What should I expect in the Level 2 Sommelier Exam, especially the blind tasting?

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What should I expect in the Level 2 Sommelier Exam, especially the blind tasting?

The **Level 2 Sommelier Exam** (online version) has both tasting and theory sections. Here's what you need to know:

- **Before you begin:**
  - Do not start the exam unless you have the **required wines** and **exam materials** (sent to you by email).
  - Confirm your internet connection is strong and stable — there are **no retakes** if you disconnect.
- **Exam order:**
  - The exam typically begins with the **tasting portion** and finishes with the **theory portion**.
  - You'll have **one hour total** to complete everything.
- **Tasting portion:**
  - Have your wines poured and ready before you begin.
  - You must describe each wine in **your own words**, in **complete sentences**. Copying basic descriptors from the varietal cheat sheet will not be enough.
  - Pay close attention to the **varietal fingerprint** (a concept taught in the course).
  - Your tasting notes must be authentic and precise — generic answers or obvious filler will not pass.

- Keith Wallace personally grades this section after tasting the same wines.

- **Theory portion:**
  - Draws from both the **reading material** and **video lectures**.
  - Question types include multiple-choice, sorting, and fill-in-the-blank.
  - For fill-in-the-blank questions, spelling matters.
  - Once you move forward, you cannot go back to change previous answers.

- **Grading:**
  - Exams are hand-graded and can take up to **six weeks** for results.

Reminder: This format applies only to the **online NWS Level 2 exam**. If you're taking the course through a partner wine school or university, the format may differ. Always review the **Exam Preparation lesson** in your course portal for the most current details.

Examples of Tasting Notes (

These examples are for the same wine by two different students. The first one earned a 81% and the second earned a 50% score.

A Passing Tasting Note

- **Acid:** Medium; **Body:** High; **Tannin:** High
- **Cabernet Sauvignon**, blended primarily with **Merlot**
- *"This Red Bordeaux gives a hint of pencil shavings and bell pepper on the nose, with deep dark fruit and earth/mushroom on the finish."*

Why it's good: It combines structure, grape identification, and a clear varietal fingerprint (graphite/bell pepper) in complete, original sentences.

A Tasting Note that Failed

- **Acid:** med
- **Body:** med-high (more med)
- **Tannin:** med-high (more medium)
- **Main varietal:** Cabernet Sauvignon

- **Varietal fingerprint:** graphite/pencil

Why it’s bad: It lacks complete sentences and original analysis; it reads like a checklist, not a persuasive tasting note.