



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
TRI-CITIES

WINE TASTING ROOM SERVER INSIGHT & EDUCATION

A Companion Resource to the WSU Tri-Cities Wine Tasting Room Server Training Certificate Course

MAKING TRACKS



through the Winery

BRIEF COURSE OVERVIEW

A quick reference guide to the topics included in the WSU Wine Tasting Room Server Training Program

REFRESHER CONTENT

Companion content and activities geared towards highlighting and reinforcing the content from the WSU Training Program

SERVER STAFF ACTIVITIES

Quickly bring your staff up to speed with practical, hands-on activities

CURATED RESOURCES

Explore our curated list of other related training materials including videos, movies, podcasts, and additional WSU training courses

UNDERSTANDING

THE MAGIC BEHIND EVERY BOTTLE



TASTING ROOM SERVERS ARE THE IN-PERSON CONNECTION TO LOYAL GUESTS.

This guide serves as a companion to the WSU Tri-Cities Tasting Room Server Training, which equips servers with the knowledge, resources, and skills to **help them provide the highest quality visitor experiences.**

PART 1: OVERVIEW

THE FOUR MODULES TO WINE CONFIDENCE

The Wine Server Training Course is offered (online, year-round) by WSU Tri-Cities and consists of four modules designed to take servers on a journey to better understand the role and skills of a tasting room server. Servers taking this course will increase their knowledge of wine, including proper serving techniques and guest service skills while becoming more confident in talking about and selling wine.



MODULE 1

EXPLORING WINE

This module provides a general overview of wine and how it is made and categorized and what is important for servers to know in order to perform their job better.

- Topic 1: What is Wine?
- Topic 2: How is Wine Made?
- Topic 3: What are Wine Styles?
- Topic 4: What are the Colors of Wine?
- Topic 5: What Are the Leading Wine Grapes of the U.S. and the World?

MODULE 1 OUTCOME

Servers will have **more knowledge** of wine and **more confidence** in their job.



MODULE 2

WINES OF WASHINGTON

This module will prepare servers to share with guests the background and unique aspects of the wines and grape growing regions specific to the state of Washington.

- Topic 1: Washington State Wine Regional Overview
- Topic 2: Wine Labeling Requirements
- Topic 3: Washington State Wine History
- Topic 4: What Makes Wine From the State of Washington Different?
- Topic 5: Washington State Appellations
- Topic 6: Wine Industry Partners

MODULE 2 OUTCOME

Servers will be able and **excited to share and answer questions** related to the unique aspects of Washington wines.



MODULE 3



KEYS TO PROPER WINE SERVICE & SALES

Delivering great wine service for guests is crucial to the success of any tasting room. This module will illustrate the keys to how to open and serve wine properly.

- Topic 1: Proper Wine Service
- Topic 2: Keys to Serving Wine From a Bar
- Topic 3: Proper Glassware and Proper Caring of Glassware
- Topic 4: Guest Service Training
- Topic 5: Suggestive Selling
- Topic 6: Just in Case: Ways to Deal With Disruptive Guests or Groups

MODULE 3 OUTCOME

Servers will suggest, present, and serve wine in a professional, consistent manner **enhancing the guest experience and benefiting the winery.**



Learning to enhance the guest experience is foremost in developing as a certified tasting room server.



MODULE 4



WINE TASTING, EVALUATION & FOOD PAIRING

This module will explore components in both wine and food that pair well together.

- Topic 1: Tasting Wine
- Topic 2: Wine Flights
- Topic 3: Evaluating Wine
- Topic 4: Wine Flaws / Faults
- Topic 5: Describing Wine
- Topic 6: Keys to Wine Food & Pairing

MODULE 4 OUTCOME

Servers will **understand the process** of proper tasting and be able to describe wine so they can share the process with tasting room guests and **enhance guest enjoyment** and confidence.

PART 2: COURSE HIGHLIGHTS

REFRESH YOURSELF

This section helps continue to reinforce the principles covered in the Wine Server Certificate Training, highlighting key topics that are central to every tasting room experience.

How to Properly Open a Bottle of Wine

How to Describe Wine Like a Seasoned Veteran

Know Your Grape Varietals

Telling the Story Behind Your Winery's Wine List

Customer Service in the Tasting Room

Sell More Wine Club Memberships With Suggestive Selling

THE KEY TO A GOOD OPENING

Learn to use a wine key, also known as the waiter's corkscrew or waiter's friend. Practice at home until you are confident.



Close-up view of a wine key. Note the two tiered lever and the single screw that is left above the cork when it is fully inserted.

QUICK OPENING ETIQUETTE TIPS:

- 1** Older bottles (15+ years) can have fragile corks. Handle the corkscrew gently or use an Ah-So opener (2 pronged) to squeeze and pull the cork.
- 2** If the cork is brittle and falls apart upon opening, it can be strained out and does not affect the wine.
- 3** When opening a bottle the customer has purchased, offer the cork to the purchaser to check for TCA, then check it yourself before pouring. Skip this step for screw-top closures.



DESCRIBING WINE

Like a Seasoned Veteran



IT'S A SUBTLE ART

You'll want to be as analytical as you are fanciful. It can be helpful to develop a formula that you can apply to any tasting. Think of it like the Mad Libs from your childhood where you've got a story outline with placeholders for nouns, adjectives, etc... only instead you'll have placeholders for body words, structure words, and aroma/flavor words.

DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS

Body Words:

Full, Light, Fat, Thin

Structure Words:

Tannic, Acidic, Soft, Bright

Aroma & Flavor Words:

Raspberry, Blackberry, Grapefruit, Cut Herbs

WINE DESCRIPTION FORMULA EXAMPLE

This wine is [Body Word] and [Structure Word] with hints of [Aroma & Flavor Word] on the nose and an [Aroma & Flavor Word] in the finish.

Resulting Description:

"This wine is full and tannic with hints of raspberry on the nose and blackberry on the finish."

KEEP PRACTICING

Remember that describing wine isn't restricted to this method of using tasting descriptors. Practice and find your own "language" that guests find most relatable or understandable.

HELPFUL LINKS:

[CREATIVE WINE DESCRIPTION TEMPLATES](#)

[GLOSSARY OF WINE TERMS](#)

**Access your digital copy of this companion for clickable links to these resources.*

REFRESH YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF WINE GRAPES

Remember that each wine grape has a distinct personality, which is in turn developed by its region. You should know the difference between a Chardonnay and a Sauvignon Blanc, or between a Pinot Noir and a Merlot. A great resource for learning about individual grape varieties can be found via the “helpful link” below the acreage table on this page.

GET TO KNOW THE GRAPE VARIETALS OF WASHINGTON STATE!

Major Grape Varietals in Washington State According to Number of Acres Grown:

WINE GRAPE VARIETAL	# OF ACRES
Cabernet Sauvignon	10,297
Merlot	8,235
Chardonnay	7,654
Riesling	6,320
Syrah	3,103

Based on 2022 data from: www.washingtonwine.org/grapes-soil-sun/

HELPFUL LINK:

LEARN MORE ABOUT INDIVIDUAL GRAPE VARIETIES

**Access your digital copy of this companion for a clickable link to this resource.*

KNOW YOUR WINE LIST...AND BE READY TO DESCRIBE IT TO GUESTS

If you're talking with a guest who knows more about wine than you do, try to get them talking. People love to talk about the things they're interested in, after all. Ask them if they've ever traveled to a wine region—they'll love the attention.

However, sometimes less is more. If your guest wants to simply enjoy a glass of wine because they like it, great! Let them enjoy the experience of wine and don't over assert yourself.



Understanding wine and being able to explain your wine list to your guests will increase your sales, and subsequently your tips. Your wine skills will give you confidence and enhance the tasting room experience of your guests.

CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS REFRESH

Business is not about what you sell but rather who you serve. Can you give your guests something extra? Call them by name, remember their favorite wines, offer a taste of another wine, etc.



SERVICE

Our main priority must be serving others and taking pride in service as a noble profession.

Ask Yourself:

Is serving others your main priority?



ATTITUDE

How you think of your guests is how you will treat them, and your attitude will dictate your interaction.

Ask Yourself:

What is your attitude about your customers?



CONSISTENCY

There are no shortcuts to consistency. You must set high standards and stick to them.

If your customers loved what they experienced the first time, they will come back and expect that same level of service every time.

Ask Yourself:

What are you committing to doing over & over again?



TEAMWORK

A team is a group of people who go out of their way to make each other look good.

Treat your internal team the same as your external customers.

Ask Yourself:

How are you helping your team look good in front of your customers?

HELPFUL VIDEO:

KEYS TO GREAT WINE SERVICE

**Access your digital copy of this companion for a clickable link to this resource.*



SUGGESTIVE SELLING & WINE CLUB MEMBERSHIPS

Get comfortable with selling more wine and wine club

memberships: Increase your guests' experience and ultimately boost the bottom line.

Upselling wine isn't always easy. But it is a valuable sales technique, and when executed with tact, grace, and thoughtfulness, it can be a highly effective way to increase the sales of your winery.

Upselling doesn't exclusively mean selling higher-priced bottles, nor does it have to be difficult.

Each winery has a different philosophy when promoting their wine club.

You might work at a winery that actively engages and promotes the wine club to each guest. Sometimes the winery might even require you to reach a monthly quota for club sign-ups.

Some wineries might take a less direct approach and only mention the wine club when asked by guests.

Regardless of where you

work, it is essential to know how your wine club functions.

Ultimately, it's important you feel comfortable presenting the club to customers.

Why does this matter? Because how you present the wine club might determine if a customer chooses to join.

GET COMFORTABLE PITCHING THE WINE CLUB

1. Practice pitching your wine club to your coworkers, family, and friends.
2. Ask your wine club manager questions.
3. Learn everything you can about your wine club.
4. Explore other winery websites for information on their wine clubs.
5. Train yourself to know nonverbal clues that guests might be interested in the club (for example, if a guest is reading the wine club pamphlet).

WINERY & VINEYARD SPECIFIC TRAINING IDEAS



VINEYARD OPERATIONS DAY

Have the vineyard manager take the tasting room staff to the vineyard.

Helping tasting room associates understand vineyard operations will prepare them to speak more knowledgeably about the wine making process and give patrons a more detailed view of your operation.

Discuss the stages of the vineyard growing season and how the passing of each event announces the beginning of a new stage in the vineyard management cycle.

THE VINEYARD MANAGEMENT CYCLE



BUD BREAK

Vines emerge from winter dormancy and initial growth begins with buds that develop leaves which restart photosynthesis.



FLOWER CLUSTER INITIATION

Initiation of flower clusters occurs in the vines' primary buds. Maximum yield is determined by the number of flower clusters.



CANOPY MANAGEMENT

Vines are trimmed to remove extraneous growth and keep the canopy open to light and increased airflow, reducing disease.



FLOWERING

The initial flower clusters develop and small bunches of tiny flowers bloom.



FRUIT SET

Each tiny flower develops into a peppercorn-sized berry.



BERRY DEVELOPMENT

Berries continue to develop and mature on the vine.



HARVEST

Ripe fruit is removed from the vine using either hand or machine methods.



DORMANCY

Vines suspend vegetative growth and drop their leaves, entering a period of winter rest.



WINERY OPERATIONS DAY

*Crafting A Vintage Takes Special Care
Through Each Part of the Process*

Having both the winemaker and vineyard manager discuss with tasting room staff, even by walking through the vineyard and winery, can help provide them with a glimpse into the craft of fine winemaking. Make sure the staff are fluent in the backgrounds of the winemaker and vineyard manager.

pieces of knowledge the tasting room staff must know is the story of the winery and the winery owners.

Becoming fluent in the winery story, as well as the people who created the brand, are integral. Sometimes, however, not all the employees or tasting room staff possess the information necessary to explain a clear and consistent message for guests. ☺

THE BACKSTORY

One of the most essential



Ensure tasting room staff are familiar with the year-round operations of a winery:



FRUIT PROCESSING

Identify where your winery's fruit is sourced and where it ends up after it is harvested.



FERMENTATION PROCESS

Review the fermentation process and the factors necessary to help that process along.



CELLARING & STORAGE

Discuss the importance of barrel programs and oak selection when cellaring wine.



FILTRATION & BOTTLING

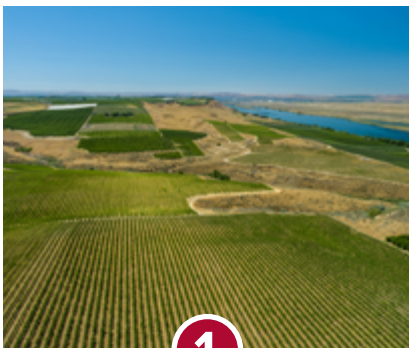
Show each step in your winery's filtration and bottling process.



A SPECIAL FOCUS ON HARVESTING GRAPES

Harvesting grapes is not only the first step individual grapes make towards the finished bottle, but it is also the busiest time of the year for a winery. Showing and having tasting room staff assist in this key component of the wine process can help deepen their understanding of the entire winemaking process.

A wonderful experience for tasting room staff is a three-step process during harvest



1

VINEYARD TOUR

Tour of the vineyard during harvest where participants are able to see the vines and vineyard environment while picking and tasting some of the grapes.



2

WINERY VISIT

Go to the winery and taste juice during the crush of the grapes they picked. This gives them a chance to taste 'unfermented' juice.



3

TASTE OF A PREVIOUS HARVEST

Taste a glass of the wine, from a previous vintage, to see the evolution of the juice from grape to bottle.

WINEMAKING TASTING EXPERIENCES

Having a strong understanding of the winemaking process is required for any tasting room associate who wants to succeed.

Not only does this allow the server to articulate and convey accurate information about winemaking, but also prepares them to answer questions posed by guests...particularly guests within the industry.

OAKEN INFLUENCERS

Tasting room staff who are fluent in winemaking practices will reflect

positively on your winery. Familiarize staff with the winery barrel program and other containers used in production.

Blind tastings can be an incredibly useful tool in understanding the elements of wine. Do blind tastings of various oak barrels, clones, or acid additions to illustrate the impact these practices have on the final product. 🍷

Inhale the
AROMA

Describe the
TASTE

Analyze the
FINISH

Name the
VARIETAL



UNCORKED

Allowing tasting staff to participate in the winemaking process can help extend their knowledge beyond standard theory and equip them to discuss wine, and the processes by which it's made, in a more clear and concise manner.



MOVING FORWARD

Hands on experience is always more valuable than theory alone.



This companion resource was developed in collaboration with:

WSU WINE TASTING ROOM SERVER TRAINING CERTIFICATE COMPANION

CRIMSON Vines
MARKETING

WINEMAKING TASTING EXPERIENCES

TASTING IS BELIEVING

The purpose of these activities is to show the tasting room staff what winemaking is all about. Staff, despite their occupation, may not necessarily understand or believe some of these winemaking techniques. Allowing them to taste the wine, and see the impacts, reveals the proof within the pudding. In addition, this will help them feel more comfortable talking about winemaking in front of guests.



ACID ADDITION

Provide three glasses to each participant. Have the glasses randomized and add increasing levels of tartaric acid to wine. Ask the tasters to identify which they think is the highest acid level and arrange them least acidic to most acidic.



BLENDING OF GRAPES

Provide three samples of the same wine (for example, 100% Semillon). Add an increased amount (1%, 2%, and 3%) to each sample of a different grape variety (for example, Chardonnay). This can help staff realize the importance of blending in precise amounts and how some grape varieties, even in minuscule quantities, have a larger impact on the final product.



OAK PROGRAM

Provide two or three samples per taster. Keep the information anonymous and allow the staff to discuss amongst themselves. Have them attempt to guess which oak application was used on each sample. Tell them what type of oak was applied to each sample (French, American, Hungarian etc.) Finish the night by blending the samples to highlight the usefulness of diverse oak programs.



CLONES

Provide two glasses to each participant with each glass containing a specified clone. Have the winemaker discuss what clones are and how they influence the final blend. Have the tasting room staff discuss what they think of each sample. Finish the tasting by having staff blend their samples together and discuss the differences.

TASTING WORKSHOP IDEA #1



SWEET X SWEET

Example:
Sweet Wine with
Chocolate or Fruit

TART X CREAMY

Example:
Sauvignon Blanc
with Ranch Dressing

TANNIC X FAT

Example:
Cabernet
with Bacon

ACIDIC X SPICY

Example:
Wasabi with
Riesling

Wine and food both influence the senses and pairing them in different ways can alter the experience dramatically.

ROLE PLAY PAIRING

Pretend to be a guest and ask the staff what food they should pair with a particular wine. Ask them to describe why the pairing works. Could it be improved or augmented by changing the type of wine? 🗣️

DYNAMIC DUOS

Try an array of different food pairings with red and white wines. Have a variety of bite-sized food offerings, bread, cheese, bacon, etc.

CLASSIC WINE FOOD PAIRINGS:

- Unoaked Chardonnay with Salmon and Garlic Butter
- Sauvignon Blanc with Smoked Gouda and Manchengo
- Pinot Noir with Savory Dishes
- Riesling with Sweet or Spicy Flavors
- Syrah with Spiced Dishes
- Rosé with Cheesy Dishes
- Cabernet with Rib Eye Steak
- Pinot Grigio with Seafood
- Sparkling with Salty Flavors
- Zinfandel with Rich Dishes

TASTING WORKSHOP IDEA #2




There are nine primary styles of wine. Each style can be further broken down into sub-categories based on the grape variety and production method.

RED, WHITE & NEW

Provide a pair of wines (both either red or white). One wine should be from your winery, while the second should be a European or other new world counterpart.

TASTE THE DIFFERENCES

Pour each sample but don't allow the staff to know the identity of each. Once the tasting room staff attempt to identify the origin of each sample, reveal the identity of each wine and present an opportunity for discussion.

This tends to help the staff taste the differences each region can produce. For example, compare two styles of white wine (White Burgundy vs Chardonnay from Columbia Valley) and red wines (Syrah from the Northern Rhone vs. Syrah from the Rocks in Walla Walla). 



TERROIR / TER'WÄR /

The terroir of a region encompasses the complete natural environment that a varietal of grapes is grown in including the climate, soil, and topography of a region, all of which contribute to the unique flavors and aromas found in the grapes grown there and subsequently the wines made from those grapes.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO RAISE A VINTAGE



MOVIES

There are a few movies that your guests may have seen and reference. Here are three of the most popular.



Bottle Shock



Sideways



Sour Grapes



PODCASTS

Got time in the car on the way to the tasting room? Dive into one of these engaging wine related podcasts.



I'll Drink To That



Guild Somm



Wine For Normal People



VIDEOS

Deepen your knowledge of wine with these immersive wine related videos.



Wine Aroma Wheel



The Missoula Floods Explained



The Wines Of Washington State



GREAT OVERVIEWS

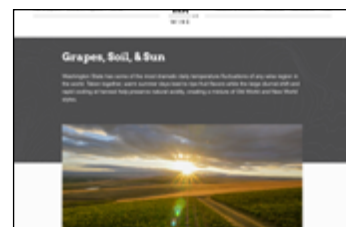
These overviews provide a bird's eye view that can help you take flight into the world of wine.



Wine Tasting Workout



Review Of The Washington Wine Industry



**Washington Wine 101
An Educational Primer**

**Access your digital copy of this companion for clickable links to these resources.*



PATHWAYS TO ENHANCE YOUR CAREER IN THE WINE INDUSTRY

1. WINE TASTING ROOM SERVER TRAINING CERTIFICATE

This is the parent course to the companion you are reading now. It consists of about 8 hours of online/on-demand server wine training for those looking to better their knowledge of wine and enhance skills in serving & selling.

WTRST Certificate



2. WINE AND BEVERAGE BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

The flexible one-year, online, non-credit certificate program in Wine Business Management will benefit students who are seriously interested in working in the wine industry and want to expand their knowledge to enhance their current position or change in career. Modules can be taken separately or combined for the certificate.

Wine and Beverage
Business Management



3. VITICULTURE CERTIFICATE

This non-credit, professional certificate consists of eleven courses that can be completed online, at any time of day, meeting the demands of busy professionals. The certificate also includes three weekend camps that provide students with hands-on experience and networking opportunities.

Viticulture Certificate



3. ENOLOGY (WINE SCIENCE) CERTIFICATE

This non-credit, professional certificate consists of nine courses that can be completed online, at any time of day, meeting the demands of busy professionals. The certificate also includes three weekend camps that provide students with hands-on experience and networking opportunities.

Enology Certificate



4. FUNDAMENTALS OF BUSINESS CERTIFICATE

In this online, on-demand training learners will develop a basic understanding of business concepts, including the importance of meeting customer and key stakeholders' needs. The 10-hour course looks inside to identify how businesses work: how they are structured, what functions they perform, the constraints they operate under, and what ultimately enables them to survive and grow.

Fundamentals of
Business Certificate



5. CULTIVATING SERVICE EXCELLENCE CERTIFICATE

In this training, you will gain a set of service skills proven to increase customer satisfaction, build strong relationships, and impact the success of your organization.

Cultivating Service
Excellence Certificate





LEADING THE WAY IN WINE EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
TRI-CITIES

2710 Crimson Way, Richland,
Washington 99354

✉ tricity.professionaleducation@wsu.edu

WWW.TRICITIES.WSU.EDU