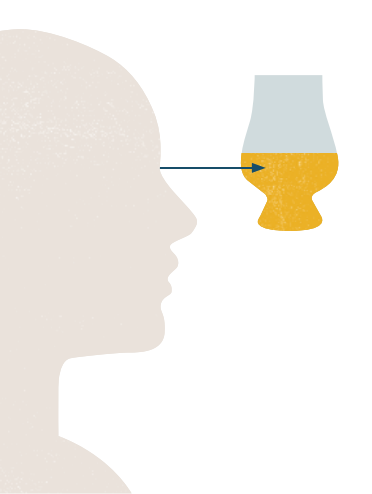


START TASTING

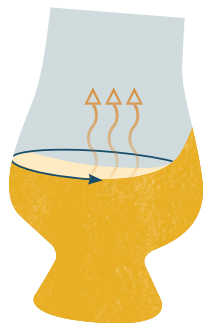
Take a tasting glass and pour around 2cm (1 in) of whisky. Use the same techniques for every drink you try. It provides a great benchmark from which to assess each whisky's characteristics.



1

LOOK AT THE COLOUR

Hold the glass up against a white background. Colour can provide a clue as to what type of cask the whisky has been aged in and for how long. The spirit will normally be clear, but if it is not this may be because it has not been chill-filtered to remove any fatty acids.



2

SWIRL THE WHISKY

Gently swirl the whisky in the glass. Higher-alcohol, or cask-strength, whiskies may throw slower "tears" – those oily trails that cling to the side of the glass. This process also agitates the whisky, forcing the aromas up to the top of the glass.



3

TAKE A SNIFF

Bring the glass to your nose and sniff gently: remember, whisky is high in alcohol and is absorbed by your nasal membranes. Once you are comfortable with the alcohol in your olfactory organs, breathe in more deeply, taking note of any specific aromas you detect.



4

TAKE A SIP

Take enough whisky into your mouth to cover your tongue. Roll it around in your mouth, coating as many sensory areas as possible. Does it taste the same as it smelled? What additional flavours have you stumbled across? Do you like what you are tasting?



5

ADD A LITTLE WATER

Try adding a little spring or filtered water, gradually and preferably using a pipette. Add just a few drops to begin with, so as not to over-dilute your whisky. The introduction of water releases the aromas and flavours otherwise locked in by the alcohol.



6

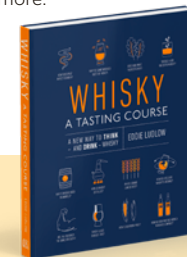
FINISH UP!

When you swallow the whisky, with and without water, take note of the flavour and the texture in your mouth and on your tongue. Is it oily, velvety or waxy? You are looking for a finish that rounds off the experience beautifully, leaving you wanting more.

COLOUR CAN PROVIDE A CLUE AS TO WHAT TYPE OF CASK THE WHISKY HAS BEEN AGED IN AND FOR HOW LONG

TO PIPETTE OR NOT?

A pipette is a useful tool for adding precise amounts of water. Start small and add more until it feels right. You can go "freehand", and not use a pipette, but this gives you less control.



THE LANGUAGE OF WHISKY

Whisky is arguably the world's most complex spirit. Articulating its flavours can be a challenge, particularly when you're tasting for the first time. Once you master whisky's "language" you will find your tasting voice.

LEARN THE LINGO

Before you start, remember: what you are doing in this book is *tasting*, not drinking. You'll be looking for words to describe flavours, aromas, and more, in order to understand and enjoy your whiskies better.

You may struggle at first, or you may feel self-conscious uttering words and phrases that at first seem a bit silly or over-the-top. But this is how you'll learn how to identify the spirits' flavour elements. Just let yourself go. Express yourself!

A PERSONAL TASTE

There is no right or wrong when it comes to the words you use. You will taste things your friends don't, and vice versa, because people's palates and experiences are all different. So don't worry if your notes aren't the same as those of

the taster standing next to you; they're bound to be different – and that's the whole point. Tasting whisky is a personal experience.

CHOOSE YOUR WORDS

The best tasting notes are those that have clearly been extracted from tasters' imaginations and show that a whisky has really "spoken" to them.

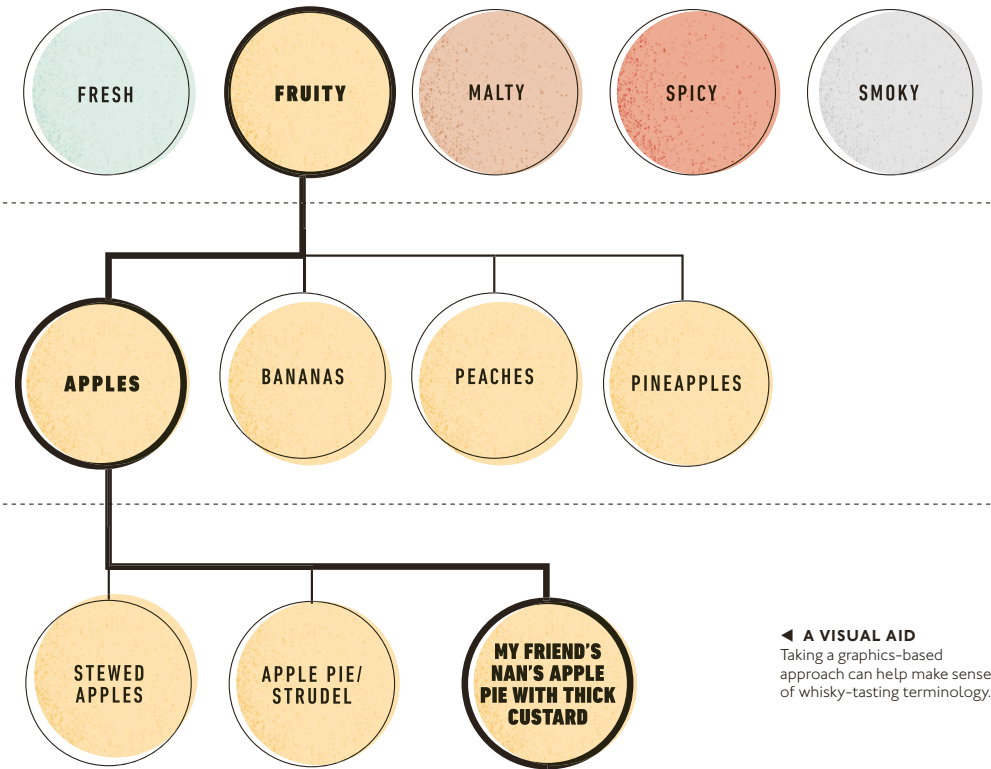
They're not just a shopping list of flavours, but a window into what that whisky has meant to a person and why.

The important thing is to make your description personal and something that you can relate to.

So, how to begin? Start by using simple, broad terms, such as:

- Fresh
- Fruity
- Malty
- Spicy
- Smoky

THE BEST TASTING NOTES ARE THOSE THAT HAVE BEEN CLEARLY EXTRACTED FROM THE TASTERS' IMAGINATIONS



◀ A VISUAL AID Taking a graphics-based approach can help make sense of whisky-tasting terminology.

BEYOND THE BASICS

Some, but not necessarily all, of these basic flavours will be found in any whiskies you taste. Once you have identified a whisky's flavour category (or "camp"), try exploring that category further.

For example, if you've detected a fruity flavour in your glass, which fruit does it most resemble? What is the dominant fruit flavour?

Try thinking:

- Apples
- Bananas
- Peaches
- Pineapples

If it is apples, what kind? Fresh, candied, cooked, spiced? Your notes should now begin to look something like this:

- Fruity
 - Apples
 - Stewed apples
 - Apple pie/strudel
 - My friend's nan's apple pie with thick custard

DO IT YOUR WAY

You will in time evolve your own "language", but basing it on a system of categories and sub-categories like this is a good start.

KEEPING A RECORD

There is no "official" way to make tasting notes.

However, a good basic structure would be to first write down the name of the whisky you taste, and when you tasted it. Then describe, in your own words: how the whisky looks; its aroma, or "nose"; its taste, or palate; the length or otherwise of its finish; and then any general comments you have.

ZESTY PEATY
SWEET SOFT
SPICY CHEWY
MEDIUM-LENGTH

▲ WHISKY WORDS

These words crop up often in whisky tastings. Use them, but add your own terminology, too.

