The Bubbly Professor's Guide:

How to Study for a Wine or Spirits Theory Exam

Excerpts and elaborations on study skills and learning from the *Bubbly Professor* blog

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Introduction

This material, based on extended research as well as my personal experience as a lifelong learner and professional educator, was originally published—bit by bit—as a series of blog posts on my personal blog, *the Bubbly Professor*.

I began to post learning-and education-based articles on the blog many years ago. I had noticed, over the decades, that my students—whether they be young or old, based in the United States or China, college students or middle-aged career-changers—all shared the same common concerns about how best to tackle the overwhelming task of studying wine and spirits. Eventually, I ended up with a series of articles directed at adult learners that were scattered throughout the blog and as such, not conducive to ease-of-use.

For that reason, I have put together this booklet that brings all the information together in one place. It is currently offered free-of-charge and available to all interested parties on the blog.

Keep in mind that it is likely that not everything in this booklet with resonate with you; people certainly learn in different ways and at their own pace. However, for those that take the time to read it over, I hope it helps you with your study plans and goals.

The original articles, as well as new material that I continue to post (at the rate of *about* one article per week), may be found on the Bubbly Professor blog, at: https://bubblyprofessor.com/

I welcome your comments and questions, and may be reached at: missjane@prodigy.net

Happy Studies!
Jane A. Nickles

P.S. This is my own work, and not intended to be representative of any school, certification body, or organization.

Part One: Books, Notes, and Flashcards

Chapter One:
Keep Calm and Make a Study Plan

Studying for a wine or spirits certification takes time—there's just no way around it. Before we dive right in, we should consider how to manage the required time from two points of view.

First, on a macro level—give yourself plenty of time and start studying early. Please don't ignore your studies for weeks and months on end, and them try to cram it all in to the last two weeks or the last two days. This sounds obvious—but few students actually do it; and this is 90% of the reason why I decided to start teaching online prep classes for the CSS and CSW. It "forces" people into a 10- or 13-week framework for studying.

Second, we need to deal with your time on a more micro level. This means we need to schedule for—and use daily/weekly blocks of time.

Here is some basic advice for dealing with both of these issues.

Eyes on the prize: The first step is to establish your long-term goal. If you are seriously into the study of wine or spirits, your goal is likely to be a certification exam—but it certainly could be to get accepted into a certain school or program of study, to land a certain job, or just to increase your knowledge. It's all good, and it's up to you.

Establish your timeline: A goal needs to have an end date. As Harvey MacKay says, “A dream is just a dream. A goal is a dream with a plan and a deadline.” Write the end date down and calculate how many days, weeks, and months are left between you and your goal.

Gather your materials: Before you can complete your plan, you need to know what you are studying. If you are studying for the CSS, CSW, or any other intro- or intermediate-level wine or spirits certification, you will most likely have a textbook (or books). If you do not have an assigned text (or pre-made list of sources), you will need to create your curriculum, starting with a list of topics, and then locate the resources (books, periodicals, websites) yourself.

Break it up: Take the number of weeks you have until your goal; and divide by two. This will be the length of your initial study plan with the goal of making it through a first reading of your material. (After your initial dive through the material, you should create another plan for the second half of your study time. This second round is when you can revise the material and commit it to memory.)

Next, consider your study materials and divide it up by the number of weeks you calculated for the first half (the “study” phase) of your plan. If you have a textbook, this should be simple, and might look something like this: week 1—pages 1 to 45, week 2—pages 46 to 89, and so on. If you have a list of topics rather than a textbook, it your plan could look something like this: week 1—red grapes, week 2—white grapes, week 3—Northern Rhône Valley, week 4—Southern Rhône Valley, and so on.

Whatever your study materials and how your plan looks at this point, consider your one-week increments and put a big red star on every fourth week.

Break it down: Take your first week’s study material and divide it more-or-less evenly over six days. For starters, it is best to do this one week at a time. You can

use a template—such as the one provided at the end of this booklet—or, if you prefer, plain old notebook paper will work as well. At the top of the page, list what you need to cover for the week.

Next, fill in your study goals for each day, covering six days out of every week. The seventh day of each week can be a free day or a make-up day for those weeks when life goes wonky (and it will). Having weekly and daily goals will help keep you on track, create checkpoints for the material, and help you to organize your study materials ahead of time. This step is where the magic happens; a six-month journey through a 300-page textbook is daunting; a daily goal to read and take notes on seven pages is easy (easier).

Create your study blocks: Ideally, you should schedule one or two "long" study blocks each day (for 30 minutes to one hour) at the same time each day. One in the morning and one in the afternoon/evening is ideal, but you are going to have to look at your available time during the week and carve out your study time according to your own unique situation (which might change from week-to-week).

In addition, schedule at least three "short" (10- or 15-minute study) blocks each day. **Note: it has always worked best for me to schedule in the specific time slots for each study block week-by-week. It's one of my "things to do" every Sunday morning.**

For the longer study blocks: You have three primary "study" goals for this first half of your study plan: (1) read through the materials, (2) take notes on the materials, and (3) make flashcards or notecards from the materials. Your focus should be on discovering the material and grasping the "big picture" of the subject matter. Use your longer study blocks to progressively plow through the material—at least until you have covered the assigned pages/topics for the day. (At the end of this first half, you'll create a new plan for the second half of your timeline that will include revision, repetition/memorization drills, critical thinking exercises, and practice tests).

For the shorter study blocks: Use the first short study block of the day to review your latest readings. Use the second to do some follow-up research on topics you are not clear on, or some background research to create context and deeper meaning/understanding of the material. Use the last one to go through your ever-growing stack of flashcards or note cards.

Notes to yourself: As you complete your study blocks (at the end of each week), jot down a quick note to yourself—just a few words about what you covered—in your study planner. For your longer study blocks, record what chapters, pages, or references you read or reviewed. For the short blocks make a quick note of what activity you completed (for instance; reviewed chapter 1, researched the Gironde Estuary, studied flashcards from chapter 6).

The routine: Having a study block at the same time each day has a myriad of benefits: your schedule is easy to memorize, you can create a routine, and you will develop a positive habit.

Here's the hard part—Stick to the schedule: There's not much point in making a study plan if you don't stick with it (so much easier said than done). However, life can get in the way of even the best of plans, so don't beat yourself up too much if you get off track. Remember those big red stars you placed on your schedule every four weeks? If you can make up any study lags or losses by the end of each four-week period, you should consider yourself a study schedule success story!

Chapter 2:
The Time Warp—How to Find the Time to Study

Where does one find the time to study in this busy, stressed-out, hacked-up world? Here are a few ideas. Certainly, none of these suggestions are ground-breaking (or time-warping), but these tactics have worked—at different stages of life—for me and many of my students, and maybe one or two will work for you!

Be dressed and ready to go (early): Whatever your deadlines are for the day—leave for work at 8:00 am, be ready to go to dinner at 7:00 pm, have the housework done for the day by 8:00 pm so you can watch Grey's Anatomy in peace—try to be primped, dressed, and ready-to-go early, and use that time to study. In the morning, you might be able to make this happen so that you have a half an hour of "found" time. Later in the day, the goal might be five or ten minutes of spare study time. Whatever the time frame, it's a perfect excuse to fit in a few minutes of no-stress study time.

Show up early: Whenever you have an interview, an appointment, a lunch date, or even a dentist appointment, get there early and you will have a beautiful block of stress-free study time. Plant yourself as close to your appointment as you can—in a coffee shop, the building lobby, or even in your car—and hit the books (or flashcards).

Stay late: At the end of your shift, stay after work for a half hour or so and study. If you have an office, just shut the door and pretend that you are not there. If you don't have an office, consider using your desk, the building lobby, an employee break room, a coffee shop, or just go sit in your car. If you work nine-to-five, this half hour of "found study time" might have the added benefit of easing the crush of the evening rush hour. One caveat: this might not be the best idea for those of you who work the late-night shift.

Brush it up: Everybody brushes their teeth in the morning and again at night. Why not tack on an extra five or ten minutes to your morning and/or evening routine, and schedule one of your shorter study sessions for right after your brush your teeth? You've already carved out these segments of the day as personal time, so it's an established habit—no behavior modification necessary.

Skip it: First things first: there is no way I am skipping Jeopardy. However, we all know that an hour a day (or even a half hour) of study time can lead to big results. If you really can't find that kind of time in your schedule, consider swapping out one hour or half hour of activity a day. Skip the first half hour of Morning Joe. Skip the 6 pm news. Skip the re-run of Family Feud you watch before dinner (I know; that one's tough). Cut your Candy Crush time in half. Cut your social media time down by 40%.

Everybody get up: Get up a half hour earlier than you need to, make a fast cup of coffee or tea, and make studying the first project of each day before the rest of the world even knows you are awake.

Use that drive time: It is easy to study if you use public transportation—just dive right into your books, notes, or flashcards. However, if you drive yourself, you need to be more creative. Consider making short recordings of yourself—read from your study guide or textbooks, read from your notes, or recite short lists of information (regions of Chile, styles of Champagne, lists of approved grape varieties [for instance]). You can even make verbal quizzes for yourself (ask a question, wait ten seconds, read the answer). This study technique has all kinds of active learning benefits built right in. Of course, many people use drive time to listen to their favorite podcasts or radio programs; this is a great idea made all the better if you can find one that is applicable to your current studies.

Chapter 3: The LTGST System

I like to tell people that the LTGST system stands for *long time gonna study this.* And that is a true statement if ever there was one.

However, LTGST—as a study system—stands for *Location, Terroir, Grapes, Style, and Terminology. LTGST is* shorthand for the method I've been using for the past several decades to introduce and teach about (region by region) the wide world of wine. This system is designed to help you really understand (and not just "memorize") the facts and figures, grapes and places, and other details about the area. It's also important to stay in the stated order; as these factors represent orders of influence: the *location* is the basis for *terroir*, which is often the basis for the choice of *grape varieties*, which are the leading factor in the *styles* of wine that are produced in the region.

This is not a shortcut not an "easy way out." for studying. It is, however, an effective study technique as it gives meaning and context to what you are studying. As I've said so many times before…your brain just does not like (and is not good at) fixing random words and numbers into long-term memory. What your brain *is* good at remembering are things that are personal, contextual, spatial, surprising, physical, and humorous in nature.

There are several ways we can use this knowledge to make our wine or spirits studies more effective. We make our studies more contextual (the background story), spatial (how this location relates to other locations), physical (taste the wine, look at the label, pick up the bottle even if you can't afford to buy it), personal (draw a map, say the words out loud, visit the region). If it can be made to be surprising or humorous along the way, so much the better!
Here is a more detailed explanation of the use of the LTGST study method:

Location:

- For starters, we need to know the basics: where is this area located?
- Get specific—latitude, proximity to well-known cities and landmarks, and location in relation to other wine regions.
- Research the topography—rivers, lakes, oceans, mountain ranges.
- The best way to do this is trace a map and draw in the cities, mountains, and rivers.

- It makes a great deal of sense to study the location first, as it sets the stage for the information to follow.

Terroir:

- What is the climate? What is the dominant soil type? Is there a dominant form of topography? What else is important to not about the terroir—how does it affect the grapes, vineyards, and wine?
- Knowing the details on the location (latitude, near-by mountains, rivers, and oceans) will translate into a better understanding of the terroir (see how that works)?

Grapes:

- What grapes are grown in the region?
- Are the wines primarily blends, single varietals, or a combination?
- Understanding the location, which leads to a better contextualization of the terroir, will lead to better understanding of what grapes grown in a certain location and why. There's a good reason that Alsace grows mainly white grapes and Bordeaux can grow botrytis-affected Semillon so well—and it has a lot to do with location and terroir!

Styles:

- After we know the overall climate and the grape varieties that are grown in a certain region, we're ready to study the types of wines made in a region.
- What styles of wine do they produce? Dry, sweet, still, sparkling?
- What unique production techniques create these wines?

Terminology:

- What terms do you need to understand the wines and their labels?
- Some regions, such as Bordeaux and Burgundy, have a vocabulary all their own and this list can get very long; others are much simpler.

On the next page, you'll find an example of a study outline using the LTGST system. It is certainly not a quick nor an easy system, but I guarantee you it's effective.

Example of the LTGST System: The Wines of Bordeaux

Location:

- 44° North, bordering the Atlantic Coast of France
- Gironde Department, Nouvelle-Aquitaine Region
- Major cities: Bordeaux (Left Bank), Libourne (Right Bank)
- Sub-sections:
    - Médoc
    - Haut-Médoc (Pauillac, Saint-Estèphe, St. Julien, Listrac-Médoc, Moulis-en-Médoc, Margaux)
    - Graves (Sauternes, Barsac)
    - Entre-deux-Mers
    - Right Bank (Pomerol, St.-Émilion)
    - Côtes, Bourg, Blaye

Terroir:

- Stretches along the Gironde Estuary, fed by the Dordogne and the Garonne Rivers
- Maritime climate, moderated by the protective barrier of the Landes Forest
- Left Bank—gravelly soils, ideal for Cabernet Sauvignon
- Right Bank—limestone and clay soils, better for Merlot
- Entre-Deux-Mers—more fertile soils; wines not as concentrated nor as renowned
- The Ciron River (tributary of the Garonne)– creates excellent conditions for Botrytis

Grapes:

- The Red Bordeaux Blend: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc are the three main grapes; Malbec, Petit Verdot, and Carmenère are used in small amounts.
- The White Bordeaux Blend: Sauvignon Blanc and Sémillon are the main grapes; Muscadelle (smaller amounts); Ugni Blanc, Merlot Blanc, Colombard (tiny amounts)

Styles:

- Basic Red: mostly from Entre-Deux-Mers and the peripheral Right Bank; Merlot-based
- High-end Right Bank Reds: predominantly Merlot; produced in and around St. Émilion
- High-end Left Bank Reds: Cabernet-Sauvignon-based, produced in and around the Médoc
- Dry white Bordeaux: Sauvignon-blanc- or Sémillon-based (Graves & Entre-Deux-Mers)
- Sweet white Bordeaux: Botrytis-affected, Sémillon-based (in and around Sauternes)

Terminology:

- Classification of 1855
    - Premier Cru (Château Latour, Château Margaux, Château Lafite Rothschild, Château Haut-Brion, Château Mouton Rothschild {promoted in 1973])
- St-Émilion Grand Cru AOC, St.-Émilion Grand Cru Classé Category A (Château Angélus, Château Ausone, Château Cheval-Blanc, Château Pavie)
- Pomerol: no classification, but several highly regarded wines (Château Pétrus, Château Lafleur, Château Le Pin)
- En Primeur

Chapter 4:
Study versus Revision (and the Importance of Both)

When it appeared as a blog post, this article went by the title of *Go Around Again!*

I considered giving it a subtitle, as in: *Go Around Again! The Art of Revision*. I eventually decided not to use the subtitle, as most North Americans (at least those that live in the USA, as I do) don't understand what is meant—in the context of education—by the word *revision.* My fellow Americans and I tend to define *revision* as those things we do when crafting an essay, such as making edits, modifications, or changes.

However, in many parts of the English-speaking world (including England, Australia, and New Zealand), *revision* (or *to revise*) means to prepare for an exam. In my experience, Americans are more apt to say that we're going to *hit the books, review, study, pull an all-nighter*, or (cover your ears) *cram for the test.*

Even though I live in Texas, I've begun to use the word *revision* when referring to the that portion of the learning process that one endures performs in the run-up to an exam. Here's what this means to the serious student of wine or spirits: it's a great idea to approach your learning program in a two-step fashion: first you study, then you revise. Or, better yet, study-study-revise-study-study-revise (repeat, repeat, repeat). Finally, when you have made it through all the material you need to cover, you take a step back…take a deep breath, and revise-revise-revise.

Here's a simplified set of definitions and some quick advice on the topic of study and revision:

First, you study: Studying means you are learning something new or widening your knowledge of a subject. This is where you read your textbook, attend your lectures, watch your videos, take notes, and complete the exercises in your workbook. Ideally—if you are taking a class—by the time the class concludes, you have kept up with the assigned readings and other activities as indicated on class syllabus. (Or, if you are studying on your own, you've made it through the first round of your study plan.)

- **Theme:** Concentrate on learning new information and understanding the big picture. Strive to grasp the context of this new material. Does it fit nicely in with what you already know? Do you need to build some background knowledge in order to truly understand this new information? Or—perhaps—is there something you need to un-learn? This is all–too–common in the world of wine and spirits, where some ill-informed myths are oft-repeated, such as old wine is always better, vodka tastes like water, or all rosé is plonk.
- **Techniques:** Read and take notes on the text (study guide), attend webinars/lectures, watch videos, ask an expert, do extra reading/internet research, have discussions. For wine and spirits study, taste the wines or spirits; make and record your tasting notes.

Next, you revise: Revision means you are consolidating and re-learning what you studied. Revision focuses on the details, repetition, and memorization. You can't run and you can't hide at this point—please don't stare at the textbook or binge-watch videos and call it revision. It's time to make a commitment to your long-term memory and conquer the details. This step will require some quality time spent on your own or in a small group.

- **Theme:** Drill down to the details, revisit the material; re-learn and consolidate what you already learned, strive for comprehension and understanding, be able to use (not just recite) the information, improve your speed of recall.
- **Techniques:** Be active! Create teaching materials and teach others (even if you have to fake it). Make your own charts, diagrams, or cheat sheets—chunk information to help consolidate and contextualize your new knowledge. Make/use flashcards, make/use practice quizzes, recite your notes from memory (out loud). Flex your memory–every time you pull something out of your brain, you improve your ability to do so. Use as much active recall and spaced repetition as you can.

One caveat**: Just because revision is the second stage of our two-step process, this does not mean you** should leave it all for the week before the exam—that's just a drawn-out version of cramming for the test. Rather, strive to fit some revision time into your schedule throughout the process—such as taking one day a week or fifteen minutes a day to revise your latest batch of new study material.

Here's an example from the world of wine: In your CSW studies (especially if you are taking my class), when you reach the section on Tuscany you might heed the following:

Study phase—big picture and context:

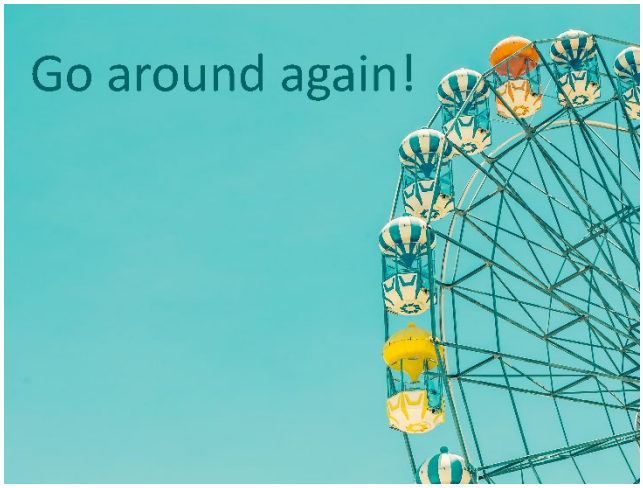
- Tuscany's vinous history, location within Italy, general terroir, main grape varieties, leading wines produced in the region. (In other words, *LTGST*.)
- Testable appellations of Tuscany.
- Terminology/vocabulary specific to Tuscany that might help you understand the area, the wines, or (especially) the label terms used in the region (Governo, Super Tuscan, Vin Santo, Brunello, Morellino, Prugnolo Gentile, Gran Selezione).

Revision—details and memorization:

- Details of the various testable appellations of Tuscany—regulations, grape varieties, leading style(s) of wine(s) allowed for production.
- Which is a DOC, a DOCG, or, (since we are talking about Tuscany), an IGT.
- Each appellation's specific location.
- Noteworthy/unique details (as applicable)—this will be specific to each appellation and might include soils, winemaking techniques, location, elevation, or other factors. For instance, Carmignano is unique in the required use of Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Cabernet Franc, Vernaccia di San Gimignano is unique as the only DOCG exclusive to white wines in Tuscany, the Maremma is unique as a coastal/cooler climate region.
- Over-learn your vocabulary words.

My original post on this subject was inspired by the most delightful of students, who just couldn't understand why she didn't pass the CSW on her first try. When I asked her how she studied in the time period leading up to the exam, she said, "I listened to each one of your webinars a hundred times!"

My advice to her? Go around again!



Chapter 5:
How to Read a Textbook—The Art of Active Reading

The first rule of studying from a textbook is this: a textbook is not a novel. There are no sudden twists and turns, smoldering romances, or slow burn of dramatic tension keeping you up well past midnight turning page after page just to find out who did what to whom…

And yet—as serious students of wine and spirits—we need to read. But we cannot expect to pick up a textbook, crack the cover and be instantly spellbound. As a matter of fact, students are advised NOT to pick up the book, dive right in and read the book from front to back. In most cases, this is a serious waste of time. The alternative is *active reading.*

How can you tell if you are engaging in active reading, as opposed to passive reading?

- If you dive right in and just start reading…that's passive reading
- If you get bored and fidgety after five minutes…. that's passive reading
- If you can't remember what you've read an hour after you are finished…that's passive reading—and you have just wasted a whole bunch of time and effort

Instead, let's get active. There are a lot of systems used for active reading—some which get quite elaborate like *S-Q-3R, P-4R, CP-3-0* or what have you—and these are excellent tools encompassing the entirety of reading, studying, and taking notes. I'd like to keep it systematic-but-simple, and break it down to three steps: Preview, Question, Read.

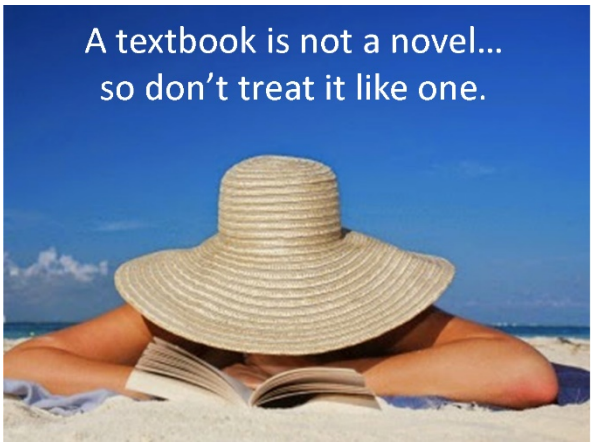
Step one—Preview: Instead of diving right in—without really knowing where the text is going to take you—skim through the material first. Check out the titles and sub-titles, the charts, the graphs, and the pictures. In other words, take a few minutes and get an overview of what you are going to read. It's like looking at a map before you arrive in a new city—you want to have a feel for the lay of the land. This quick preview will help you to see the "big picture" or context of the material and provide a bit of familiarity with the subject before you dive into the deep end.

When I approach a new module or chapter of a textbook, I like to take a few minutes to flip through the entire chapter. However, I think it's even more important to do a quick preview each time you sit down to study, and to do this in such a way as to ensure that you proceed through the material in manageable "chunks' or short sections. This is easy to do, but important. By setting boundaries for your reading—whether it be a paragraph or a chapter, you help to maintain your focus. You know where you are going to begin, and where you are going to stop.

Step two—Question: Take a minute to think about the material. What do you already know about the material? This can help your put the topic into its proper context. What do you think will be the main topic of the section? This can give you a purpose (looking for the answer) and can help maintain your interest. The "questioning" step should not take more than a few minutes, but it can go a long way in helping you stay focused on the reading. It's also good practice for quizzing yourself and using active recall.

Step three—Read: The next step is a thorough reading of the material. You need to read slowly and systematically, focusing on understanding and processing the information. Toss out any ideas you have of reading on "automatic pilot" with the goal of merely reaching the end.

Keep in mind that this is *not quite yet* the ideal time to take notes. Taking notes at this stage will break up the flow of your reading and diminish your understanding. Taking notes too soon is not very productive, seeing as you aren't likely to know if the first sentence is worth taking notes on until you read the rest of the section. Once you are through the section, you'll have the perspective to know what's important enough to put down in your notes, but for this step, focus on reading and understanding.



Active reading is nothing like reading a novel—it's a real mental workout. And—as everyone knows—workouts are not always fun, but the lasting benefits are well worth the struggle!

Chapter 6:
Advice on How to Take Notes

It happens at least once a week. I get a frantic email from a student who is feeling overwhelmed, confused, and hopeless. I ask if they are reading the text and taking notes, using the workbook, making and using flashcards, and studying their maps. A typical response is, "I use the workbook and the flashcards—for hours!" Or, "I watched all the videos five times each!" Or, "I'm very visual, so reading just doesn't work for me." To which I respond, "just reading doesn't work for anybody. What you need to do is read and take notes."

It's understood that reading and taking notes from a textbook is not the most hilarious way to spend a Friday night or a Sunday morning—but when it comes to learning, it works.

Simply put, proper note-taking is essential to learning success, and provides two basic benefits:

1. The act of note taking (when done properly) involves processing, summarizing, and writing down information. This is an active learning activity that (by itself) will help you understand and retain what you read.
2. Your notes are a living document and you will continue to learn when adding to, reciting, and studying your notes.

When it comes to taking notes—efficiently and effectively—my first piece of advice is to use active reading techniques before you even start. This means previewing the material before diving right in and reading a small segment of the material from start to finish before you take notes. You are ready to begin your notes once you understand the main topic of the section and you recognize *what you don't already know* as well as what is important to remember. I also recommend taking down your notes one section (or sub-section, or "chunk" of 1 to 3 paragraphs) at a time.

If we're all agreed on this first step, let investigate how to take notes efficiently and effectively. This section is built around on some of the more common missteps I've observed, along with some alternative techniques that work.

Don't do this: Copy the textbook or speaker word-for-word**.**
Instead, prioritize and paraphrase. Take notes after you've read the section through at least once, and note down just the key words, phrases and bit of information IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

Copying something verbatim does very little to engage your mind and memory. If you don't believe me, copy a sentence from a French textbook (assuming you don't speak French) and see how much you understand. The most important step in effective note taking is deciding what information is important, where that information fits into the "big picture," and paraphrasing the information (putting it in your own words). It is not exactly quick, but its effective.

Remember, reading and taking notes verbatim might be quick, but it is a waste of time. Some exceptions to this rule include dates, definitions, formulas, and quotations. (Don't be a creative accountant.)

Don't do this: Ignore the structure provided by the book.
Instead, follow the visual cues from the text. The author(s) of your textbook developed a system of chapters, headings, and sections for a reason—to provide a framework for the information presented and a visual hierarchy of the main concept.

This is good news for the note-taking students of the world; there's no need to make up your own framework or to create an amorphous, impossible-to-understand blob of notes.

Just follow the author. Also, note the words that are written in bold or italics—these are often key concepts or vocabulary words.

Don't do this: Fill the entire page from top to bottom.

Instead, leave some space on the page. Your learning and understanding is going to evolve over the course of your studies, and you might want to add to or clarify some information. It can also be very helpful to add drawings, diagrams, charts, and summaries to your notes—and you'll need space to do this.

One other little tip—mark the page number of the text (or more thorough bibliographical information if studying from a variety of sources such as articles and websites) at the top of each page of notes. It will help you if you need to go back and clarify some information.

Don't do this: Build a fortress of factoids.

Instead, include keywords, cues, and ready-made review questions. You are going to want to use your notes for review and revision, and you can ensure an active revision if you include a ready-made cue section in your notes. In the very popular Cornell method of notetaking, this is a dedicated section off to one side of the page where you jot down keywords, review questions, or a few words signaling the main topics or essential points. Use these scribbles to quiz yourself during your review sessions.

A bit on note-taking systems:

A lot has been written about the different styles of notetaking, such as the Cornell method, the outline method, or visual/web/mind mapping. My best advice is to find the one that works for you and stick with it. You can read a nice, succinct article about the three methods on the Varsity Tutors website: https://www.varsitytutors.com/blog/3+note+taking+formats+every+student+should+try

Don't do this: Highlight everything.

Instead, highlight sparingly, if at all. I see it all. the. time. A student emails me a question (good study technique, by the way), and they've included a photo of their textbook showing the passage they can't understand. What I often see, is a sea of pretty colors—the student has highlighted the entire paragraph (or close to it). What this tells me is that the student highlighted the textbook on their first read-through, when they encountered a whole lot of new information that they want to remember.

If you do use a highlighter, be sure and keep it locked away during the preview stage and your first reading of the material. Use it on a subsequent read to highlight key words, cues, or definitions. In most circumstances, its best to aim to use your highlighter on no more than 20% to 30% of the total material.

Note: I prefer to take notes rather than highlight, and I don't specifically recommend highlighting as a study technique. However, if asked for study advice, I do not dissuade folks from highlighting if they feel it works for them. (I do, however, think that highlighting your notes can be an effective part of revision.)

Don't do this: After you've taken your notes, ignore them.

Instead, review your notes on a regular basis. An ideal practice is to review your notes the next day by answering your own questions, reading your notes aloud, or reciting definitions of your key words or cues (using your own words).

A note on hand-written versus digital notes:

If you are taking notes, whether it be by hand, on a laptop, or into a note-taking app, you are on the right tract. However, there are those that believe handwritten is the way to go. For more information on this subject, see the article by James Doubek entitled "Students, Put Your Laptops Away" on the website of NPR: https://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away

Chapter 7: Active Recall

We all know it: in order to acquire or maintain a skill, you must practice.

- Do you want to improve your tennis game? Practice your backhand!
- Do you want to improve your weightlifting ability? Work out with weights!

But what if you goal is to improve your knowledge? Perhaps you want to improve your ability to help your customers navigate your 100-item bourbon list. Or, maybe your goal is to pass a wine or spirits certification exam.

In all these instances, the answer is the same: use it or lose it.

We know we need to get active. However, in the context of studying (particularly for an exam), students often use passive study methods. These include re-reading the text, re-reading notes, watching videos over and over, or floating a highlighter over a book. These strategies are b-t-n (better than nothing), but for most people, they are not the most effective. The main issue with these techniques is that they improve your ability to recognize the material—your brain tells you "oh yeah, I remember that!" and you think you know the material. It might even lead you to experience the illusion of mastery (ouch).

Recall, on the other hand, is retrieving content from your memory—and using a study method called active recall is the "use it or lose it" of improving your knowledge.

In a nutshell: you actively try to recollect what you are learning. No peaking, no lists, no notes—close your eyes and flex your brain.

Active recall is one of the most efficient ways to increase your knowledge.

But you don't have to take my word for it: according to Jeffrey D. Karpicke and Janell R. Blunt, as reported in February 11, 2011 edition of Science Magazine, "Every time a memory is retrieved, that memory becomes more accessible in the future. Perhaps most surprisingly, practicing retrieval has been shown to produce more learning than engaging in other effective encoding techniques."

Here are some specific ways to engage in active recall in the context of the study of wine and spirits:

- Draw maps from memory
- Use flashcards: Like many educators, I have a love-hate relationship with flashcards. I hate it when students over-rely on them or try to use them in place of a more appropriate method of building background knowledge and context. I also acknowledge that they can be described as promoting "rote memorization" of "random factoids." However, in order to understand complicated material, we must first have knowledge of certain details (factoids if you must)—so flashcards have their place.
- Write up a list of questions and quiz yourself. (See the sample slate of questions at the end of this chapter.)
- Re-write your notes using "blanks" in the place of important facts, then fill in the blanks from memory. When used in teaching, we often call such notes guided notes as used in interactive lectures.
- Use the Cornell method of note taking (particularly the "review" step): See the chapter on note-taking for more information on the Cornell note taking method.
- Stand and deliver: Re-read your notes or a page in your textbook, then paraphrase it out loud. This is fun to do in a small group, but there's nothing wrong with talking to yourself—just go for it. (For more information on this, see "Un-study Technique #3.")
- Rephrase it: Read three paragraphs or sections in your textbook. Starting with the first one, write a summary of each, re-stating the information "in your own words" rather than quoting the source material.
- The more often you engage in active recall, the better your results will be. This refers to the study techniques known as *spaced repetition* (see chapter 8).

In conclusion: we all focus on getting information into our brains. Turns out, it is just as important to pull information out. Or, put another way: re-membering beats re-reading

Use it or lose it.

Sample questions for use with active recall

Note: These questions were taken from chapter 10 of the 2020 CSW study guide

- What term is used for PGI wines in Spain?
- What four subcategories exist for PDO wines in Spain?
- Name six synonyms for Tempranillo (extra credit: state where they are used).
- What are the leading DOs of Galicia?
- What are the three leading grapes of the Rías Baixas DO?
- What are the leading styles of wine produced in the Ribeiro DO?
- What are the leading styles of wine produced in the Valdeorras DO?
- What are the four main DOs of Castilla y León?
- What type of wine is produced in the Toro DO?
- What type of white wine is produced in the Rueda DO?
- When did the Rueda DO approve the production of red wines?
- What type of red wine is produced in the Rueda DO?
- What type of wine is produced in the Cigales DO?
- What is the minimum % of Tempranillo required in the Ribera del Duero DO?
- What other grapes are allowed for used in the Ribera del Duero DO?
- Where is Navarra located?
- For what style(s) of wine is the Navarra DO best-known?
- When was Rioja first designated as a DO?
- When was Rioja promoted to DOCa?
- What are the three zones of Rioja, and where are they in relation to each other?

References/for more information:

Illusion of Mastery: http://rethinkinggenius.blogspot.com/2019/01/the-illusion-of-mastery.html

Karpicke and Blunt: https://science.sciencemag.org/content/331/6018/772.full

https://www.apa.org/science/about/psa/2016/06/learning-memory

http://www.indiana.edu/~pcl/rgoldsto/courses/dunloskyimprovinglearning.pdf

Chapter 8: Spaced Repetition

If you are studying for a wine or spirits certification you already know that studying takes time. A lot of time—so let's not waste it.

It's important (and encouraging) to know—amid all this book-and-flashcard work—that *more* does not always *equal* better in terms of study time. As a matter of fact, science tells us that you will retain more knowledge if you space out your study sessions rather than if you try to do it all at once—even if the total amount of study time is the equal. This sounds like good news to me: five hours of study, spread over a period of time (whether it be 5 days or five weeks) is more effective than five hours of cram time.

In other words—just like with physical exercise—you are likely to see the best results if you use multiple, well-spaced study sessions, as opposed to a few long (probably miserable) nights of cramming-for-the-test.

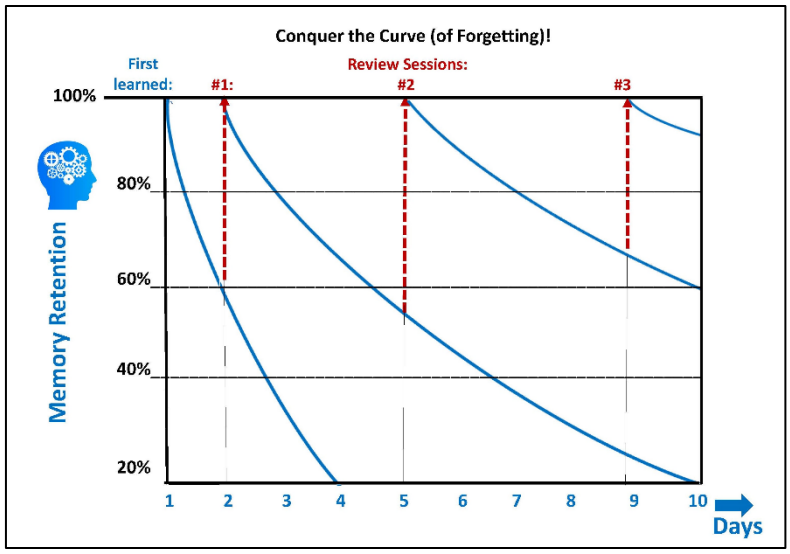
Hermann Ebbinghaus—a German psychologist who pioneered the study of memory in 1885—was one of the first to examine this phenomenon. Simply put, he observed that after learning new material, his subjects forgot 50% of the information within 30 minutes. After 24 hours, they had forgotten between 70% and 80%. Ebbinghaus dubbed this phenomenon of declining memory retention "the curve of forgetting."

Ebbinghaus also noticed that with each repeated exposure to the new material, the speed of forgetting slowed significantly. As such, he asserted that the best way to combat the curve was through spaced intervals of active recall—what we call "spaced repetition" or "spaced practice."

The goal of spaced repetition is to re-visit that new material when it is foggy but not completely forgotten. For most people, this means that the ideal time to revisit newly learned material is one or two days after that first exposure. This should be followed by another short revision session after another two or three

days, followed by a series of reviews spaced so that each succeeding interval is progressively longer than the one before. Remember—just like with physical muscles—every time you flex your mental muscles with a review of the material, the memory will be stronger and take a bit longer to fade.

Imagine that you are taking a class. If you are a wine student, you are taking a class on the white wines of Tuscany. The spirits students are taking a class on the iconic spirits of Galicia. You attend your class (and take some notes), read you textbook, and take some hand-written notes. Now…what do you do with your new knowledge and your valuable notes?



Here's a sample sequence of how you might use spaced repetition to enhance your learning: after your first exposure (the class), review the material the next day. Skip two days and revise the material again; then skip 3 or 4 days before revising the material; then skip 5 or 6 days (and revise again). After those five repetitions, the knowledge is going to start to stick, and you can slide the material into a longer rotation so that you review it a few more times (maybe once a week or once a month) before your deadline—whether it be an exam, job interview, competition, meet-the-parents, or some other such event. For best results, be sure and combine spaced repetition with active recall study methods (it's more fun than just re-reading your notes and much more effective).

All it takes is bit of organization and some (intervals of) time. With the help of spaced repetition, you too can conquer the curve of forgetting!

References/for more information:
https://supermemo.guru/wiki/Optimum_interval
https://bjorklab.psych.ucla.edu/research/#spacing
https://qz.com/1213768/the-forgetting-curve-explains-why-humans-struggle-to-memorize/

Chapter 9:
Best Practices for Flashcards

Flashcards: most wine and spirits students use them; many despise them. As for myself, like most educators, I have a love/hate relationship with flashcards. Here's why:

The Bad: Flashcards can be used solely for "rote memorization" and are often blamed for the trivialization of knowledge and an ensuing army of factoid-focused nerds.

The Ugly: I know students who skip their reading assignments or their lectures—and dive straight into memorizing the cards. These folks are robbing themselves of the opportunity to gain a true understanding of the subject matter.

And yet, flashcards can be an efficient and effective study method:

The Good: Flashcards utilize active recall and are a natural way to use spaced and targeted repetition. They are best used for fact-heavy (as opposed to concept-heavy) topics and as such, work well for vocabulary words, dates, regulations (aging requirements, grape[s] allowed in a certain product), numbers (yields, abv) and any manner of facts and figures. Flashcards also trigger your meta-cognitive faculties (did I get it right? yeah me!) which can help with attention and engagement. They're bite-sized and portable, and a great way to use small bursts of time to study.

Flashcards can also, with a few tweaks, be useful for a deeper level of learning well beyond rote memorization, which leads us to:

The Excellent—here are a few ideas for the most excellent use of flashcards:

Say the answers aloud: Whether reading, quizzing, summarizing, or *flashcarding,* studying out loud is always a good idea. As a more active form of study, it uses more senses (sight, hearing), and motor activity than just reading. This leads to better memory retention!

Add in a bit of elaboration: Don't just state—elaborate! Using hot pink or bright yellow cards, create a deck of "instructional" flashcards with questions. These questions, used alongside your fact-based cards, should encourage you to think a bit deeper on the topic at hand. To use, shuffle the decks together, placing an instructional card at intervals of 3 or 4 cards—or keep the decks separate and use an instructional card along with every few fact-based cards. Some wine-related examples of instructional questions might include:

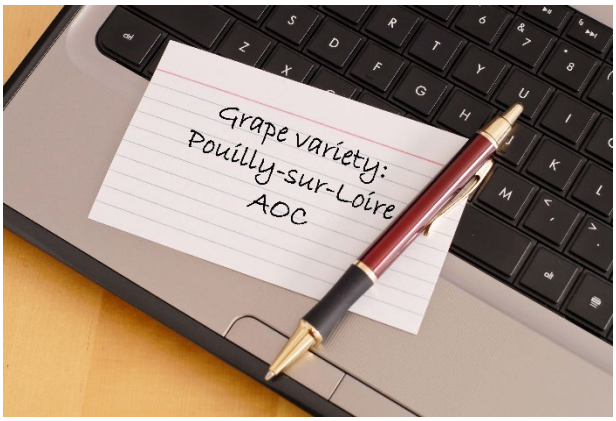
- Have you ever had this wine? If so, describe it. If not, describe a wine have you had that is similar.
- What is unique about this wine/region/grape/place/regulation?
- Is this regulation stricter or more lenient than most?
- What region, city, or landmark is close to this area?
- What is the quality/reputation/price point of the wine/region/place (whatever fits)?

You can keep this technique super-simple and in your head by asking yourself one of these cheeky questions after every other card:

- Who cares?
- So what?
- And this matters why…?

In my opinion, this study technique destroys the flashcards-equal-factoids conceit.

Use Confidence-based Repetition: Confidence-based repetition allows you to focus on what you need to learn without spending valuable study time on things that you already know. Here's how it works: as you go through a stack of cards, divide it into three piles depending on how confident you are in your knowledge, and as your revision progresses, concentrate on the material you don't know well (or at all). You can label these three piles as follows: "I know it (heck yeah)," "I kind of know it (I've heard of it, but can't remember it)," or "I don't know it (I have no clue/WTF)." As you progress, your "don't know" stacks will get smaller and smaller, and when your "I have no clue" pile is tiny, add those cards into your next stack and move on.



Best practices for a pre-made/digital deck: If your subject matter is super-fact-heavy, a pre-made flashcard deck can save you time. But please-please-please make sure your deck comes from a reliable source (not a random stranger off the internet). Once you've determined your flashcards are legit, here's an idea of how best to use them: run through a stack/section of flashcards one time to see how you do. If you miss nearly all of them, go back to some other forms of study and revision, and then try again. When you reach the point where you get at least half of them correct, copy down (make physical copies of) just the cards you missed and work from there.

Make your own cards: Creating your own cards is a form of active learning. It involves summarizing complex topics into concise statements, and at the very least requires you to write something down. Using new information (whether it be writing something, saying something, or creating something) triggers the production effect. This means that you are more apt to remember something that you personally made, did, or said. Heck, it's now part of your life experience and more memorable than something that you just read or heard.

Stay excellent: Avoid the following flashcard foibles:

- Wrong time: Do NOT be tempted to dive straight into the flashcards or (gasp!) attempt to use flashcards as a means of instruction. The proper use of flashcards is in the revision/review stage of learning—after the student has the "big picture" and a good understanding of the surrounding concepts.
- Wrong subject: Flashcards are not the most effective study technique for complicated subject matter, concepts involving hierarchies, anything that requires a two-page flowchart, or subjects that are mired in debate and/or opinion. They are also not ideal for the study of geography, unless you paste (or draw) an actual picture or map on the flashcard.
- Over-reliance: Flashcards are not a silver bullet and should always be used in conjunction with other forms of study and revision.

In conclusion: if someone tells you that flashcards are a bad way to study, react in shock and surprise— pretend they just told you that they don't like a good old-fashioned make-out session with someone they love. Just roll your eyes and tell them (in your best Marlene Dietrich voice), "*well, dahling, you must be doing it wrong."*

Part Two: Un-Study Techniques (for when you just can't face another flashcard!)

Un-study Techniques: An Introduction

We've all been there. No matter how passionate, engaged, and delighted we are to get to study wine, take a wine class, or attempt a wine certification…there are times when we just can't stand studying another longer. We can't crack a book, we can't flip a flashcard, and we certainly will not re-write our notes.

And yet that class, that presentation, or that exam is on the near horizon.

What's a student to do?

Here's an idea: use what I call un-study techniques—an admittedly goofy term for an activity that will help you learn about what you need to know, but will NOT force you to highlight your text book or flip over a flash card.

In this booklet, we offer ten of these little un-study techniques. Consider using them on those occasions when you just can't stand to study any longer.

Un-study Technique #1:
Plan a trip

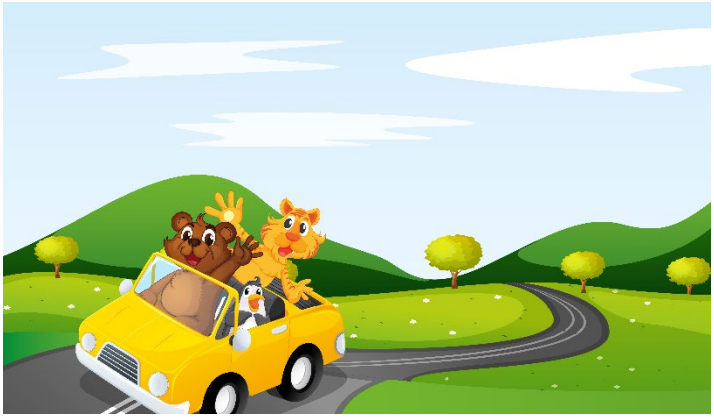
Everyone knows one of the absolute best ways to learn about the wine (or whiskey) of a certain region is to travel. To see the vines, feel the dirt between your fingers, fall in love with a winemaker in a dark, dusty cellar—you'll never forget it.

Even if you can't make that trip to Tuscany this weekend, you can still plan a trip, and learn a lot in the process.

To make this an effective un-study technique, choose a specific wine or spirits region.

- Plan how you will get there, where you'll stay, where you will eat, and the wineries or distilleries you will visit.
- Pretend you are driving and plot out your map, making sure you learn the important details that can help you in your wine studies later—such as how many miles/kilometers it is from one place to the next, and what vineyards are located on the valley floor, as opposed to up the hillsides.
- Choose a local restaurant to dine in and (via the magic of the internet) check out the menu and the wine list (pay particular attention to the local wines and spirits they have on offer).

I know this sounds a little silly, but there have been many Monday evenings in my life when I couldn't get the gumption to crack a book…but I learned a lot by plotting my fantasy trip through Bolgheri courtesy of Google and their maps.



Un-study Technique #2: Write one multiple choice question

That's right…write just one exam-style question. There's a secret about writing multiple choice questions: it is not easy. But that's what makes it a perfect un-study technique.

Here's what to do: pick a topic and write a question as well as the correct answer. The question—known as the question stem—should be a direct question, written as a complete sentence, and should be grammatically correct.

Next: do some deep-dive research on your question-and-correct-answer to make sure that is always correct. For instance: consider this question: Which of the following types of wine is produced using 100% Gamay?

- Is the correct answer Beaujolais? (No, Beaujolais AOC may contain up to 15% white grapes, and may also be white.)
- Is the correct answer Moulin-à-Vent? (No…while Beaujolais Cru is only produced as a red wine, it is also allowed to contain up to 15% white grapes— Chardonnay, Aligoté, and/or Melon de Bourgogne, to be precise).

Perhaps this question should be re-written as follows: Which of the following types of wine is mostly likely to be produced using 100% Gamay? Using this as the question, Beaujolais or Moulin-à-Vent could be a correct answer.

Next, come up with the three incorrect answers—known as the distractors.

- Keep in mind: the more similar the distractors are to each other and to the correct answer, the more difficult the question will be.

Using the question discussed above, you could craft a relatively easy question using the following three distractors: Saint-Joseph, Rosé des Riceys, and Musigny. However, don't just *assume* that these appellations do not produce Gamay-based wine. Research it, find out everything that they are allowed to produce, and if indeed they are not at all likely to make a wine produced using Gamay, go ahead and use it as one of your distractors.

- The following three distractors would make for a more difficult question: Crémant de Bourgogne, Chinon, and Irancy. *Can you figure out why?*

When writing your questions, make sure to take and keep your notes (after all, you are un-studying), and keep a file of your questions to test yourself with later.

Un-Study Technique #3:
Say it, Scream it, Sing it (The Production Effect)

Even when you just can't stand to study, perhaps you won't mind a bit of talking? Grab one page of notes or a short stack of flashcards and read them out loud. This is a great time to go straight for the information you can never seem to recall or understand. Just make sure to keep your material to a minimum so there's no chance of overwhelming yourself.

Once you have your notes, read them out loud. When I do this, I like to go all-in. Stand up straight, say it loud, say it proud, repeat it three times directly into the (fake) microphone. Then do it again. Say it, scream it, or sing it until you have it memorized. Then paraphrase it and say it again. Elaborate on it a bit—what else do you know about this topic?

Keep going. Repeat it ten times. Do it with a glass of wine or a shot of Bourbon and it gets fun and silly…and it's very, very effective.

Here's why:

In the vocabulary of memory science, there's something called the "production effect." To put it simply, the production effect relates to the fact that a person will remember something that they said (even if it is a random string of words or sounds) much more than something that they read (silently) or something they heard someone else say.

I am inclined to think that this is likely to do with the fact that we like to hear ourselves talk (ahem), but the experts will tell us it is more than that—and the research that proves it is impressive. In a study reported by Psychology Today (as provided by Dr. W. R. Klemm) students who

read a list of 160 items silently were able to recognize about 64% of them two weeks later…and the students who read them aloud were able to recall 77%. That's worth speaking up for.

One explanation for the production effect is distinctiveness—something that is read, spoken, and heard is more distinctive (and therefore more memorable) than words that are "just" read silently. The literature describes this as such: "the additional dimensions of encoding for items read aloud can be subsequently used during retrieval" (Icht, Mama, and Algom, 2014). In other words, it helps us remember.

Another reason this works is that it involves multiple senses (hearing and seeing) as well as motor activities (speaking). This fits in with the meaning of "production" – in the sense that you "produce something" when you use information rather than just reading it or hearing it. While it might be nice if the "production" created was a cupcake rather than a sound, a sound will do for purposes of your hungry-for-wine-knowledge long-term memory.

In addition to the scientific explanations, there is another, simpler one: we are seldom more engaged as when we are hearing ourselves talk.

So, the next time a day (or night) rolls around and you "just can't stand to study," well, don't study. Instead, grab a small section of your notes, and talk it out.

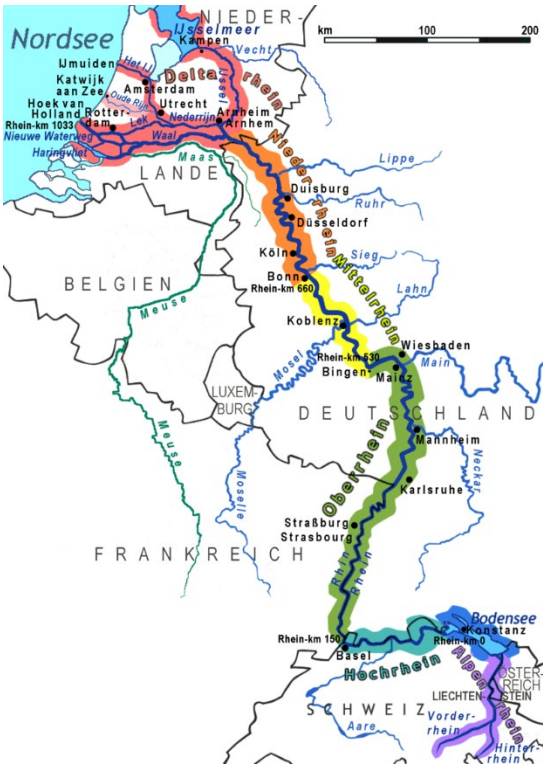
References/more information on the production effect:
https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00886/full
https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4128297/
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/memory-medic/201712/enhance-memory-the-production-effect

Un-Study Technique #4:
Watch the River Run

The next time you can't get motivated to study, consider a river. Rivers are so relaxing and beautiful. I've always found rivers to be fascinating; they spring to life from someplace high in the hills, find their way to the valley floor, and snake their way across hundreds of miles until they reach their final destination.

Lucky for us, we can contemplate a river all night…and wind up learning a lot about wine as well. Rivers are easy to research via Google or even Wikipedia will even work—although I've had the best luck with the online version of the Encyclopedia Britannica. To tie this into your wine studies (albeit ever so subtly), have your wine maps handy before you get started. To demonstrate this un-study technique, let's follow the path of the Rhine River and see where it takes us!

The Journey: The Rhine River begins its journey high up in the glaciers of the Swiss Alps. From there it flows for over 765 miles until it reaches the Netherlands and flows into the North Sea.



The Source: The Rhine is formed from two headstreams, both beginning in southeastern Switzerland. The Vorderrhein River emerges from Lake Toma at an altitude of 7,690 feet (2,344 m). The Hinterrhein Rivers begins at a place called San Bernardino Pass—about 20 miles away from Lake Toma—at an elevation of 6,775 feet (2,065 m). These two rivers join at the Swiss village of Reichenau (elevation: 1,946 feet/593 m) to form the Rhine.

Switzerland to Liechtenstein to Austria: From Reichenau, the Rhine flows north to form the border between Switzerland and Liechtenstein. Slightly further north, the river creates the border between Switzerland and Austria (in Austria's far west, mountainous zone).

Onward towards Germany: Just south of the northern border of Austria, The Rhine blends into Lake Bodensee—only to emerge by taking a sharp turn to the west. At this point, the Rhine is forming the border between Switzerland (to the south) and Germany (to the north) with just a small detour that means Rhine Falls (the largest waterfall in Europe) is located entirely within Switzerland.

Between Alsace and Baden: After a 20-mile run on fairly flat land, the Rhine takes a sharp turn north near the Swiss city of Basel and forms the border between France and Germany. The French wine region of Alsace is just to the west of the river, and just beyond the vineyards lie the Vosges Mountains. The German wine region of Baden, and beyond that the Black Forest, are located on the eastern side.

Beyond Baden: Once north of the French Border, the Vosges Mountains become the Hardt Hills, and the Rhine River continues northward between the Pflaz and Rheinhessen regions to the west, and the small Hessische Bergstrasse region to the east.

Sharp turn west: After the Main River flows through the Franken Region, it flows into the Rhine. Here, the Rhine River takes a sharp turn and flows westward alongside the Rheingau and a corner of the Nahe region.

The Middle Rhine: Just beyond the small town of Bingen, the Rhine turns again—this time to the northwest—and begins its journey along the 90-miles of the Middle Rhine. This is the area where the river flows through the Mittlelrhine wine region, cutting between the steep, slate-covered Hunsrück Mountains to the west

and the Taunus Mountains to the east. This is also the area where the Mosel River (flanked by the vineyards of the region of the same name) flows into the Rhine.

Cologne and beyond: Once past the vineyards of Germany, the Rhine River passes through the German city of Cologne. Just beyond the German border, as the river flows into the Netherlands, it breaks into several wide branches and makes its way to the North Sea.

If you want to make your session more interactive, try "free-style" drawing the course of the Rhine River from its source to the North Sea. See if you draw in the surrounding countries (and try not to forget tiny little Liechtenstein), and then pencil in the wine regions of Germany and Alsace. If you are feeling a touch less ambitious, use one of the blank maps of the rivers of Europe found on the original blog post: https://bubblyprofessor.com/2018/10/29/un-study-techniques-watch-the-river-run/ .

References/for more information on the Rhine River:
https://www.britannica.com/place/Rhine-River
http://www.tauck.com/river-cruises/rhine-river-facts.aspx
https://traveltips.usatoday.com/rhine-river-63951.html
Map Credit: Daniel Ullrich (Threedots) via Wikimedia Commons.

Un-Study Technique #5:
Your Five Minutes of Fame (Teach to Learn)

Instead of studying, pretend that you have an assignment to give a five-minute presentation on wine or spirits (any wine, any spirit, any subject). If you work with wine or spirits, assume that you are going to present to your employees or co-workers. If you don't work in wine or spirits, let's assume this is a five-minute talk given to students in an intro to wine or spirits class.

Your first step—choose a topic: We're just talking five minutes here, so you'll need to choose a very specific topic. Here are a few ideas:

- The white grapes of Bordeaux
- Anjou rosés
- Subregions of Champagne
- Terroir of the Sonoma Valley AVA
- The noble grapes of Alsace
- Vin Santo
- Soave
- Chile's east-west appellations
- Vinho Verde
- The Great Dividing Range
- Cool-climate regions of Australia

Narrow it down: Your next challenge is to narrow your focus down so you can create a five-minute presentation! Keeping your presentation short will force you to focus on the most important pieces of information concerning a topic…in other words, you need to use your critical thinking skills to determine the context and relative importance of all the available information.

Five key points: For a five-minute presentation, you can easily make five key points. (Don't fret if you need to expand into plus-or-minus-one-or-two, such is life.) If you are presenting on the rosé wines of Anjou, your key points might be:

- Approximately 45% of Anjou wine is rosé (Anjou makes a range of wines, is most famous for Chenin-blanc based Vouvray, but rosé is a major product.)
- The grapes (Cabernet Franc, Grolleau, Grolleau Gris, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Gamay, Pineau d'Aunis)

- Cabernet d'Anjou AOC (Cab Franc + Cab Sauv, min 1.0% R.S.)
- Rosé d'Anjou AOC (mainly Grolleau, min 0.7% R.S.)
- Rosé de Loire AOC (produced throughout the Central Loire, but a good choice for a dry rosé at a maximum 0.3% R.S.)

Keep it Simple: This caveat has nothing to do with your (pretend) audience, but rather this simple truth: you can't explain something in clear, concise terms unless you have a true understanding of the subject. Anyone can ramble on about a topic…but only someone who really understands the topic can distill it down to a sentence or two. Albert Einstein said it better than I can, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough."

Slides, slides, everywhere the slides: Whether you use power point or other types of slides *in real life*, this is a good exercise in consolidating your information and keeping this concise. So…make a slide deck with five slides only, and one of your key points per slide. (When you are done, you can add in an introductory slide and a conclusion, we won't tell anyone.) Remember to stick to the "real rules" of slide design and do not fill them with words (no fair "reading slides" during your presentation.) Find a photo or make a graphic; and use a statement or two. Use the notes page of the slide to fill in as much detail as you want—this is where a lot of your "un-study" learning will come in.

Learn-by-teaching, learn-by-practice: Practice your presentation and have fun with it! You'll soon experience the learn-by-teaching effect. Give the presentation to your family, friends, teddy bears, or the mirror. Record yourself and play it back. The point here is to internalize the information until you can talk about the subject naturally and with confidence…to the point where you could give the presentation extemporaneously. Once you're there, you've learned the material—un-study techniques in action!

Un-Study Technique #6:
The Big Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

The big picture is worth a thousand words. That's a true statement if ever there was one. It's also the name of an un-study technique. Here's how it works:

For starters, choose a wine-related (or wine-adjacent) place or thing—not a wine, winery, or an appellation—but rather something like a mountain, river, monument, city, statue, or village. This can be approached one of two ways: either start with something that is of interest to you; or go random and throw a dart.

Here are a few ideas for your first topic:

- The Hill of Hermitage
- The Riddoch Highway
- Lake Garda
- Santa María la Real de Irache (the Monastery of Irache)
- Mount Aconcagua
- The Abbey of Sant'Antimo
- The Cathedral of Reims

Once you've chosen your place-or-thing, do a Google Image search and find an image that you just love (and can pique your curiosity or wanderlust). Print out the picture (or just leave it on your computer screen) and go for it—do some research and find out everything you can about your chosen mountain-river-monument-city-village-building-statue-or whatever. Be on the lookout for something fun, humorous, or just plain fascinating about the topic. What you're doing is building some meaningful context that will help in the next step…which is, of course, studying the wines of the place.

The point of this exercise is that your newly-found contextual knowledge—besides the fact that it is engaging and will undoubtedly make you a more fascinating companion—is that it is likely to allow you to more easily understand and recall the need-to-know details about wines of the area. And yes, that's the next step…study the wines of the area! Ideally, your new-found background

knowledge will spike your curiosity and help you break through that "can't stand to study" rut you've temporarily fallen into.
Be advised: this study technique is likely to result in you heading out the door to find a bottle of said wine—that is, if you didn't purchase one in advance. Just don't forget to record your tasting notes before the bottle is gone.

Here are a few more ideas for your "big picture" exploration:

Montevideo
The Pinhão Train Station
Cape Agulhas
The Monastery of Scala Dei
The Napa River
The Forest Spiral (Waldspirale)
The Grotte de Pair-Non-Pair
The Murray River
The Dolomites
The Château de Chambord
Wine Box Valparaíso
Milford Sound
Mission San Diego de Alcalá
Laguardia, Spain
Château de Rastignac
The Rock of Solutré
Lake Neusiedlersee
Mont Brouilly
Poverty Bay
Hermanus
Sonoma Creek
The Hospices de Beaune
The Monolithic Church of Saint-Émilion
The Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela
The Massif Central
The Drakensberg Mountains
Mount Konocti
Mont Blanc
The Columbia River
Niagara Escarpment

Un-Study Technique #7:
Wine (or Spirits) Map Scavenger Hunt

The next time you *just can't stand to study*, try a Wine (or Spirits) Map Scavenger Hunt! This activity requires the use of the Google Maps search ("get directions") function and should take between 30 and 45 minutes to complete (unless you choose to go down a photo search rabbit hole—but that's up to you).

The Wine (or Spirits) Map Scavenger Hunt activity will help you engage with and understand some of the regions/places/appellations on your wine and spirits maps (as opposed to just "memorizing" them—which gets exhausting).

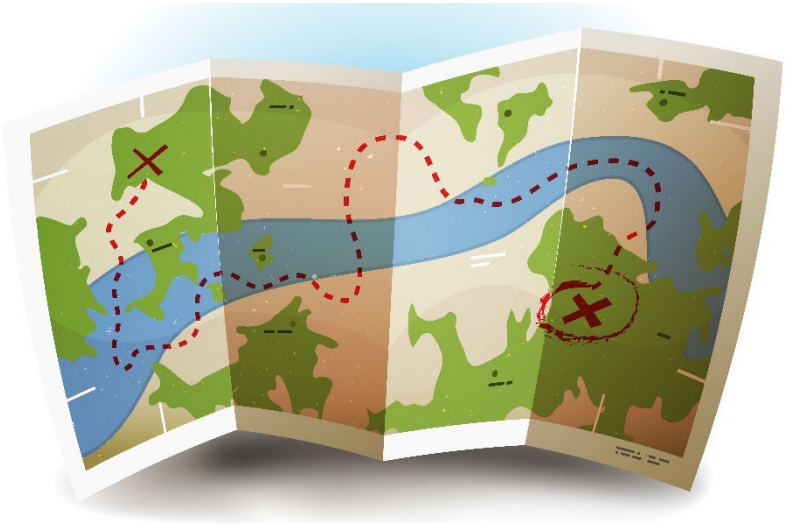
To go on a wine or spirits map scavenger hunt, the first thing you need to do is to pick the region you want to study. (The Bubbly Professor blog has four scavenger hunts ready to go: Argentina, Bordeaux's Left Bank, Napa County, and Scotch Whisky. You can find these at this link: https://bubblyprofessor.com/2019/04/03/un-study-techniques-wine-or-spirits-map-scavenger-hunt/).

Next, you need to download a wine or spirits map of the location you have chosen and print up the scavenger hunt location list. Using the wine or spirits map as a key, trace or draw a rough "blank map" of the region. We'll be plotting our locations on the blank map as we go.

Then, fire up your internet connection and access Google Maps. Choose one item from the location list and allow the miracle of Google Maps to take you there. Look around a bit and make sure you are in the right place. You might want to click on some of the pictures, zoom out and use the satellite function to check out the terrain (if you are hunting in a wine region the vineyards are likely to be of interest), or zero in on your location and see what you can

learn. Mark the location on the blank map you've drawn and make sure to note the name of the location and the region (appellation).

Next, click on the icon for "directions" and type in the location that you think is closest to the first location (you can go in any order on the location list page—the list is randomized). You might want to choose the directions for walking, but it is probably best to choose driving directions. Once you've landed on the new location look around a bit (like you did before). Once you've satisfied your curiosity, plot the new location on your blank map (the paper-and-pencil version).



Continue using Google Maps to plot your locations. As you find them, re-arrange the items in the list of driving or walking directions so that you are plotting the most efficient way to navigate through the region whilst visiting each of your locations—this will help you learn distances between regions as well as the east/west/north/south orientation of your chosen spot. When you are done you should have a nice record of your virtual trip through the region.

You can use the scavenger hunts we've posted below, or you can make your own. To make your own scavenger hunt, start with the wine or spirits map of your choice, draw or trace it in order to create a blank map, and then search one interesting spot in each area you want to explore. Use whatever type of establishment (winery, vineyard, distillery, historical site, restaurant/bar/wine bar, etc.) that will hold your interest and increase your understanding of the area. As you find your spots, use the Google Maps "directions" tool to map your course! Be sure to "log" each of your finds onto the paper-and-pencil map you made. After all, we do want to make this as (painlessly) educational as possible!

Happy Hunting!

Un-Study Technique #8:
Conquer the Wine Glass

For this un-study technique, we get to gaze deep into a glass of wine or a splash of spirits. However, we are not just going to sip and savor, this is more akin to *thinking while drinking.*

When dining (whether out-on-the-town or at home) as a serious student of wine, you choose your beverage wisely. Of course, the delight of your guests and dining companions is the most important thing to remember, but when the occasion will allow, you can use each bottle (or glass) as a learning opportunity.

Use these ideas to develop your tasting skills with each new bottle or glass:

- Consider the quality of the wine; is this typical of the grape variety, the region, the appellation, and/or the producer?
- What is the fruit condition; are the grapes under-ripe, perfectly ripe, over-ripe or perhaps affected via botrytis, *passerillage, appassimento* or other factors? Does this make sense concerning what I know about the wine and/or the region?
- What are the dominant aromas of the wine? Would you classify these aromas as primary, secondary, or tertiary? Based on what you know about the wine, does this make sense—or was it a surprise?
- How would you describe the taste components of the wine—sugar acidity, bitterness, umami? Does this make sense, considering what you know about the wine?
- How would you describe the body of the wine? What components comprise the structure of the wine—alcohol, tannin, sugar, acid? Does this make sense to you?
- What do you think would be a good food pairing for this wine? Why do you think this pairing would work? If you are having food, how does the wine evolve in relation to the food? Why does this occur?

Use these ideas to explore theory surrounding the wine:

- What wine have you had recently that reminds you of this wine? In what ways are the wines similar?
- What wine have you had recently had that is the opposite of this wine? In what ways are the wines dissimilar?
- What wine would be considered the Old World/New World equivalent to this wine?
- Why is this wine the way it is? Why is it so acidic/sweet/tannic or smooth?
- If you were visiting this winery, where would you stop next? What other wine regions (or associated points of interest) are located nearby?

Un-Study Technique #9: Liquor Store Archaeology

The next time you find yourself wandering the aisles of your favorite wine or liquor store, use that time to do a bit of digging. With the right tools, a bit of liquor store archaeology can lead to a valuable educational find! Here's a plan:

- Decide upon a type of wine or spirit that you want to uncover.
- Visit a (preferably local) wine or liquor store with a good reputation for knowledgeable staff and selection. Talk to the staff members and see what they can tell you about the store selection and how the product makes its way to the shelves. Ask them for their advice on the products and see what you can learn from them.
- Take note of the price range exhibited for the product you are interested in; and purchase a representative (or interesting) bottle.
- Taste the wine/spirit and record your tasting notes.
- Thoroughly read the information found on the label(s) and packaging. It's particularly interesting to note the information regarding the producer (winery/distillery), place of origin, and importer.
- Go online and find the producer and/or importer's website. See what you can learn from the marketing materials that pop up (which will be hard to miss). However, what you really want to find is information on how the wine or spirit was produced. Wineries often post winemaker's notes and/or technical sheets. Distilleries often provide a link to "how it's made" and/or pictures of their tanks and stills. Often, the best place to look for this type of information is on a navigation button that reads "for the trade."
- Your goal is to learn as much as you can about the specific product, and the product category.
- Considering the available price range and the price point of the bottle you bought, what factors do you think contributed to the price of your bottle? Why were the others more, or less expensive? What is a specific production technique, age (or lack of it), supply and demand, what the market will bear, creative marketing, quality, reputation—or none of the above?

Un-Study Technique #10:
Trade Tastings with a Purpose

Trade or consumer tastings can be an excellent adjunct to your book-and-flashcard-based serious wine (or spirits) studies. With a bit of on-the-ground discipline, tasting events can be used to "fill in the gaps" in your tasting experience and/or to expand your understanding of wine theory. It just takes is a bit of planning.

Here are some ideas to ensure purpose-driven tastings:

- Decide on an educational goal (or goals) for the event. Focus on this goal for your first hour at the tasting.
- To focus on theory-based knowledge, prepare a list of questions in advance and ask the same question of each winemaker or rep. Your focus could be anything– wine making, marketing, food pairings, the region, distribution—whatever topic or topics you'd like to explore.
- To focus on tasting skills, choose one of more of the following:
- Varietal focus: Choose a varietal to focus on; and come equipped with a tasting grid that focuses on that variety. Taste five wines and record your impressions. After tasting all five, do a compare-and-contrast exercise.
- Regional focus: Taste five wines from the same region. Record your impressions and see if you can detect a similar character in the wines.
- Procedural focus: Taste five wines produced using the same technique—such as carbonic maceration, sur lie aging, or cold soak—and see if you can detect any similarity potentially derived from the process. Alternatively, taste five wines of the same "type" (such as rosé or Sonoma Chardonnay); but seek out wines that were produced using different winemaking techniques. Always remember to take notes!
- Topographical or terroir-driven focus (extra credit for this one): Seek out wines that share a topographical similarity, whether it be high-altitude vineyards, limestone soils, or an exceptionally warm vintage.
- Organoleptic focus: If there is a certain type of wine descriptor that you just don't "get" or don't particularly enjoy—such as floral aromas, salinity, minerality, black pepper aroma, earthiness, or gritty tannins—ask each table if they have a wine that showcases it. See if this can lead to an understanding or appreciation of these types of wine.

CONCLUSION

I hope you have found something useful (or at least thought-provoking) in this material. Keep in mind that it is no problem at all if you don't agree with some of what I've written, or if you feel you have some better ideas about adult learning and studying. As a matter of fact, if you have anything to add, I'd love to hear from you!

Best of luck with your continued wine and spirits studies, and please feel free to contact me with your comments and questions.

Cheers,
Jane A. Nickles
The Bubbly Professor
https://bubblyprofessor.com/

Weekly Study Planner Week # _____

Material/Topics for the week:

Day One	
Day/Date:	Material/Topic(s) for the Day:
Block 1 (long):	
Block 2 (short):	
Block 3 (short):	
Block 4 (short):	
Block 5 (long:)	

Day Two	
Day/Date:	Material/Topic(s) for the Day:
Block 1 (long):	
Block 2 (short):	
Block 3 (short):	
Block 4 (short):	
Block 5 (long:)	

Day Three	
Day/Date:	Material/Topic(s) for the Day:
Block 1 (long):	
Block 2 (short):	
Block 3 (short):	
Block 4 (short):	
Block 5 (long:)	

Day Four	
Day/Date:	Material/Topic(s) for the Day:
Block 1 (long):	
Block 2 (short):	
Block 3 (short):	
Block 4 (short):	
Block 5 (long:)	

Day Five	
Day/Date:	Material/Topic(s) for the Day:
Block 1 (long):	
Block 2 (short):	
Block 3 (short):	
Block 4 (short):	
Block 5 (long:)	

Day Six	
Day/Date:	Material/Topic(s) for the Day:
Block 1 (long):	
Block 2 (short):	
Block 3 (short):	
Block 4 (short):	
Block 5 (long:)	

Notes from this week: