

# The Beginners Guide To Whiskey

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for more information

## Welcome!

Thanks for downloading this e-book. What I had hoped to do with this e-book is create a one stop shop document that beginners and intermediate whiskey drinkers can refer to if they have questions or queries about whiskey.

I find whiskey a tremendously interesting and exciting topic and I hope to draw you in with enthusiasm!

This e-book contains everything you need to know about whiskies to further your appreciation of it. A bonus side effect is you will be able to sound smart when talking about it at parties.

Everything in this document is in short-form and contains only the details you need to know. You can read this e-book cover to cover or use it as a reference. I recommend reading it cover to cover first and checking out some of the useful links inside, then referring back to it later once questions arise.

If any questions are unanswered, hit me up by leaving a comment on my website at <http://thewhiskeybar.org> or on the Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/drinkwhisky>

Thanks for taking the time to learn more about whiskey!



# The Whiskey Bar

### Legal Stuff

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## What Is Whiskey?

Whiskey is a spirit that is distilled from a fermented grain mash. Let's break that phrase down.

*Fermentation* is when sugars are converted to alcohol via chemical breakdown.

*Grain* is a cereal crop such as barley or corn.

*Mash* is a combination of grains and water.

So whiskey is created from a complex process where the sugars in certain grains are broken down and turned in to alcohol.

## What is Scotch Whisky? Bourbon? Tennessee Whiskey?

All the [different types of whiskey](#) can get confusing. The different names depend on a number of things, including where it is made, what it is made from and how long it has been aged. Certain types of whiskey must be aged in certain types of barrels as well – for example, bourbon must be aged in new barrels, whereas Scotch whisky can use any sort of barrel. Accordingly, Scotch whisky producers buy a lot of old bourbon barrels in which to age their product

- ⑤ **Scotch Whisky** is whisky made in Scotland that contains malted barley and has been aged at least 3 years in oak casks.
- ⑤ **Irish Whiskey** is whiskey made in Ireland that has been aged at least 3 years in wood casks.
- ⑤ **Bourbon** is whiskey made from a mash that contains at least 51% corn. It is aged in new, charred oak barrels and is mostly made in Kentucky.
- ⑤ **Tennessee Whiskey** is a bourbon whiskey made in Tennessee that is charcoal filtered. The same rules of bourbon apply to Tennessee whiskey too.
- ⑤ **Rye Whiskey** contains 51% rye (at least in the USA) and is aged in new, charred oak barrels.
- ⑤ **Canadian Whisky** is a whisky that contains some rye and is aged at least 3 years.

Other areas of the world produce whisky, such as Japan. Yamazaki is an example of a great 12 year old single malt that tastes like you'd expect a Scotch whisky to taste, but because it is not made in Scotland it cannot be a Scotch whisky.

Scotland has different whisky production areas. They are Highland, Lowland, Islay, Islands, Speyside and Campbeltown. You can read more about each of the areas [here](#).

## Whisky vs Whiskey

Whisky (no E) refers to a product from Scotland or the U.S.

Whiskey (with E) refers to a product from Ireland or Canada.

Only hardcore whisky enthusiasts will get upset at you if you get it wrong, so don't worry too much. Most countries not listed above will use the 'whisky' spelling.

## Age of Whiskey

Whiskey only ages in the barrel. If you buy a bottle of 12 year old whiskey, 6 years later it is still a 12 year old whiskey as it does not age in the bottle.

An age statement on the bottle refers to the youngest whiskey in the bottle. A 12 year old labelled bottle may contain whiskey that is older than 12 years, but may not contain anything younger. Age can be a good guide on the quality of a whiskey but it is not the be all and end all. Many distilleries are creating excellent whiskeys without age statements.

## Other whisky terminology

- ⑤ Single malt is a whisky from one distillery only.
- ⑤ A blend is a whisky that is made from the produce of a number of different distilleries. This is done to create a highly consistent taste and to save money.
- ⑤ Cask strength, or barrel-proof, refers to whisky that is not watered down. Cask strength whiskeys are usually around 56% ABV as opposed to around 40%.
- ⑤ Peat is a smokey, spicy, salty flavor that comes from smoking the malted barley over a fire made from peat (a vegetation found in Scotland).
- ⑤ A *dram* is a colloquial name for a glass of whisky. It's also a unit of measurement, but it's most often just used to describe a pour of whisky.
- ⑤ *Neat* is drinking whisky without water or ice. *On the rocks* is drinking whisky with ice.



## Appreciating Whiskey

Whisky can be appreciated by anyone, anywhere using any method of consumption. However, if you go to a whisky tasting event or read whisky reviews they refer to a number of different factors.

- ⑤ The colour
- ⑤ The nose aka the smell of the whiskey
- ⑤ The taste (sometimes called the palate)
- ⑤ The finish

Let's go in to a bit more detail about each one.

### 1. Colour

Colour matters least of all. It matters because what we see affects our perception of taste, so if we see something we like the look of we unconsciously will like the taste better. The problem with colour is that in many parts of the world it is perfectly legal to add caramel colouring to whisky, which affects the colour quite a lot. As a result, some reviewers don't bother talking about colour.

### 2. Nose

The nose of the whiskey refers to the aromas that spring forth from it. Smelling a whiskey is referred to as 'nosing' it. It is best done in a nosing glass that tapers towards the top so that all the flavours are captured by your nose. The best glass to use is the [Glencairn](#) glass. If you don't have one and don't want to buy one, you can use a wine glass with a small opening.

To nose the whiskey, simply bring the top of the glass right up to your nose and take a nice big breath in.



### 3. Taste

What flavours are present in the whiskey. People also talk about the “body” or “mouth feel” of the whiskey, which is essentially what it feels like in the mouth.

To taste a whisky, have a sip and move it all around your mouth. The best way to do this is to literally try and chew the whiskey as you would a big mouthful of food. Each area of your mouth might experience a different flavour so it's important to spend a bit of time on it.

Note: it's considered to be okay to add a few small drops of water when tasting whiskey, but not ice. Ice cools the whisky which prevents appreciation of some flavours and also excessively dilutes it. If you're just starting out you might want to add ice anyway to 'soften the blow' a bit. Adding coke to whiskey is not a crime, but it better be Johnny Walker Red Label and not a beautiful single malt.

### 4. Finish

The finish is what happens after you swallow the whiskey. This can be both in taste, freshness and length. Read the section below for more details on how to describe the finish.

## Describing Whiskey

The words that we use to describe whiskey are the flavours that we can detect in them. What flavours you experience will depend on lots of factors, including your experiences with the flavours and how many whiskeys you have tasted. It can be useful to read some reviews of a whiskey before tasting it and see if you can experience the flavours that the reviewers are describing.

Here are some examples of common flavours:

*oak, chocolate, citrus, sherry, floral, vanilla, cereal, malt, earth, dried fruit, cooked fruit, ripe fruit, nut, leather, smoke, salt, brine, medicine, fish.*



These can be experienced in both **nosing** and **tasting**. You can go in to more detail if you want, such as *almonds* instead of *nutty* and *cough syrup* instead of *medicinal*. Sometimes you might detect a flavour when nosing but not in the tasting and vice versa. The words you use to describe the whiskey are totally up to you and there are no correct terms to use.

When describing a **finish**, people talk about length. Remember that the finish is the effect after swallowing. Sometimes the taste or feeling hangs around for ages, and this is a long finish. Sometimes it goes in seconds, and this is a short finish. A finish can also be warm, powerful, smooth or any other words that you can use to describe your feelings after swallowing the whiskey.

## Recommended Whiskies for Beginners (or anyone looking for a daily drinker)

Blends: Johnnie Walker Black Label, Chivas Regal, Jameson



Scotch Whisky: Highland Park 12, Ardbeg 10, Glenfiddich 18



Irish Whiskey: Redbreast 12, Bushmills 10

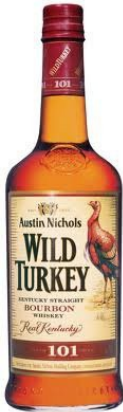




Rye Whiskey: Sazerac Rye, Knob Creek Rye



Bourbon: Wild Turkey 101, Buffalo Trace, Old Grand-Dad (100 or 114)



## **Conclusion**

Well, that's more than enough information to get you started on your whiskey tasting adventures. Perhaps you are still at the stage where you find it difficult to drink whiskey neat – keep sipping away and developing your taste for it. You may recall the first time you had wine or coffee as being quite unpleasant, but over time you developed a taste for it. The same is true for whiskey. Once you are able to enjoy whisky neat a whole new world of exciting flavours opens up.

Here's to good drinking times in the future. See you online at <http://thewhiskeybar.org>

Cheers!

Lawrie