



General Guide to Tea Tasting (Applicable to all 6 tea types).

Print this out, in addition to the rubric specific to the tea type being assessed, to use together as references when conducting tea quality assessments

4 Quality Domains: Color, Aroma, Taste, Shape/Appearance

5 Steps of Tea Processing and their important quality criteria:

1. **Dry Leaf:** 1. Uniformity of shape and color. 2. Wholeness. 3. Cleanliness.
2. **Soup:** 1. Chroma (is the color on par for that tea type and sub-type) 2. Luminosity/vibrancy 3. Clarity
3. **Aroma:** 1. Purity (perceived notes are aligned with tea type and lack unusual odors) 2. Body (is the physical sensation of the aroma *rich* – full of substance, *smooth* – easy on the nose, little irritation, *level* – consistent and unified aroma profile) 3. Length (aroma should linger in the nose and cup).
4. **Taste:** 1. Appropriate relative degrees of the five taste senses 2. Body/Mouthfeel (astringency, smoothness/roundness) 3. Finish (assess the residual taste characteristics in the mouth, throat, and nose over the seconds and minutes after drinking).
5. **Infused Leaves:** 1. Tenderness (bud/leaf ratio and physical softness of the material) 2. Color (depends on tea type. Green tea should not have red/black spots, and black tea should not have green spots). 3. Uniformity (of leaf age, size, thickness, tenderness, color, and wholeness).

NOTE: To review of how this 5-step process is conducted, see Chapter 4 of the Masterclass on Tea (QR code on right)



Positive

Negative

Dry Leaf

Soup

Aroma

Taste

Infused Leaf

Furry: abundant buds rich in little hairs. **Sturdy:** strands are heavy, dense, thick, tightly knotted. **Oily/glossy:** Color looks fresh, bright, moist, and has a sheen **Neat:** referring to good uniformity of shape and leaf parts.

Clear: clean, transparent, bright, without precipitates. **Vivid:** fresh and vibrant, has some sheen to it. **Brilliant:** Soup color is rich, deep and transparent.

High aroma: aroma is strong, stimulating and long-lasting. **Pure:** aroma is balanced and lacks miscellaneous scents. **Full-bodied:** aroma feels rich and full in the nose. **Long finish:** aroma lasts long > 10 seconds in the nose and cup.

Hui Gan: sweet aftertaste and long finish. **Rich:** Taste is thick but not astringent, full and palatable with a sweet aftertaste. **Pure:** taste is balanced and strong, mellow aftertaste, good but less substantive than **rich**. **Level:** taste is normal, less substantive than **pure**.

Delicate: many buds, leaves are very small and tender. **Youthful:** buds and leaf material feel soft and appear vibrant. **Soft:** slightly less tender and more rigid than **delicate**, leaves feel like cotton. **Uniform:** leaves are uniform in age, size and color. **Hefty:** leaves are thick and strong. **Bright:** colorful and vibrant appearance of leaves.

Hot spots: burnt spots on the leaf. **Fluffy:** Tea feels light, coarse and loose. **Heavy feet:** Too much crushed crumb-like tea pieces. **Messy:** lack of uniformity in color or shape. **Dull:** color is dull or lifeless

Shallow: soup is not rich in substance, and the color is light. **Lots of sediment:** slag at the bottom of the bowl. **Turbid:** many suspended solids in the soup, poor transparency. **Dark:** Soup color lacks brightness

Plain: not an overly negative descriptor – refers to relatively low aroma body that lacks the strength of high aroma but does not carry bad or impure odors. **Dull:** aroma is of a certain concentration, but still relatively unremarkable/unstimulating. **Muffled:** aroma feels stifled or suffocated, relatively dull and unpleasant. **Rough:** aroma is low and abrasive. **Stale:** tea smells old and lifeless. **Inapt:** aroma carries foreign non-tea odors, such as smoke, acid, mildew, rancidity.

Light: taste lacks serious abnormalities, but it bland and weak. **Skinny-fat:** tea is both coarse and thin, typical of low-grade tea.

Bitter/Astringent: while a certain degree of bitterness and astringency is good, these characteristics can be found in excess, creating over-stimulation and numbness of the mouth. **Watery:** taste feels light, weak, and impure. Tea has a watery taste when it is damp or insufficiently dried.

Frail: leaf material is thin and fleshless with veins apparent. **Craggy:** leaves are rough and hard, with exposed veins. After pinching with fingers, the leaves bounce back open rather than staying closed. **Single leaflets:** leaves have been removed from stems. **Broken:** tea leaves and buds are cracked and fragmented. **Dull:** leaves are dark and lackluster. **Messy:** leaf material is variable in terms of age and tenderness, with miscellaneous stems and plant parts. **Hot spots:** local black or yellow burn marks on the leaf edges or surface.