

Beer Judging and the BJCP Exam

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BJCP Goals

Stated BJCP Purpose

- Promote Beer Literacy
- Promote the Appreciation of Real Beer
- Recognize Beer Tasting and Evaluation Skills

Alternative Definition

The BJCP is a volunteer-based organization that:

- Certifies judges: develops and administers exams, certifies that one can competently judge beer
- Tracks judge experience growth using a point system and provides updated information to judges and competition organizers
- Develops style guidelines: the common language of beer evaluation
- Sanctions competitions: assures that those who enter beers will have their entries judged fairly in a proven, standardized manner. Develops scoresheets and competition rules.

BJCP Exam Objectives

- Provide a common method for evaluating beer and brewing knowledge, and the ability to judge beers in a competition setting
- Provide structured feedback to prospective judges to allow for further study and growth
- Provide legitimacy to the BJCP rank system

To Do Well on the Exam, one must have:

- Good practical judging skills
- Sound knowledge of beer styles and brewing processes
- The ability to prove it!

BJCP Exam Format

Online Entrance Exam:

- 200 questions in 60 minutes
- Pass/Fail, with no score given
- Available in English, Spanish and Portuguese

Beer Judging Exam

- Six beers to be evaluated in 90 minutes
- Judge beers as in competition, but without references
- Beers may be homebrew, commercial, blended, doctored, or mis-categorized

Written Proficiency Exam

- Requires judging score ≥ 80 and ≥ 10 judging points
- 20 T/F question on the BJCP and the judging process
- 5 essay questions in 90 minutes
- Two questions on beer styles, two technical questions and one on recipe formulation

Foundations of Beer Judging

Tasting Experience

- Homebrew clubs
- Beer pilgrimages
- Beer/homebrew conferences
- Judging/Stewarding
- Doctored beer seminars

Beer Styles and Brewing

- BJCP Style Guidelines
- Michael Jackson's books
- Specific beer style books
- Homebrew/beer magazines
- Brew a batch of beer!
- Homebrew books
- Technical brewing books

Judging Day Tips

Personal Readiness

- Avoid spicy foods
- No cologne
- Avoid hangovers (when possible)
- Avoid smoking between beers
- Proper frame of mind
- Head cold = Handicap

Judging Environment

- Quiet and well-lit
- No food aromas
- Bread and water for palate cleansing
- Standard equipment:
 - Flashlight
 - Bottle opener
 - Mechanical pencils
 - BJCP Style Guidelines

Beer Presentation

- Often overlooked, but can dramatically affect the judging process.
- Give these beers the respect they would receive in Germany or Belgium!
- Important aspects are:
 - Hard plastic cups or glasses
 - Proper temperature for style
 - Decanting not pouring
 - Uniform fill and head level

Describing the Beer

- This step establishes the characteristics on which the beer will be evaluated. All relevant aspects should be described on the scoresheet.
1. Aroma - transients
 2. Appearance
 3. Aroma – any changes?
 4. Flavor
 5. Mouthfeel
 6. Overall impression



Evaluation and Feedback

Evaluation

Score the beer objectively based on:

- Style guidelines
- Scoring guide
- Classic commercial examples
- Other entries

Feedback

- Should be consistent with score
- Give at least one positive comment
- Avoid assumptions about recipe, ingredients and brewing experience
- Offer humble suggestions for improvement
- Overall impression should be consistent with rest of scoresheet

Assigning a Consensus Score

Judging should be done independently, but need:

- Consensus result
- Minimal table talk
- Scores comparable
- Conflicts resolved



Final Step: Ranking the Beers

- Mini-Best of Show (BOS) is sometimes necessary
- Complete flight summary sheet
- Correct any scoring drift



Additional Information

How to Prepare for the Exam

- Review Study Guide and recommended materials
- Become very familiar with the BJCP Beer Style Guidelines
- Understand the exam format
- Take the 20 question practice online exam
- Consider forming a study group
- Get practical judging experience, particularly with BJCP judges (gain scoring calibration)

Strategies for Completing the Exams

Entrance Exam

- Read and understand the question
- Use references efficiently (if needed)

Beer Judging Exam

- Understand the style
- Evaluate the beer
- Complete the scoresheet

Written Proficiency Exam

- Identify key requested elements
- Prioritize facts
- Present information

Mastering the Beer Judging Exam

- Three main steps: Identify and quantify your perceptions (if unsure, say so); be thorough in identifying each component of flavor, aroma, etc.
- Assess how well they fit style requirements. Identify stylistic (recipe) and process (brewing) faults. Make value judgments.
- Provide suggestions to the brewer on any identified faults. Avoid making too many assumptions (e.g., all-grain brewer). Provide conditional suggestions, if possible.
- Write out full and complete scoresheets. Try to avoid leaving excessive whitespace. Write legibly.
- Use clear, descriptive language. Don't use vague words like "good" or "nice" to describe beer characteristics (e.g., "good color").
- Make sure your scores add up correctly.

Common Mistakes: Judging

- Using vague, imprecise language
- Making too many assumptions about the beers
- Not understanding the styles
- Not providing feedback when faults are identified
- Not fully assessing the beers
- Leaving several blank lines
- Scoring not aligned with comments

Point Breakdown of the BJCP Exam

Beer Judging

- Scoring Accuracy (20%), 9/20 is lowest score/beer
- Perception Comments (20%)
- Descriptive Ability (20%)
- Feedback (20%)
- Completeness/Communication (20%)

Written Proficiency

- Each essay question is worth 20 points
- Incorrect answers on the T/F portion result in 0.5 point penalty
- Partial credit given, no bonus points for exceptional answers
- Omitting required information results in mandatory deductions
- Scores given on each question align to judging ranks
- Weak or incomplete answers score lower

Mastering the Written Proficiency Exam (1)

- Understand Beer Style Question Formats
 - Information to be provided has been standardized
 - Aroma, appearance, flavor, mouthfeel
 - One aspect of ingredients or background information that distinguishes the style
 - Classic commercial example from the Style Guidelines
 - Similarity and differences between styles
- Try to understand the common or differentiating element of the three beer styles listed
 - color, ingredients, process, etc.

Mastering the Written Proficiency Exam (2)

- Know how to formulate all-grain recipes
 - Plan ahead. Calculate quantities [e.g. 4 kg malt -> 13 Plato (1.054 OG), 1 alpha acid unit (AAU) ~ 4 IBUs]
 - Use proper ingredients and techniques (historical accuracy with the style)
 - Keep the recipes simple, and within midpoints of style definitions
- Understand troubleshooting common brewing faults
 - Know causes, controls, relationship to certain styles
- Understand each phase of the brewing process
 - Know why each step is done, and how it can be controlled
- Understand the main ingredients in beer
 - Know how ingredients affect the finished product
 - Know why different ingredients would be selected

Common Mistakes: Written

- Not answering all aspects of the question. Incomplete. Non-responsive.
- Answering a different question than that which was asked. Providing detail that doesn't contribute to your score. Providing irrelevant information.
- Failing to differentiate styles when asked.
- Not providing commercial examples or style parameters.
- Writing too much on certain answers and not enough on others (time management?).
- Providing weak or minimal answers. Failing to demonstrate depth of knowledge.

Importance of Making Every Word Count!

Q: Discuss the following brewing techniques. How do they affect the beer? (a) adding gypsum, (b) fining, (c) kräusening.

- **A1:** a. Adding gypsum (popular brewing salt addition). Serves to adjust the PH of the water used to brew with. Proper PH should be between 5.2 - 5.7. Brewing salts can be used to mimic traditional brewing waters with gypsum - one can "burtonize" the water to simulate that of Burton-on-Trent good for English Pale Ales, as it accentuates the hops, bitterness and flavor.
- b. Fining - using additives (fish guts) one can clear their beer. Finings are most well known with English Bitters. Cask conditioned ales are fined i.e. cleared during stillage prior to serving. The result is a beautiful (clear) beer upon dispense.
- c. Krauesening - the act of adding young beer to mature beer to carbonate the finished product. When your beer has finished fermenting one can add krauesen of young not fully fermented beer to the main beer. The result is a renewed fermentation that can serve to carbonate the beer and/or bottle condition it.
- 158 words, Score: 7/10
- **A2:** a. adding gypsum accomplishes 2 things: increasing Ca^{++} and SO_4^{--} ; Calcium will help yeast metabolism in proper levels, and also allows the wort to acidify. It is also critical to proper enzyme function. Sulfate lends a soft edge to hop bitterness by affecting alpha-acid extraction and creating a synergistic perception effect.
- b. Fining is the addition of kettle finings (Irish moss) to coagulate proteins to clarify beer. It may also be carried out post-fermentation (Isinglass, Bentonite, Polyclar) to help precipitate tannins and/or proteins that may cause haze, or even flavor instability.
- c. Krauesening is the addition of a portion of actively fermenting wort to a wort that has finished fermenting. It is used chiefly as a means of providing "natural" carbonation. It also reduces residual diacetyl and may contribute acetaldehyde ("green" beer character) in the finished beer.
- 138 words, Score: 10/10

Resources

- BJCP Web Site: <http://www.bjcp.org>
- BJCP Study Guide (includes the entire question pool for the exam)
- BJCP Style Guidelines
- BJCP Judge Procedures Manual
- Beer Styles: Any Michael Jackson book, AHA Style Guide series, Roger Protz books, old Brewing Techniques articles, Zymurgy articles
- Technical: Noonan's *New Brewing Lager Beer*, Korzonas' *Homebrewing Vol 1*, Dave Miller's *Homebrewing Guide*, Palmer's *How to Brew*, Fix's *Principles of Brewing Science*
- Recipe Formulation: Daniels' *Designing Great Beers*, Zainasheff/Palmer *Brewing Classic Styles*
- AHA/BJCP Sanctioned Competitions