



British Columbia Amateur Winemakers Association Competition Handbook

Fourteenth Revised Edition

March 2026

BCAWA OFFICIAL CLASSES

Proposed – March 2026

Wine Class Descriptions

Numerical data given under "Technical Characteristics" are not intended to provide absolutely rigid bounds; rather, they are for the general guidance of Competitor and Judge. The term "varietal" refers to a wine with 85% or more of the named variety. Examples are given for clarification and are not intended to be prescriptive.

Wines in Classes E1 through E7 are red table wines. Better wines in these classes are virtually free of residual sugar, although a well-balanced and well-aged wine will have a softness that could be mistaken for sweetness. The garnet edge of a well-matured wine is preferable to the red-purple of a young wine.

=====

Class A. Aperitif Sherry

Dry and not very sweet sherry, madeira and related type wines belong in this class. A "nutty" characteristic is often present. These wines have been fortified with brandy or neutral grape spirits to a moderately high alcohol content and frequently have undergone oxidation during baking and/or barrel ageing or have been fermented with flor yeast and aged under a flor film. Titratable acidity is low. Non-grape examples must be placed in this class. The sweeter Sherries, Madeira, and related wines belong in the After Dinner Class and herbed aperitif wines belong in Class B.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients: Commonly used grapes would include Palomino and Muscat. Herbs and other flavourings should NOT be used in this class.

Alcohol:	15.5% - 20%
Colour:	No restrictions
Sugar:	0% - 10%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 – 1.030
Acid:	4.0 g/l – 5.5 g/l
pH:	2.9 – 3.3

Class B1. Aperitif

Wines in this class are designed as an aperitif to be drunk **before** a meal. They can be created to exhibit a strong stimulating effect on the salivary glands due to ingredients such as citrus or other strongly flavoured fruit as well as a diversity of aromatic and slightly bitter herbs. They can be fortified and may range from dry to sweet. They include Vermouth styles, Aperol, Campari, Dubonnet, Noilly Prat, Lillet, and similar commercially patented aperitifs.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes and or Fruit based.
Alcohol:	11% - 18%
Colour:	No restrictions.
Sugar:	.5% - 11% (off dry to sweet)
Specific Gravity:	.992 - 1.036
Acid:	4.0 g/L - 5.0 g/L
Tannin:	May be somewhat astringent.
Bitterness:	A bitter characteristic is permissible

Class B2. Digestif

Entries in this class are designed as an Digestif to be drunk **after** a meal. A digestif is an alcoholic beverage served after a meal with the intention of aiding digestion and extending the enjoyment of a meal. They can be bitter, herbal or sweet. They may range from dry to sweet. These beverages are typically stronger in alcohol content than apéritifs and are often enjoyed neat. Common types of digestifs include Amari, Pernod, Chartreuse, Calvados, Brandies, Limoncello, Orange cello, Slivovitz, Prugna, herbal liqueurs, Grand Marnier, Amaretto, and other commercially recognized liqueurs.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	No Restrictions.
Alcohol:	18% - 40%
Colour:	No restrictions.
Sugar:	(dry to sweet)
Bitterness:	A bitter characteristic is permissible but not common

Class C1. Chardonnay

Entries in this class must contain at least 85% Chardonnay.

Wine Characteristics

A dry, full bodied white with rich mouthfeel. Apple, pear, fig, melon, peach, pineapple, lemon, grapefruit, along with nutmeg, honey, butter, butterscotch are some of the flavours that you will find in this wine. Any combination of barrel fermentation and/or aging, sur lie, stirring, ML may require time to develop in glass. Oak should blend with fruit. As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	9% - 15%
Colour:	Pale straw to golden. No amber, brown or grey tinges.
Sugar:	0.0% - 1.0%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 – .994.
Acidity:	6.0 g/L - 7.5 g/L
pH:	3.0 - 3.7.

Class C2. Aromatic White Vinifera

A dry to off-dry white wine from *Vitis vinifera* grapes such as any of the Muscat's,, Bacchus, Ehrenfeltser, Gewürztraminer, Malvasia, Optima, Ortega, Pearl of Casaba, Scheurebe, Schönburger, Siegerrebe, Symphony, Viognier, or White Riesling.. Unblended varietals that demonstrate a striking perfumed quality tend to be more successful than blends. Aromatic quality may reflect floral characters, fruit characters, or both. The final decisions about which entries best represent the concept of 'aromatic' must be left to the judges. Wines in this class should be judged cool. As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style.

Wine Characteristics

Gewürztraminer. Floral (rose petal), lychees, peach, apricot, grapefruit, anise, spicy. Oak should be very subtle, if present. Slight bitterness acceptable varietal character. Noticeable acidity acceptable. May have pink or bronze tints.

Muscats. Strong, spicy, floral, musky, orange peel, ripe peach, table grape characters expected. Usually short to medium finish. Seldom oaked. Muscat of Alexandria, Golden Muscat, Orange Muscat, White Muscat, Morio Muscat, Muscat Ottonel, etc.

White Riesling. Floral, honeysuckle, lychee, apricot, citrus, apple, peach, lime, pie crust, mineral, and petroleum notes reported. “Racy” acidity. Long finish.

Viognier. Honeysuckle, jasmine, primroses, apricots and peaches, candied peel, musk and spice. Creamy mouthfeel.

Technical Characteristics

Alcohol:	9% - 13.5%.
Colour:	Pale bronze or bronze-pink to pale straw to light gold. No amber, brown or grey tinges.
Sugar:	0.0% - 3%.
Specific Gravity:	0.990 – 1.002
Acidity:	6.0g/L – 9.0g/L.
pH:	3.0 - 3.4

Class C3. Dry White Non-Vinifera

BCAWA does not currently use this class. This suggestion was reaffirmed in July 2018.

Class C4. Other Dry White

This class contains all other white wines, either varietals or blends, which do not fit the descriptions of Classes C1 (Chardonnay), C5 (White Pinot), or C2 (Aromatic White Vinifera). Varietal vinifera wines in this class must contain 85% or more of vinifera varieties such as Auxerrois, Chasselas, Chenin blanc, Colombard, Grüner Veltliner, Madeleine Angevine, Sauvignon blanc, Semillon, or Trebbiano. The remaining 15% may be any ingredient. Blends in this class must not fit the definitions of C1, C5, or C2. Wines that include interspecific hybrid grapes are acceptable in this class and their ingredient percentages must be specified so their eligibility in the appropriate AWC class can be determined. Aromatic white grape varieties are acceptable in blends provided their impact is subdued. Non-grape dry white table wines belong in either this class or J1 (Country Table). As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style.

Technical Characteristics

Alcohol:	9% - 13.5%.
Colour:	Pale bronze or bronze-pink to pale straw to light gold. No amber, brown or grey tinges.
Sugar:	0.0% - 1.5%.
Specific Gravity:	0.990 – .996.
Acidity:	6.0g/L - 8.5g/L.
pH:	3.0 - 3.4

Class C5. Dry White Pinot

Varietal wines in the Dry White Pinot Family Class must contain at least 85% of any one of the following varieties: Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, white juice from Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier or Gamay Noir.

Blended wines in the Dry White Pinot Family Class must contain at least 85 % of any two or more of the above varieties. Entries will be considered for the AWC National Competition as Class C4, Other Dry White.

Wine Characteristics

Pinot blanc. Ripe pear, spice, citrus and honey. Oak should not overpower. Styles range from fruity to Chardonnay-like complexity.

Pinot Gris. Aromas of tropical fruit, tangerine, floral perfume, magnolia blossom, smoky, anise. In the mouth, flavours of citrus, tangerine, peach, anise, almond and pear. Should have excellent mouth feel and lingering finish. Oak usually not very successful. May have pink or bronze tints.

As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	9% - 13.5%
Colour:	Pale bronze or bronze-pink to pale straw to light gold. No amber, brown or grey tinges.
Sugar:	0.0% - 1.5%
Specific Gravity:	.990 – .996
Acid:	6g/l - 8.5g/l

Class D. Rosé

Light, refreshing, transparent pink to very pale red wines. Wines that are unmistakably red are not acceptable. Sweetness ranges from dry to off-dry. The most interesting rosés tend to be made from the juice of black grapes fermented with little or no skin contact but small amounts of red wine may also be added to a white wine. Slight spritz is permissible. As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style. Non-grape rosés belong in either this class or J1 (Country Table) and qualifying provincial entries will be placed in the more appropriate of those classes for the AWC Competition by the Provincial Director, usually after discussion with the winemaker. Blends of grape and less than 95% non-grape may also be entered here. Non-vinifera rosés are acceptable in this class.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Red and black grapes with colourless juice are most successful, but blends of red and white wines are permitted.
Alcohol:	9% - 13.5%
Colour:	Pink: pale to deep. An orange tinge is permissible. Red or purple are undesirable. Amber is unacceptable.
Sugar:	0% - 2.0%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 – .998
Acid:	6.0 g/L – 8.0 g/L
pH:	3.1 - 3.4

Class E1. Dry Bordeaux Style Red

Varietal (= single variety) wines in this class are those that contain at least 85% of any one of the following five varieties: Cabernet franc, Carmenere, Malbec, Merlot, or Petit Verdot. Note that any other grape variety or varieties may be used in the remaining 15%. Note that varietal Cabernet Sauvignon wines belong only in Class E7.

Blended wines in this class must contain at least 85% of any one or more of the following six varieties: Cabernet franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere, Malbec, Merlot, or Petit Verdot. Note that any other grape variety or varieties may be used in the remaining 15%. Note that Cabernet Sauvignon is permitted in this class as a component of a blend.

A blend in this class containing 85% or more Cabernet Sauvignon must be entered in class E7. (Cabernet Sauvignon)

Wine Characteristics

Cabernet franc. Similar in nose and flavour to Cabernet Sauvignon but tending towards coffee and blueberry characters and seldom without a more or less distinctive bell pepper, canned green bean/canned asparagus (methoxypyrazine) character. That character should not be considered a flaw in otherwise good wines but good wines in which it is least aggressive will likely be correspondingly rewarded.

Carmenere. Unless very ripe, tends to exhibit bell pepper herbaceousness. Black currant, smoke, raspberry, earth, spice, violets on the nose. Plummy, black fruit, tea, chocolate, dried herbs in the flavour on the nose. Plummy, black fruit, tea, chocolate, dried herbs in the flavour.

Malbec. Flavours of earth, truffles and dark chocolate accompany the black and red berry flavors.

Merlot. Herbal, cherry, raspberry, plum, eucalyptus, cedar, bell pepper, nut, chocolate, raisin, tobacco.

Petit Verdot. This wine adds colour and minty, musky flavors to Merlot, and Bordeaux Style Blends.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	11% - 16%
Colour:	Medium red to garnet
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 – .994
Acidity:	5.0g/L – 7.0g/L
pH:	3.4 – 4.0
Tannin:	May be somewhat astringent.

Class E2. Dry Red Pinot

Wines in the Dry Red Pinot Class must contain at least 85% of one or more of the following varieties: Pinot noir, Pinot Meunier, or Gamay noir. Ideally, these wines exhibit fruity attributes and may be at their peak when young. The best mature examples demonstrate complexity and finesse while retaining substantial fruit.

Wine Characteristics

Pinot noir. Nose – earthy, Bing cherry, spice, light, plum, dry black cherry; and an aroma that can resemble wilted roses. Flavours can be cherry, spice, raspberry, currant, and mushroom, along with earth, tar, herb and cola notes. Complex, silky tannins, barnyard notes. Velvety mouth feel. Long finish.

Pinot Meunier. Somewhat light in colour and body. Strawberry, black currant, plum, raspberry, blueberry in the flavour.

Gamay Noir. Violet, rose petal, cherry, strawberry, raspberry aromas and flavour.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	11% - 15%
Colour:	Medium red to garnet
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 - 0.994
Acidity:	5.0g/L – 7.0g/L
pH:	3.3 –3.8

Class E3. Non-Vinifera Red Grape

A red table wine made from grapes of which at least 85% are interspecific hybrid varieties. They include, as varieties or blends, Baco Noir, Castel, Chambourcin, Chancellor, De Chaunac, Frontenac, Landal, Landot, Lucie Kuhlmann, Léon Millot, Maréchal Foch, Michurinetz, Sabrevois, and St. Croix among many others.

The remaining 15% may be any ingredient. As with any table wine, the sugar-acid balance must convey the impact of dry table wine style. Judges should have sufficient general familiarity with these wines that they recognize their positive attributes and realize that entries should not be penalized for characters that are typical of the varietal.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	11% - 16%
Colour:	Medium red to garnet
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 - 0.994
Acidity:	5.0g/L -7.0g/L
pH:	3.4 – 4.0
Tannin	May be somewhat astringent

Class E4. Dry Red Zinfandel

A dry red table wine made from at least 85% Zinfandel grapes. Primitivo grapes are acceptable. The remaining 15% may be any other ingredient.

Wine Characteristics

Raspberry, blackberry, cherry, plum, tar, earth, leather, spice, pepper. Full-bodied.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	11% - 16%
Colour:	Medium red to garnet
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 - 0.994
Acidity:	5.0g/L - 7.0g/L
pH:	3.4 – 4.0
Tannin:	May be somewhat astringent.

Class E5. Rhone Style Dry Red

A dry red table wine made from at least 85% of one or more of the following grape varieties: Alicante Bouschet, Carignane, Grenache, Mourvèdre, Petite Syrah (Durif), and/or Syrah (Shiraz). Blends may also contain any other variety permitted in Chateauneuf-du-Pape. The remaining 15% may be any ingredient.

Wine Characteristics

Grenache. Light to medium-bodied red wines that have lots of red fruit flavors (e.g. raspberry, cherry, etc) and soft tannins.

Mourvèdre. Medium weight, spicy cherry and berry flavours and moderate tannins.

Petite Syrah. Black pepper, blackberry jam, blackberries, oranges, plums, boysenberries, vanilla, red meat, black tea, dried sage and clove. Deep colour.

Syrah. Blackberry, pepper, plum, dry pepper, spice, black cherry, tar, leather and roasted nut flavours, a full bodied, smooth, supple texture and smooth tannins.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes.
Alcohol:	11% - 16%.
Colour:	Light red to med. red to garnet.
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%.
Specific Gravity:	0.990 - 0.994.
Acidity:	5.0g/L – 7.0g/L.
pH:	3.4 – 4.0.
Tannin:	May be somewhat astringent

Class E6. Other Dry Red

This class contains all other red wines, either varietals or blends, that do not fit the definitions of Classes E1 (Dry Red Bordeaux), E2 (Dry Red Pinot), E3 (Non-Vinifera Red Grape), E4 (Dry Red Zinfandel), E7 Cabernet Sauvignon), E5, (Rhone Style Red). Varietal vinifera wines in this class must contain 85% or more of vinifera varieties such as Limburger, Barbara, Dornfelder, Nebbiolo, Ruby Cabernet, Sangiovese, Touriga Nacional, Tempranillo (Valdepeñas), or Zweigelt. The remaining 15% may be any other ingredient. Wines that include interspecific hybrid grapes are eligible for this class provided they are from less than 85% hybrid. Non-grape dry red table wines belong in either this class or J1 (Country Table).

Wine Characteristics

Lemburger. Black cherry, raspberry, cassis, black pepper, rose petal, earthy.

Montepulciano. Raspberry and anise aromas; textured flavours, full fruit, black pepper, hints of spice.

Sangiovese. Cherry, dark cherry, plum, herby, bay leaf, dry supple texture and medium-to full-bodied spice, raspberry, cherry and anise flavours.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes.
Alcohol:	11% - 16%.
Colour:	Light red to medium red to garnet.
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%.
Specific Gravity:	0.990 - 0.995.
Acidity:	5.0g/L - 6.7g/L
pH:	3.4 – 4.0

Class E7. Dry Red Cabernet Sauvignon

Wines in this class must contain at least 85% Cabernet Sauvignon.

All entries in this class will be considered for the AWC National Competition as Class E1, Dry Red Bordeaux Style.

Wine Characteristics

Black currant, cassis, plum, black cherry and spice. It can also be marked by herb, olive, mint, tobacco, cedar and anise, and ripe, jammy notes. Generally accepted that oak improves it by softening tannins and imparting, woody, toasty, cedar, vanilla characters.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	Grapes
Alcohol:	11% - 16%
Colour:	Medium red to garnet
Sugar:	0.0% - 1%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 – 0.994
Acidity:	5.0g/L – 7.0g/L
pH:	3.4 – 4.0
Tannin:	May be somewhat astringent.

Class F. Dessert

Wines to be drunk with the dessert course of the meal. Should be sweet and luscious, but with sufficient acid to prevent them from being cloying. Alcohol must have been developed by fermentation of the wine.

These are NOT fortified wines. Wines such as ports, sweet sherries, Madeira types, and other wines that are fortified, baked or otherwise made using port, sherry, Madeira etc. processes do NOT belong in this class.

The Dessert Class has three style sub-categories: Botrytis Affected, Ice-wine Style and Other Dessert Styles (such as Late Harvest, etc.). The style of the wine should be indicated on the Registration Form.

Dessert wines made from 95% or more non-grape must be entered in this class. Dessert wines that are blends of grape with less than 95% non-grape are acceptable. Non-vinifera dessert wines are acceptable.

The style of the wine should be indicated on the Registration Form.

Technical Characteristics

	Botrytis Affected	Ice wine Style	Other Dessert Styles
Ingredients	No Restrictions		
Alcohol	9% - 14%	9% – 13%	8.5% - 14%
Colour	No Restrictions		
Sugar	15% - 22%	15% - 26%	6.5% - 15%
Specific Gravity	1.060 – 1.090	1.060 – 1.110	1.025 – 1.060
Acid	Minimum 8g/L	9g/L – 14g/L	Minimum 8g/L
pH	2.9 – 3.4		

Class G. After Dinner

Wines in this class are for use after dinner or on other occasions in place of a liqueur, perhaps with nuts or cheese. They are rich, sweet, full bodied and alcoholic. Any ingredient is acceptable. Wines such as port, sweet sherry or madeira types or other wines that have been fortified, baked or otherwise made using appropriate processes belong in this class. Most wines in this class will have been fortified by the addition of brandy or neutral spirits. An unfortified wine naturally home-fermented to high alcohol is also acceptable. Acid and astringency should be muted. Any appropriate ingredients are acceptable.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	No restrictions
Alcohol:	15% - 22%
colour:	No restrictions
Sugar:	6%-12%
Specific Gravity:	1.014 – 1.038
Acid:	4.0 g/l – 6.0 g/l
pH:	3.2 - 3.9

Class H. Sparkling

There are Sparkling wines made that are appropriate for all occasions. All wines with detectable carbon dioxide pressure in the bottle and showing visible sparkle in the glass should be entered in this class. Wines sparkled by the Champagne method have an unmistakable yeasty flavour which adds to their complexity. Those that have been carbonated tend to exhibit fruitier characteristics. Cloudy sediment of any kind, in the bottle or in the glass, is unacceptable. Presence of a secondary fermentation capsule or capsules in the bottle is not a fault. There is no restriction on ingredients

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients:	No restrictions.
Alcohol:	9% - 12%
Colour:	No restrictions.
Sugar:	0% - 6%
Specific Gravity:	0.990 to 1.014
Acid:	9 - 12 g/L
pH:	2.8 - 3.4

Class I. Social Wine

A Social wine should be enjoyable with or without the accompaniment of food. Colour can fall into a wide range but it should be inviting. The wine should have an inviting fruity aroma. The wine should be neither dry nor excessively sweet. It should not be noticeably high in alcohol. In many types of wines a peak or peaks appear in the flavour spectrum. For example, a White Table wine might have an acid peak; in the Aperitif class, a bitter peak is not out of place. There should be no such peaks in a Social wine. Good balance between sugar and acid is essential. A touch of "spritzy" is permissible. This would be a good choice of wine for a social function.

Technical Characteristics

Ingredients: White or Red grapes/Juice

Alcohol: 8% - 12%

Colour: Appealing, no restrictions.

Sugar: 1.0% - 6%

Specific Gravity: .994 - 1.014

Acid: 6 g/l - 10 g/l

pH: 2.9 - 3.4

Country Classes

A country wine is any wine made from at least 95% non-grape ingredients. **Some country wines are intentionally made in a style closely matching the description of one of the "functional" grape classes: A (Aperitif Sherry), B (Aperitif), F (Dessert), G (After Dinner), or H (Sparkling) and must be entered in those classes.** Others may fit the definitions of classes E6 (Other Dry Red), D (Rosé), C4 (Other Dry White), or I (Social) and may be entered there or in Class J1 (Country Table) or J2 (Country Social), whichever seems most appropriate.

The Country Wine Classes J1 and J2 are intended for those country wines which depend heavily on their non-grape origins for their interest and character and have been made in a functionally table or functionally social style. Still meads and melomels are appropriate for this class and should be entered in either J1 or J2 depending on sweetness.

Class J1: Country Table Wine

Any dry to medium dry (0-3% Residual Sugar) country wine intended as table wine. Balance is of great importance in determining a successful wine. Flavour may range from very delicate to very intense. A touch of "spritz" is acceptable, especially in lower alcohol or lighter flavoured wines.

Class J2. Country Social Wine

Any country wine intended to be appreciated on its own, rather than to accompany food. Country Social Wines are medium dry to medium sweet (3-8% Residual Sugar) and are not sweet enough to be dessert wines. Class J2 is intended primarily for wines which are outside the parameters of Class I (Social) because of their fruit characteristics and often, sweetness. Country Social Wines typically have one or more dramatic "peaks" in their profile - an immediately recognizable intensity of fruit aroma and/or flavour, or noticeable acidity and freshness, or a hint of bitterness, or a higher alcohol level through fermentation than is suitable for Class I (Social). Astringency and/or bitterness and/or high acidity are not faults in themselves but must have been balanced by appropriate sweetness and/or flavour intensity and/or mouthfeel. A touch of spritz is acceptable, especially in lower alcohol or less intensely

Class P. Sparkling Cider

A sparkling beverage of 6 to 10% alcohol content, dry to medium sweetness, low to medium acidity, made from either or both apple juice (Cider), or pear juice (Perry) or from some combination of one or both of those juices with other fruit (non-grape) juice. The other juice must be less than 50% of the blend and the flavour of the other fruit should not dominate. The difficult-to-define, zesty character of traditional cider must be present and will be a direct reflection of the cidemaker's skill in selecting ingredients. Any form of carbonation acceptable in the Sparkling Class is also acceptable in the Sparkling Cider Class. Sparkle should be controlled and prolonged. Fine champagne like bubbles trailing from the bottom of the glass are preferred. Cider may be disgorged or presented on the priming yeast. In the latter case the cider must pour clear to within 3 cm of the bottom of the bottle.

Class Z. Provincial Crush

This class will consist of wines made from the Provincial Crush which will be defined in the competition notice on the BCAWA Website.

Entries must be made from 100% grapes received through the Provincial Crush program. No blending is allowed.

The entries in this class will be judged as the appropriate class that they fall into, as defined in the competition notice.

.