



**WSET**  
WINE & SPIRIT  
EDUCATION TRUST

# WSET® Level 1 Award in Spirits

# *Specification*

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Designed by Paul Barrett

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# Introduction

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This Specification contains necessary information for both candidates and Approved Programme Providers (APPs) about the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits.

The main part of the document is a detailed statement of the Learning Outcomes of the Level 1 Award in Spirits. These outcomes should be used by APPs to prepare programmes of learning, and by candidates to plan their studies, because the examination is specifically set to test these outcomes.

The Specification also provides a list of recommended tasting samples, guidance concerning the examination and the examination regulations.

At the end of this document you will also find information on the other WSET qualifications.

# 1

## Introduction to the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits

### Qualification aims

The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits is intended for people who have little or no prior knowledge of spirits. It is designed to provide a sound but simple introduction to spirits, and will assist those who need a basic familiarity with the main styles and categories, for example people who work with spirits in the retail and hospitality sectors.

Successful candidates will be able to list the principal spirits categories, state their defining characteristics, and know the key principles involved in creating a balanced cocktail. They will consequently be able to answer customer queries and provide recommendations for spirits service.

### Qualification structure

#### Learning outcomes

In order to meet the qualification aims there are three Learning Outcomes.

<b>Learning outcome 1</b>	List and state the purpose of the main production processes and stills commonly used in the production of spirits.
<b>Learning outcome 2</b>	Name the principal categories and types of spirits and aromatised wines and state their defining characteristics.
<b>Learning outcome 3</b>	Know the principles used to create a balanced cocktail and name some core cocktail families.

### Entry requirements

There are no restrictions on entry to the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits.

Please refer to section Entry Requirements on page 13 for additional eligibility information.

### Total Qualification Time (TQT) and Guided Learning Hours (GLH)

TQT is an estimate of the total amount of time, measured in hours, that a learner would reasonably need to be able to show the level of achievement necessary for the award of a qualification. It is made up of GLH and private study time. GLH include all tutor-supervised learning and supervised assessments.

The TQT for the Level 1 Award in Spirits is 6 hours of GLH. This includes 45 minutes for the examination.

### Recommended progression routes

The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits provides a good foundation for progressing to the WSET Level 2 Award in Spirits.

## 2

## Learning Outcomes

**Learning outcome 1**

List and state the purpose of the main production processes and stills commonly used in the production of spirits.

**Assessment criteria**

1. List and state the purpose of the four key stages used in spirits production.
2. Identify the two types of still, state how they are used and what styles of spirit they can produce.
3. Identify the production processes that affect the aroma, sweetness and colour of a spirit.

**Ranges****Range 1: Four key stages of production**

<b>Key stages</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Processing the raw material to create a sugary liquid</li> <li>2. Alcoholic fermentation to create an alcoholic liquid</li> <li>3. Distillation to concentrate ethanol to create a spirit</li> <li>4. Post-distillation operations to adjust the colour, aroma, sweetness and alcoholic strength of a spirit</li> </ol>
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**Range 2: Types of still**

<b>Pot stills</b>	Batch distillation Lower strength spirits = medium to pronounced aroma intensity
<b>Column stills</b>	Continuous distillation Lower strength spirits = medium to pronounced aroma intensity Higher strength spirits = light or neutral aroma intensity

**Range 3: Production processes that affect the aroma, sweetness and colour of a spirit**

<b>Aromas</b>	Raw material, fermentation, distillation strength, unaged, oak ageing (new and old oak), blending (consistency and complexity), re-distillation, maceration, adding purchased natural/other flavourings, dilution with pure water
<b>Sweetness</b>	Added sugar
<b>Colour</b>	Oak, caramel colour, other natural or artificial colours

## Learning outcome 2

Name the principal categories and types of spirits and aromatised wines and state their defining characteristics.

### Assessment criteria

1. Name the principal categories and types of spirits and aromatised wines and state the key aroma characteristics of these beverages.
2. Name the raw materials used for the principal categories and types of spirit.
3. Identify key production processes that influence the characteristics of the principal categories and types of spirits and aromatised wines.
4. State the meaning of key labelling terms for the principal categories and types of spirits and aromatised wines.

### Ranges

Ranges 1, 2, 3 and 4: Principal categories and types of spirit	
<b>Cognac</b>	
Raw material	Grapes
Key production processes	Grapes must come from a defined area, double pot still distillation, must be aged in oak barrels for at least two years, blending, caramel colour, often sweetened
Key labelling terms	VS (minimum age of two years), VSOP (minimum age of four years), XO (minimum age of 10 years)
<b>Vodka</b>	
Raw material	Any raw material (grains and potato are traditional)
Key production processes	Distilled to 95% abv or 96% abv, unaged
<b>Whisky/Whiskey</b>	
Key production processes	Malting barley to create enzymes Enzymes created by malted barley used to convert starch to sugar
<b>Scotland</b>	
Type	Single Malt Whisky
Raw material	Malted barley
Key production processes	Pot still distillation, must be aged in oak barrels for at least three years, must be distilled and aged in Scotland, peat (optional), blending, caramel colour
Key labelling terms	Single, Malt Whisky
Type	Blended Scotch Whisky
Raw material	Malted barley and other grains

## Learning Outcomes

Key production processes	Blend of malt and grain whisky, must be aged in oak barrels for at least three years, must be distilled and aged in Scotland, blending, caramel colour
Key labelling terms	Blended Scotch Whisky
<b>USA</b>	
Type	Bourbon
Raw material	Corn (at least 51%) and other grains
Key production processes	Distilled in a column still to a low strength, new charred oak barrels, can be made anywhere in the USA, Kentucky number one state for production, blending
Key labelling terms	Bourbon
Type	Tennessee
Raw material	Corn (at least 51%) and other grains
Key production processes	Same as Bourbon except it can only be distilled and aged in Tennessee and the newly made spirit is passed through a maple charcoal filter before maturation
Key labelling terms	Tennessee
Type	Rye
Raw material	Rye (at least 51%) and other grains
Key production processes	Distilled to a low strength, new oak barrels, can be made anywhere in the USA, blending
Key labelling terms	Rye
<b>Other Whiskies</b>	
Type	Ireland, Canada, Japan
<b>Caribbean rum</b>	
Raw material	Sugar cane (sugar cane juice, molasses)
Key production processes	Choice of raw material, fermentation, choice of still, distillation strength, oak-aged, unaged, blending, caramel colour (optional), sweetening (not always permitted)
Key labelling term	<i>Rhum agricole</i>

## Learning Outcomes

Tequila	
Raw material	Blue agave
Key production processes	Blue agave must come from a defined area, conversion by cooking, typically distilled to a low strength, blending, caramel colour
Key labelling terms	Tequila, Tequila 100% agave <i>Blanco/silver, oro/joven/gold, reposado, añejo</i>
Flavoured spirits	
Types	Flavoured vodka, gin, bitter spirit, cocktail bitters, spiced rum, liqueur
Key production processes	Juniper must be the predominant flavour in gin Key bitter botanicals: gentian, quinine, bitter orange Liqueurs must be sweetened Liqueurs can be made using either a neutral or a characterful spirit Cream
Key labelling term	London Dry Gin
Aromatised wines	
Types	Vermouth
Key production elements	Base wine, spirit, flavourings (some are bitter), sugar, caramel colour

### Learning outcome 3

*Know the principles used to create a balanced cocktail and name some core cocktail families.*

#### Assessment criteria

1. State the two sets of scales used to create a balanced cocktail.
2. Name four core cocktail families and some examples from each family.

#### Ranges

Range 1: Balance	
The two sets of scales	Strong vs weak Bitter and/or sour vs sweet

  

Range 2: Cocktail families	
The spirit-forward cocktail	Old Fashioned, Sazerac, Rusty Nail, Manhattan, Martini, Negroni
The short sour	Pisco Sour, Whiskey Sour, Daiquiri, Sidecar, Margarita, Clover Club
The highball	Cuba Libre, Greyhound, Horse's Neck
The long sour	Tom Collins, Paloma, French 75, Mojito, Singapore Sling

# 3

## Recommended Tasting Samples

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- A vodka
- A VSOP Cognac
- A peated Single Malt Scotch Whisky
- An unpeated Single Malt Scotch Whisky
- A Bourbon
- Two molasses-based rums
- A 100% Agave *Blanco* Tequila
- A London Dry Gin
- A vermouth

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# 4

## Examination Guidance

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### Examination administration

Examinations are conducted by WSET Approved Programme Providers (APPs). APPs must comply with WSET policies and procedures set out in the APP Handbook.

### Assessment method

The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits is assessed by a closed-book theory examination of 30 multiple-choice questions, to be completed in 45 minutes. Each question has only one correct answer, which should be indicated on either (a) a computer-readable answer sheet, or (b) a computer/other device, depending on the mode of assessment delivery. Full instructions on how to complete the test will be given on the day of the examination.

Each correctly answered multiple-choice question is worth one mark, and marks are NOT subtracted for incorrect answers. A candidate is required to pass with a minimum mark of 70 per cent.

### About the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits Examination

All examination questions are based on the published Learning Outcomes and examination papers are carefully compiled to reflect this content. The recommended study materials (*An Introduction to Spirits*) contain the information required to answer these questions.

A chart giving a detailed breakdown of the examination weighting is shown below.

Learning Outcome	Multiple-Choice Questions (1 mark per question)
1	5
2	20
3	5
	<b>30 marks</b>

## 5

## Examination Regulations

## 1 Entry requirements

## 1.1 Eligibility

- 1.1.1** Candidates applying to sit the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits examination must be over the legal minimum age for the retail purchase of alcoholic beverages in the country where the examination is being held, or be preparing for the examination as part of a recognised full-time programme of study, or have obtained consent from their parents or legal guardians.
- 1.1.2** There are no restrictions on entry to the WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits through overlaps with other qualifications or parts of qualifications.
- 1.1.3** Candidates who are under the legal minimum age for the retail purchase of alcoholic beverages in the country where the examination is being held, or those who choose not to taste alcohol (e.g. for health or religious reasons) will not be allowed/required to sample any alcoholic beverage as part of their course, but this is not a barrier to successfully completing the qualification.

## 1.2 Recommended Prior Learning

- 1.2.1** There are no requirements for candidates to have previous knowledge or previous experience of alcoholic beverages.
- 1.2.2** Candidates sitting in English where it is not their first language are strongly recommended to have IELTS at 6 or above or be able to demonstrate an equivalent ability level.
- 1.2.3** Candidates sitting in other languages should have an equivalent level of literacy in the language used for the examination.

## 2 Format and results

- 2.1** The WSET Level 1 Award in Spirits assessment is a closed-book theory examination of 45 minutes duration and consists of 30 multiple-choice questions worth one mark each.
- 2.2** Examination results are issued by WSET as follows:
- WSET will issue an all-candidate grade list to the APP so that they can communicate results to their candidates.
  - Subsequently, WSET posts candidates' record of achievement letters and certificates to APPs, who are responsible for forwarding these documents to their candidates.
- 2.3** Results are graded as follows:

Mark of 70% or more	Pass
Mark of 69% or below	Fail
WSET reserves the right to make changes to the grade thresholds published above.	

### 3 Reasonable adjustments

- 3.1 Examination candidates who have special examination requirements, which are supported by independent written assessment, are requested to notify the examinations officer at their APP of any such requirement at the time of enrolment. Further guidance for examination officers and candidates is available from WSET as required.
- 3.2 It is the policy of WSET that such candidates should not be placed at a disadvantage in the examinations. Candidates are responsible for informing their APP of any such requirement at the time of enrolment.

### 4 Resits

- 4.1 Candidates may apply to resit the examination if they are unsuccessful. There is no limit on the number of attempts that may be made.
- 4.2 Candidates who have passed are not permitted to retake them to improve their grade.

### 5 Examination conditions and conduct

- 5.1 By registering for a WSET exam, candidates agree to the following conditions:
  - Candidates must not be involved in any unfair or dishonest practice in any part of the examination. Malpractice or misconduct will be investigated in line with published WSET policy and may lead to sanctions including disqualification from the exam.
  - Before the exam all candidates must supply proof of identity in the form of photographic ID.
  - The exam is to be completed in the time specified.
  - Possession of reference material of any kind is prohibited.
  - Once exam conditions are in place, no communication of any kind between candidates is permitted until they have left the examination room or the end of the exam has been announced.
  - During the exam candidates are only permitted to have the following items with them: pens, pencils, erasers and drinking water.
  - It is prohibited for candidates to photograph exam materials, reveal the content of exam papers to others, or to reproduce it in any way. The use of electronic devices of any kind, other than a computer or mobile device which is being used to sit an exam, is prohibited.
  - Mobile phones (which are not being used in a remote invigilation context) must be switched off and placed out of sight, away from the examination desk.
  - The use of audible 'alarms' on any clock or watch is prohibited.

#### In-Person examinations

- Candidates may not leave the room until the first 15 minutes of the exam time have elapsed.
- Candidates who arrive after the published start time will NOT be allowed to sit the exam if any other candidate has already left the exam.
- Candidates who arrive late may be allowed to enter the room at the discretion of the invigilator and only if other candidates are not compromised. Under normal circumstances we would not expect any candidate to be allowed to start the exam if they arrive more than 30 minutes after the published start time.
- Candidates may not leave, and then return to, the examination room once the exam has started unless they can be accompanied by an invigilator at all times while they are out of the examination room.
- Candidates who complete the exam early may leave the examination room up until the last 10 minutes providing they do not disturb other candidates; no re-admission is permitted.

## Examination Regulations

- Invigilators have no authority to comment upon, interpret, or express an opinion on any exam question.
- Any candidate who is suspected of misconduct will be advised to leave the examination room immediately.
- No exam question papers are to be removed from the examination room; candidates who fail to submit the question paper with their answer sheet will be deemed guilty of misconduct.

### Remote Invigilation examinations

- Clear guidance on how to administrate remotely invigilated exams and associated regulations will be given to applicable candidates in advance of their examination.
- 5.2** Candidates also agree to abide by the invigilator's instructions. Failure to do so may render a candidate's results invalid.
- 5.3** WSET reserves the right to permanently exclude candidates found guilty of misconduct from WSET qualifications
- 5.4** Examination papers and answer sheets are the property of WSET and will not be returned to candidates.

## 6 Examination feedback, enquiries and appeals

- 6.1** Candidates requiring enquiry (re-mark) and/or feedback on their examination paper should contact their APP and request an Enquiry and Feedback Form.
- 6.2** Any candidate dissatisfied with the result of an enquiry of an examination paper should contact the APP and request an Appeal Against Enquiry Application Form, which must be completed and returned to WSET, together with the appropriate fee, no more than 10 working days following notification of the enquiry decision. Appeals received outside this time-frame will not be reviewed.

## 7 Candidate satisfaction

- 7.1** Should any candidate have concerns that their APP is not providing the service that they expect, or is behaving in a way that is inconsistent with the standards required in terms of administration, tuition or examinations, they should first make a complaint to their APP. If this does not lead to a satisfactory resolution, candidates are asked to contact our Quality Assurance Team by emailing [qa@wsetglobal.com](mailto:qa@wsetglobal.com). Please note that all complaints will be dealt with confidentially, but WSET cannot act on anonymous complaints.

## 8 General conduct

- 8.1** WSET has a reasonable expectation that its staff and those representing WSET at our APPs will be treated professionally and respectfully as they carry out their jobs. Inappropriate behaviour including verbal or physical abuse, persistent or unrealistic demands, or threats that cause stress to staff will be viewed as misconduct and may lead to permanent exclusion from WSET qualifications.

## 9 Examination regulations

- 9.1** WSET reserves the right to add to or alter any of these regulations as it thinks fit.

# 6

## WSET Qualifications

WSET has a range of qualifications that cover sake and wine as well as spirits. In full, the qualifications are:

WSET® Level 1 Award in Wines (600/1504/4)  
WSET® Level 2 Award in Wines (603/4432/5)  
WSET® Level 3 Award in Wines (601/6352/5)  
WSET® Level 4 Diploma in Wines

WSET® Level 1 Award in Spirits (600/1501/9)  
WSET® Level 2 Award in Spirits (600/1507/X)  
WSET® Level 3 Award in Spirits

WSET® Level 1 Award in Sake (603/2051/5)  
WSET® Level 3 Award in Sake (603/2066/7)

More information about all of these qualifications can be found on the WSET website [wsetglobal.com](https://www.wsetglobal.com).

### Regulation

WSET is recognised as an awarding organisation by Ofqual, the English regulator for qualifications and examinations. Where applicable, the Ofqual accreditation numbers are listed next to the Qualification title above.

WSET operates a Quality Management System that complies with the requirements of **BS EN ISO 9001** for the management of awards for qualifications and examinations in the product knowledge and tasting competence of alcoholic beverages.



### Diversity and equality policy

WSET fully supports the principle of diversity and equality and is responsible for ensuring that all candidates for its qualifications are treated fairly and on an equal basis. A copy of our diversity and equality policy can be obtained from the Quality Assurance Team by emailing [qa@wsetglobal.com](mailto:qa@wsetglobal.com).

### WSET prizes

Candidates who have achieved outstanding marks in their examinations may be eligible for a prize and will be contacted by WSET should this apply. For more details on the prizes available, please go to: <https://www.wsetglobal.com/about-us/awards-bursaries/>



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