards; issues concerning the acquisition of vineyards through leasing, purchase, inheritance, or other means.
- **Factors affecting grape growing:** climate; weather; soil; aspect; regulations; the effect of all these factors on wine style, quality, yield and cost; the concept of terroir.
- **Cultivation of the vine:** types and methods of pruning and training; underlying principles and practical applications of canopy management, irrigation, the application of fertilisers and other treatments, the use of herbicides, pesticides and fungicides, green harvesting; the implications for quality and yield of all of the above; conventional, sustainable, biodynamic, organic, and other alternative cultivation methods.
- **Maladies of the vine and their control:** vine pests; vine diseases; physiological disorders; prevention and control.
- **The structure and composition of grapes:** grape structure; chemical composition of grapes, e.g. sugars, acids, anthocyanins, tannins; fruit ripeness; analytical techniques to determine the above.
- **Harvesting of grapes:** timing of the harvest; picking options; grape transportation; quality and cost implications.

### **Theory paper two: Vinification and pre-bottling procedures**

- **Processing of grapes:** grape reception; grape handling strategies, e.g. sorting, de-stalking, crushing, pressing and skin contact; must treatments; temperature control.
- **Fermentation:** alcoholic fermentation; the role of yeasts, enzymes, temperature and fermentation vessels; strategies for the extraction of colour, aroma, flavour and tannin; carbonic maceration, whole bunch fermentation and thermovinification; theory and practice of malolactic conversion.
- **Maturation and blending:** maturation options for the winemaker; types of maturation vessels; inert storage; blending options; timing of preparation for bottling.
- **Stabilisation and clarification:** methods of stabilisation and clarification, e.g. fining, filtration, centrifugation; the use of processing agents and additives in winemaking and wine handling – their function, action and application; international regulations governing the use of additives and processing enhancements of any kind.
- **Production of sweet wines:** production techniques for sweet wines; grape selection; concentration methods; pressing; fermentation; stopping fermentation; maturation; finishing.

- **Production of sparkling wines:** production techniques for sparkling wines; grape selection and pressing; temperature control; selection and blending of base wines; the second fermentation; maturation; finishing.
- **Production of fortified wines:** production techniques for fortified wines; selection of base wines; timing of fortification; practice and significance of blending and maturation; finishing.

### **Theory paper three: Handling of wine**

- **Preparation of finished wines for bottling:** cold stabilisation, final filtration and other treatments of wine for bottling.
- **Packing and labelling:** methods of packaging; different types of packaging and closures; regulatory requirements.
- **Quality assurance (QA) and quality control (QC):** composition of wine; chemical and physical analysis of wine, its purposes, uses and limitations; QA and QC systems and structures for wine and dry goods; practical issues of QA and QC; wine faults, their detection, prevention and treatment; compliance with statutory regulations; effects of storage on wine before and after bottling; shipping and transport including bulk shipping and transport of wine for bottling away from area of origin; methods of bulk transport; quality assurance before and during bulk transport and checking procedures on receipt of bulk wine.

### **Theory paper four: The business of wine**

This paper will assess your knowledge and understanding of financial, commercial and marketing aspects of the international wine industry.

You should demonstrate an ability to apply knowledge to a range of business situations including marketing and investment strategies, financial decision-making, supplier/ customer relationships and strategies for identifying and meeting consumer demand. You will need a broad background knowledge of wine industry structures and trends from around the world and an understanding of how these relate to one another.

You will be expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following:

#### **The theory and practice of marketing wine**

- Marketing strategy as practised by growers, producers, exporters, importers, distributors, and retailers.
- Market research, applied to existing and potential wine purchasers, with clear understanding of the appropriate techniques of information gathering and analysis as well as an awareness of current global consumption trends in a broad range of individual countries and on a global basis.
- Product marketing applied to different sectors of the wine market; factors influencing market segmentation; theory and practical application of product positioning and branding in relation to the market and product range.
- Promotional and sales techniques relevant to the wine industry; understanding of the role of advertising and public relations; use of traditional and modern channels of communication, including social media.

## Financial and commercial awareness

- Financial and commercial structures affecting all sectors of the wine industry, e.g. négociants, agents, brand owners, brokers, grape growers and co-operatives, wineries, large multinational producers, marketing co-operatives, merchants, consultants, specialists, supermarkets, wine chains, direct-to-consumer mail order and online operators.
- Factors to be considered when appraising investment decisions in different industry sectors.
- Influences on business decisions including strategic planning, national and international regulation, taxation and currency fluctuations.
- A general understanding of cash flow, balance sheets, profit and loss accounts and how costing and pricing decisions are made in the wine industry.
- Pricing trends in major markets, e.g. producer, en primeur, wholesale, retail and auction.

## Trends and challenges facing wine producing countries and regions

- Broad knowledge of industry structures world-wide.
- Export shares and trends for significant wine-producing countries and regions.
- Supply and demand trends for wine, grapes, and other raw materials, locally and globally.

## Theory paper five: Contemporary issues

This paper will assess your communication skills, individual insights and originality of thought on a wide range of subjects which may be considered relevant to the wine industry now and in the future.

To be successful you will need to demonstrate your:

- Ability to write persuasively, authoritatively, imaginatively and fluently, showing a breadth of understanding of contemporary wine issues, supported by a wide range of global examples.
- Knowledge and critical analysis of social, historical, cultural, health, ethical, educational, communication and media issues relevant to the wine industry.

## Method of assessment for theory papers

Answers may be written in any language agreed with the IMW and can be typed or handwritten. If handwritten, responses must be legible, otherwise examiners may award few or no marks for an answer. Correct spelling of wine terms is expected.

The structure of each paper may vary from year to year (e.g. there may be a compulsory question, or the paper may be divided into parts). You will be required to answer questions from across the syllabus of each paper.

Paper	Duration	Format of the paper
Theory paper one	Three hours	Three answers required
Theory paper two	Three hours	Three answers required

Theory paper three	Two hours	Two answers required
Theory paper four	Three hours	Three answers required
Theory paper five	Three hours	Two answers required

**Important note:** In any of theory papers one, two, three and four, examiners may set holistic questions, drawing on a student's knowledge and understanding from across all four papers. If a question requires an answer that draws on knowledge across more than one paper, this will be stated clearly in the exam paper. In theory paper five it is expected that you will draw on knowledge and understanding gleaned from your study across the other four papers.