# Stellenbosch 2023 Abstract Submission

## Title
A Study of Consumer Knowledge of Wine Language in Bandol

## I want to submit an abstract for:
Conference Presentation

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## Keywords
oenotourism, wine language, winespeak, cellar door, consumer wine knowledge, wine descriptors

## Research Question
Can consumer knowledge of wine be accurately measured by the ability to use wine descriptors?

## Methods
A questionnaire distributed at cellar doors in Bandol, France, to visitors.

## Results
Most visitors can use general wine terms but very few are capable of using more specific, meaningful descriptors. For most visitors, communication through wine is an important goal.

## Abstract
A questionnaire gauging consumer knowledge of wine language was distributed in the tasting rooms of 15 wineries in Bandol, a wine region located on the French Riviera, a 45-minute drive from Marseille. The study was conducted between July and September 2021 while the author was living locally and writing a book on Bandol wine. Respondents were asked to taste one wine – either rosé, red or white – and to describe it using three words or phrases that they believed to be correct wine language. They were also asked to assess their own level of wine knowledge and explain their interest, or lack thereof, in wine language. Over 300 questionnaires were distributed to tasting room staff members and exactly 100 were completed and returned.

Though the sample size is small, the study yielded interesting and unexpected results that suggest that the goals of the wineries and their visitors may be divergent. While the former group seeks to educate customers and to sell wine, the latter are interested in having personal experiences and direct communication. If the goal of a winery visit was simply to make a purchase, then it would be much easier to shop online or at the supermarket. In linguistic terms, the aim of the study was to see if wine aficionados can be distinguished from novices by their ability to use wine terminology correctly. In other words, are those respondents who consider themselves knowledgeable able to consistently use acceptable wine descriptors while those with less knowledge aren’t? The answer is that the situation is complicated in Bandol. Hordes of summer tourists come to the region for the sun, not the wine, though there are also a handful of internationally renowned wineries that attract devotees. While they are staying in the area, traditional tourists typically visit the local wineries to buy rosé by the case for poolside drinking while oenotourists and wine lovers stop off at renowned wineries like Domaine Tempier, which was one of the participating wineries. This means that a wide range of wine drinkers were represented in the study.
It was also interesting that only a handful of participants used precise tasting terminology to describe the wines they had tasted. Precision, rather than the failure to commit an error, became a more accurate measure of advanced wine knowledge. Most participants could say that a wine was fruity or tannic – two of the most popular descriptors – but only a handful could go further to describe the kind of fruit or tannins in the wine. The results showed a ratio of five aficionados to two novices, and this is in line with previous cellar door research. We should expect to find more aficionados than novices coming to the cellar door because they are more likely to seek out wine-centered experiences. The overwhelming majority of wine novices prefer to make their purchases at the supermarket, for the sake of convenience and also in the hopes of finding sale items. While the novices – self-professed or otherwise – proved inconsistent and contradictory in their responses and choice of descriptors, many of them expressed the surprising desire to learn more about both wine and descriptors because they would like to be able to discuss wine with confidence in social settings. This was an unexpected result, particularly since several wineries approached by the author refused to participate on the grounds that customers are intimidated by wine language and such a questionnaire would not be welcome. In spite of the increasingly visual focus of many wineries in their advertising on social media, this study found that the importance of direct, face-to-face communication of tasting impressions should not be overlooked by wine producers today.

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