

# Espresso

## module overview

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## Espresso definition as per 2025 Rules

### 3.1 Espresso

- A. **Espresso is a beverage (around 1 fl. oz. / 30 ml)** made from ground coffee, poured from 1 side of a double portafilter in 1 continuous extraction.
- B. Coffee is the accumulation of roasted product of the seed of the fruit of a plant of the genus *Coffea*.
- C. For the purposes of this competition, **no additives of any kind may be added to coffee after it reaches the "green coffee" stage**, i.e., seeds of the *Coffea* genus, dried as a part of the post-harvest process, and free from all pericarp layers. **This includes exposure to aromatic substances, flavourings, perfumes, liquids, powders, etc.**
- D. **Whole bean coffee** may be a blend, single-region, single-country, single-farm, etc.
- E. All judges **must be served a full espresso**. If the shot does not comply with the espresso definition, then taste and/or tactile scores will reflect the resulting sensory experience. Espresso may be prepared with various amounts of coffee.
- F. Espresso will be brewed on the sponsored machine with brewing temperature set between **90.5-96 degrees Celsius (195-205 degrees Fahrenheit)**. Individual group heads may be set to different temperatures within this range. However, each beverage course should be served at a consistent temperature. Competition Bodies are required to use only one temperature across group heads.
- G. The espresso machine brewing pressure will be set between **8.5 and 9.5 bars**.
- H. Extraction times between 2 pairs of espresso extractions must be within a 3.0 second variance, otherwise a "no" will be given for "Extraction time." **A 20-30 second extraction time is recommended, but not mandatory.**
- I. Crema should be present when espresso is served, with no break in coverage.
- J. Espresso must be served in **a vessel** from which judges must be able to drink as required **without any functional detriment** to their ability to score accurately; this includes but is not exclusive to vessel being too hot, unable to hold and drink from vessel safely, judges unable to execute espresso evaluation protocol. Espresso must be served to the judges with an appropriate spoon, napkin, and unflavoured water. The competitor will receive a reduced score in **"Attention to detail"** if the cup is not functional or not all appropriate items are served.

K. **Nothing other than ground coffee and water** may be placed in the portafilters, **otherwise the espresso will receive 0 points** on all scores available on the technical and sensory scoresheets in the espresso category.

- unable to execute espresso evaluation protocol. **If there is a functional detriment** to a judge's ability to score, the **"Judges Total Impression"** score will be impacted.

## Evaluation protocol

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### 15.1 Espresso Evaluation

- A. **Espressos will be evaluated using the following protocol by all sensory judges. Sensory judges will complete all steps of the evaluation before recording scores.**
- B. Sensory judges will **stir the espresso 3 times with a spoon (moving the spoon front to back)** to mix the flavours within the shot, **then immediately taste**. Sensory judges will take **at least 2 complete sips** to fully evaluate the espresso. Judges will not taste the espresso off the spoon.
- C. **Competitors may override the evaluation protocol** by giving the judges specific alternative instructions on how they want the espresso evaluated. As long as the instructions are **reasonable**, and are not in contradiction with other rules, **the judges should follow all instructions given by the competitor**.

### Crema evaluation

(0/1)

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#### 15.1.1 Crema

Judges will visually evaluate the appearance of the crema for presence in the vessel. To score a "yes" the **crema must stretch across the entire surface of the espresso and not have any holes or broken spots**.

### Accuracy of taste descriptors

(0-3)

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#### 15.1.2 Accuracy of Taste Descriptors

**Judges will listen to the taste (flavour and aftertaste) descriptions and explanations** given by the competitor and compare those with the beverage served. **The overall taste profile of the beverage served should support specialty coffee**. Any flavour or aftertaste descriptors given by the competitor for their espresso will be taken into consideration under this score. **This score is based on how accurately these descriptors match the flavour and aftertaste** of the espresso. **Taste descriptors must be given or a score of 0 will be received in this category**.

### Accuracy of tactile descriptors

(0-3)

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#### 15.1.3 Accuracy of Tactile Descriptors

**The judges will listen to the tactile descriptions and explanations given by the competitor and compare** those with the thickness and texture of the beverage served. The judges **will score how accurately the given description matches the tactile sensation** of their espresso. If the experience matches the description, but the tactile experience score is low, high marks cannot be given. **If no descriptors are**

provided, the competitor will receive a 0 for this score.

## Taste experience

(0-6)

### 15.1.4 Taste Experience

The **taste experience of the espresso** is evaluated to determine the quality of the beverage. Judges will evaluate the components of **the overall taste experience** of the espresso across **both the espresso's flavour and aftertaste** to determine **their quality**, how well they fit together, and how well they complement each other. "**Flavour**" is defined as the combined perception of basic tastes (including sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami) and aromatic qualities. "**Aftertaste**" is defined as the combined sensation of basic tastes and aromatic qualities that remain after coffee has left the mouth (either by swallowing or spitting). Both the taste components of the extraction and the coffee itself are evaluated.

**If one or more of the taste components detracts from the flavour experience of the espresso** (e.g., sour, acrid) the aftertaste of the espresso (e.g., "bitter"), **lower marks are given. If the taste component contributes positively to the overall taste experience, higher marks are given.**

**If the espresso is unbalanced** (lacking in a certain taste component in a way that detracts from the overall positive experience or if a taste component is overpowering the beverage), **the experience score is reduced.**

**Note: Accuracy of taste description is not taken into consideration for this score.**

## Tactile experience

(0-6)

### 15.1.5 Tactile Experience

The **quality of the tactile experience**, or **mouthfeel**, is evaluated. Judges will evaluate the **tactile sensation** of coffee in the mouth, based on the thickness and texture of the espresso served. The espresso should have a tactile experience that correlates to the preparation, method of extraction, and coffee used in the espresso. "**Thickness**" relates to the perceived **weight or viscosity** of the espresso, from thin to thick. **Texture** is defined as the perceived **sensation of grittiness to smoothness** (e.g., "watery," "tea-like," "velvety"). The quality of thickness and texture is based upon the tactile feeling of the espresso in the mouth. **Both a light and heavy weight can receive high scores relative to the texture quality in the mouth.** If the weight and/or texture detracts from the espresso experience (e.g., "watery," "rough," or "dusty"), lower marks are given. **If the perception of weight and texture contribute positively to the experience of the espresso, higher marks are given.** The tactile experience that is present after the coffee has left the mouth will be taken into consideration in the Tactile Experience (e.g., astringent, or silky).

## Thought exercises

### Accuracy:

Accuracy refers to how close descriptors are to the "true" flavour experience. In this case, the "true" flavour experience is your experience of flavour. **It is important to capture your flavour experience while you are on stage!!** Write your flavour notes as you experience them so they can be referenced during deliberation.

**What classifies as 'Accurate'?**

If we allow our Flavour Experience to take the shape of a target, with high scoring accuracy and precision being the bullseye, we can break its components down locationally. A descriptor that is inaccurate or not present would not be found on the target. Descriptors that are somewhat accurate would hit on the outer rings of the target while descriptors that are more accurate would be found closer to the centre.



Your Flavor Experience



Average Accuracy



Good Accuracy

### **Precision as an Extension of Accuracy**

Precision refers to how close the descriptors are to the “true” flavour experience. In this case, the “true” flavour experience is your experience of flavour.

### ***What classifies as “Precise”?***

Another way that we can think of precision in this case is “Specificity”. If we again, think of the target as our Flavour Experience we would find highly specific descriptors at the bullseye, with lesser specific descriptors found along the outer rings.



Very Good Accuracy  
"Medium Precision"



Excellent Accuracy  
"Medium-High Precision"



Extraordinary Accuracy  
"High Precision"

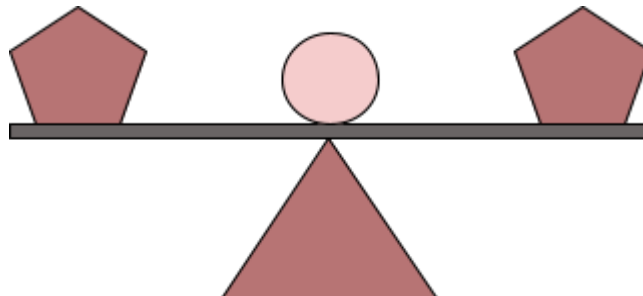
### Thinking of Taste Experience

Assigning a Score to Taste Experience requires us to think subjectively; in terms of intensity, experience, and perception; then to channel this subjective experience through an objective filter via Calibratable Language. This kind of language includes statements that objectively describe *intensity, quality, relationship, and duration*.

### Thinking of Taste as Structured

Let's start first by thinking of Taste, when of good quality, as something that has Structure. When we think of Taste as Structured, we can begin breaking down what components--and the respective attributes of these components--that make up this overarching perception of Structure; components of Structure should *fit together and complement each other*.

#### *Structure is Intensive & Relational*

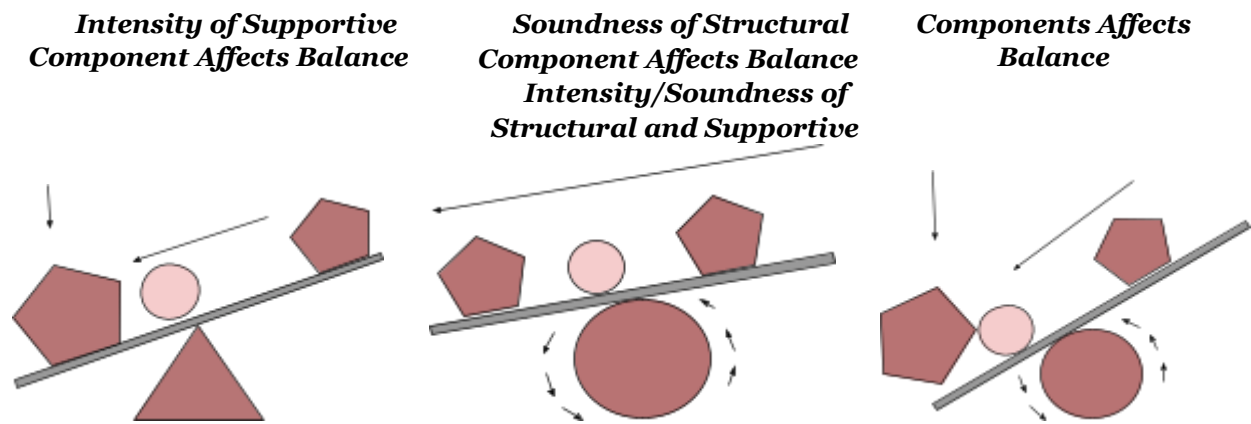


**Structural Intensity**

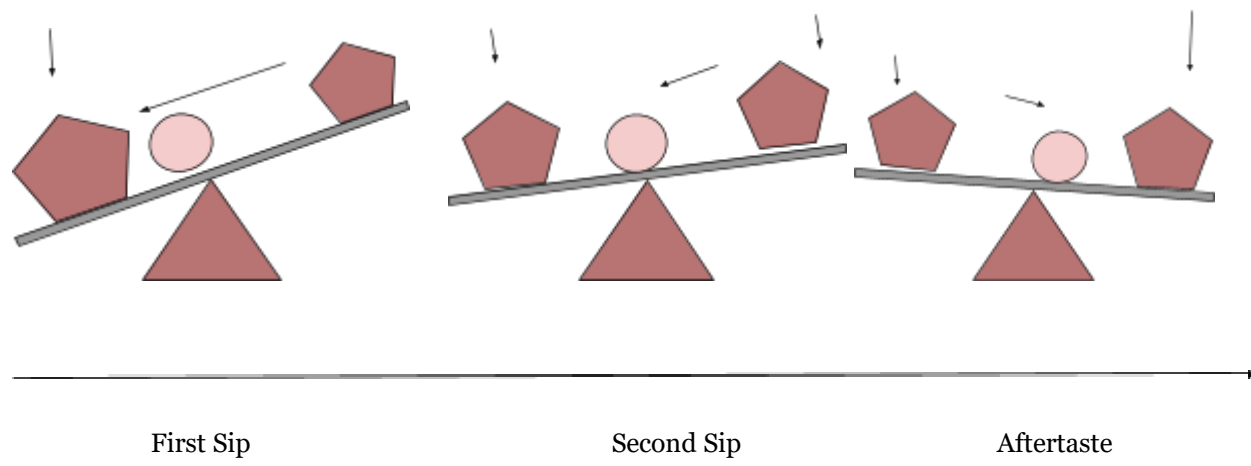
Balance is only as structured as the most *intense* or *dominant* component. If we consider this component to be the Structural Centre of our Taste Balance, we can begin to think of other Supportive Components as roles that influence the final perception of Balance.

**Structural Relationship**

Balance is only as structurally sound as the Relationship between each of the components in Balance. If we begin to think of these Supportive Components, beyond their intensities, into what role they play Relationally within the Balance, we can get insight into the complexity, soundness, and harmony of their Balance.



Intensities of Supportive Components can change from start to finish. The relationship between Structural and Supportive Components can change over time; a relationship that feels unstructured at first, can become more Structured overall as its Components Relate over time.



## Thinking of Balanced as Relational

Once we start to think of Taste as Structured, we can start thinking of that Structural Balance as Relational. When we perceive Taste we are evaluating different forms of structures and how their individual components relate to each other. Structure is only as balanced as the relationship between its structural components. Let's think of scenarios in which components relate to each other and evaluate how balanced that relationship looks.



### **Scenario I: Together & Balanced**

*Our duo is dancing together to the rhythm of the beat!*

The structural component is foundational and of good quality and the relationship between the two other supportive components work together, supporting the foundation of the structural component.



### **Scenario II: Separate & Balanced**

*Our duo is dancing separately, not in sync, but to the rhythm of the beat!*

The structural component is foundational and of good quality, the relationship between the supportive components isn't in sync, but are still supporting the foundation of the structural component.



### **Scenario III: Together, Unbalanced**

*Our duo is dancing together, but not to the rhythm of the beat!*

The structural component is foundational and of good quality, however, the supportive components, while they might be in sync, are not supporting the foundation of the structural component.



### **Scenario IV: Separate, Unbalanced**

*Our duo is dancing separately and not to the rhythm of the beat!*

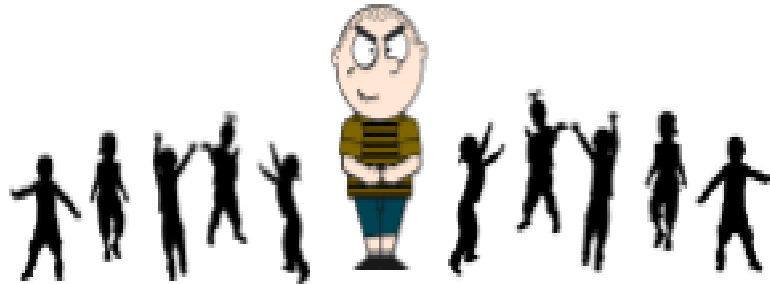
The structural component is foundational and of good quality, however, the supportive components are not in sync and are not supporting the foundation of the structural component.

**Scenarios V & VI: Kids on a Playground**

In this scenario, we might see balance a little bit differently. Previously we've thought of balance as a Structural Component, of good quality, being supported by and in relation with other Supportive Components. Let's think now, of three separate components, perhaps of varying intensities and qualities, acting together in some way. Let's imagine a playground full of kids running around playing games.

***Scenario V: The Tyrant***

A bully on a playground determines who gets to play with who and where they get to play. The dominant component is innately not of good quality, however, when it directs the other components in the relationship the overall perception of quality is perceived as balanced.



***Scenario VI: The Democracy***

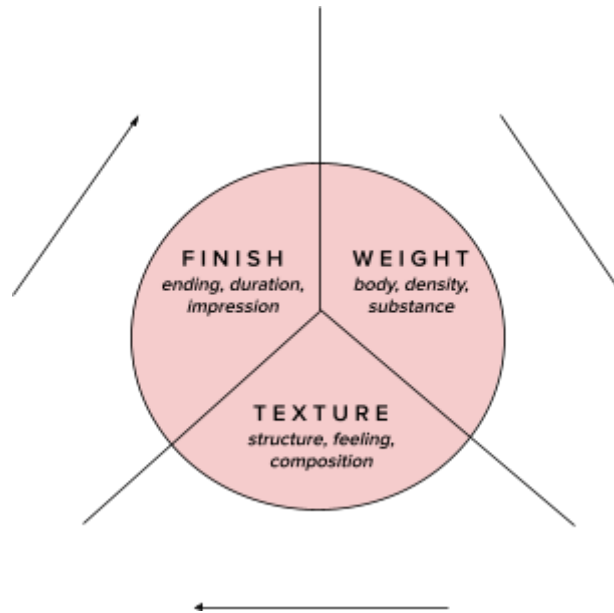
Three different “cliques” are playing on a playground, they don't play with each other, but everyone is happy doing their own thing. There is no dominant component. Individually they might not be of good quality, but working together, even doing their own thing, the overall perception of quality is perceived as balanced.





### What is Tactile?

Tactile: of or connected with sense of touch. In short, tactile is mouthfeel! For Taste Balance, we are evaluating various perceptions of compounds for sweetness, acidity, and bitterness and determining how they relate and work together; we are thinking about what our palettes are perceiving. For Tactile, we are evaluating what our palettes *feel*. Below is a diagram that explains the relationship between tactile descriptors and fundamental mouthfeel.



#### **Weight**

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We can describe weight as the body of the tactile experience. Is the espresso heavy, medium, or light bodied. Is the density full or flat. Is the substance of the body grainy or watery.

#### **Texture**

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We can describe texture as the overarching roundness or abrasiveness of the tactile experience. Is the structure round or smooth? Is the feeling of this structure well composed; does it move or coat, or sit flat?

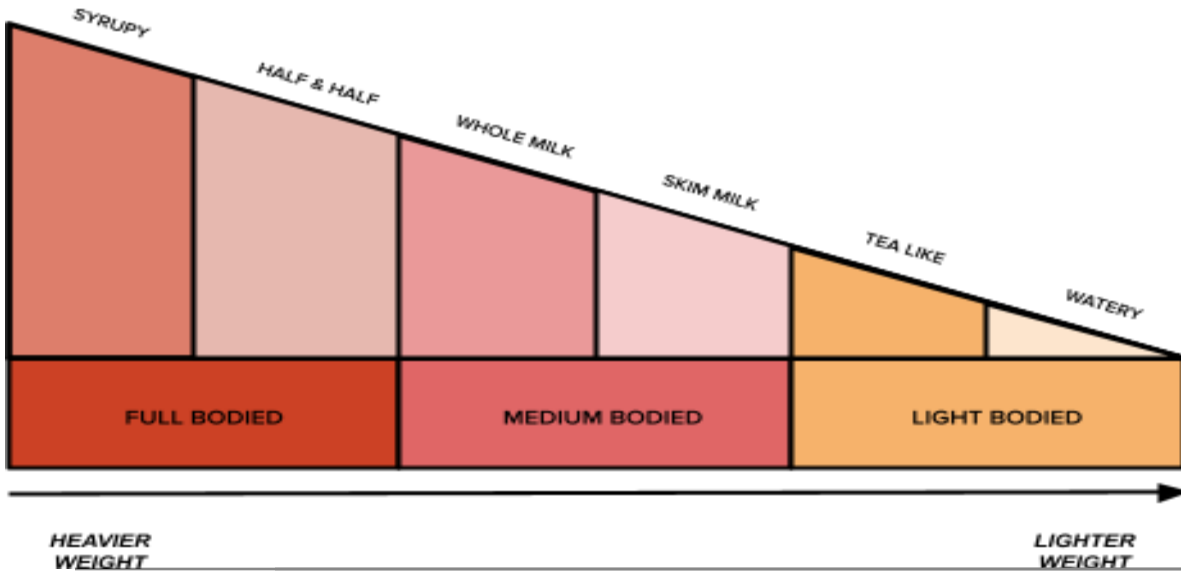
#### **Finish**

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We can describe the finish as the end-note or final impression of the tactile experience. What is the impression? Is it smooth, rough or pleasantly drying? Is the finish short or long lasting? What is the quality of that duration?

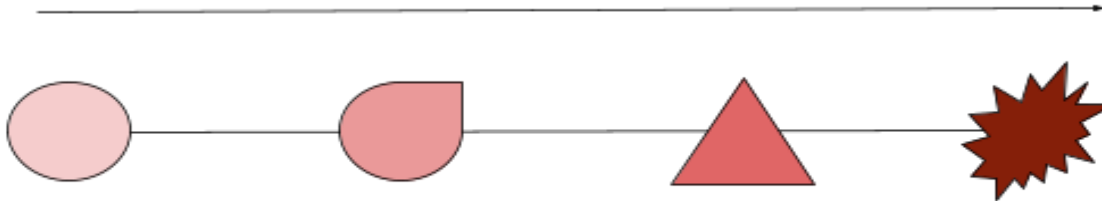
**Weight (Body)**

**Texture (Mouthfeel)**



*Components of Good Quality*

*Components of Lesser Quality*

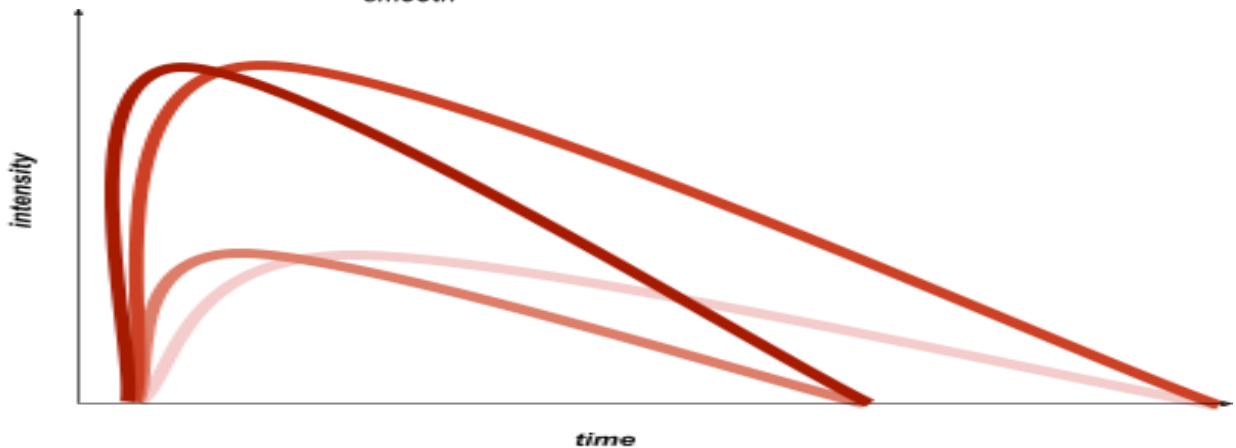


*smooth*

*relatively smooth*

*sharp*

*abrasive*



- high intensity, short finish*
- high intensity, long finish*
- low intensity, short finish*
- low intensity, long finish*

**Finish (Aftertaste)**