

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PYRAMID TASTING METHOD

© 2001–2022 Clay Gordon

Select four chocolates themed in some way.

Put a piece of each chocolate in one of the A, B, C, and D squares in the bottom row of the Tasting Mat.

Make a note of which chocolate is in each square. Maker, cocoa origin and varietal (if known), cocoa content, harvest (if known), and any non-cocoa ingredients (e.g., an emulsifier such as lecithin and flavorings such as vanilla or salt, type of milk).

TheChocolateLife Comparative Method

Step 1 - Aroma Impressions

Smell chocolate A by putting it under your nose and breathing deeply. Think about what you are sensing in terms of intensity (how much aroma, if any), cocoa/chocolate, sweetness, bitterness, floral, fruity, milky, caramel, burnt or other off notes. It's okay to be general about your first impressions, especially when just starting out. Just fruity is okay, don't feel pressured to differentiate between red fruits and tropical fruits or fresh or dried but is great if you can. Write your impressions down. Now smell chocolate B the same way and write down your impressions.

Next, smell chocolate A followed immediately by chocolate B. Write down your impressions *in terms of the differences*: Chocolate A smells sweeter than B. Chocolate B smells more bitter, A is fruitier, B is earthier, B smells more like cocoa. Write down your impressions. Wait at least 15 seconds before reversing the order – smell B then A. Write down your impressions.

Step 2 - Flavor Impressions

Follow the processes outlines in Step 1, but instead of smelling, taste each chocolate. First on their own, writing down your impressions, and then comparing them in both orders (A>B, B>A). It is *not* necessary to clear your palate between each taste. Write down your impressions.

When Steps 1 and 2 are done,, select which one you prefer and place it on the next level of the pyramid in square 1/2.

Repeat Steps 1 and 2 with chocolates C and D and put the chocolate you prefer in square 3/4.

Repeat Steps 1 and 2 with chocolates 1/2 and 3/4. Put the chocolate you prefer in square F (favorite).

When done, reorder the chocolates according to the instructions on the Tasting Mat for Rounds 2 and 3.

Observations About the Pyramid Tasting Approach

The goal of the Pyramid Tasting approach is *not* to put a piece of chocolate in your mouth and immediately be able to identify individual aromas and flavors in great detail – that will happen over time with experience and practice.. What do cherries taste like in *chocolate*? How are cherries different from currants? What type of cherry, Bing, Morello, Montmorency? Fresh or dried? You *are* training your taste memory, but in a new way.

The immediate goal of this method is to be able to identify what you like – and *why*. This method gets you to quickly identify whether you prefer sweeter or less-sweet chocolates, chocolates that are fruity or floral or nutty rather than chocolate-y. You will be able to identify the texture of the chocolate you prefer, from the snap, bite, and chew to the melt, and what kind of finish you prefer, from short to medium to long. With practice, especially with friends, you will be able to put names to aromas and flavors and textures – *the components of the tastes of chocolate*.

PYRAMID TASTING



Some Descriptors To Consider

Aroma and Flavor

- Chocolate / cocoa
- Sweet
- Dairy / Caramel
- Fruity – Red, Tropical, Citrus, Browned
- Floral – Green
- Bitter / Burnt
- Earthy / Mushroomy / Woody / #2 pencil
- Grassy
- Chemical / Metallic / Medical
- Acetic (as opposed to citric/fruit) acidity

Texture

- Crisp / Soft (snap)
- Hard / Resistant (bite/chew)
- Fast / Slow (melt)
- Gritty
- Smooth
- Pasty
- Finish (short, medium, long)

Trigeminal

- Astringency

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS MAT

Familiarize yourself with the Instructions and prepare a note taking method.
Place one piece of each chocolate on squares A,B,C,&D.

Round 1

First Comparison: Pieces A&B. Take notes.
Select a favorite and place in on square 1/2.
Note the selection on the tasting worksheet.

Second Comparison: Pieces C&D. Take notes.
Select a favorite and place in on square 3/4.
Note the selection on the tasting worksheet.

Third Comparison: Pieces 1/2 & 3/4. Take notes.
Select a favorite and place in on square F.
Note the selection on the tasting worksheet.

Round 2

Place the A chocolate from Round 1 on Square B, B on C, C on D, D on A.

Repeat the three comparisons from Round 1.

Round 3

Place the A chocolate from Round 1 on Square A
Place the B chocolate from Round 1 on Square C
Place the C chocolate from Round 1 on Square B
Place the D chocolate from Round 1 on Square D

Repeat the three comparisons from Round 1.

Thinking about the result of the three rounds:

These three rounds take you through the combinations of the four chocolates you've selected.

By *changing the order* in which the comparisons are made, your perception of aromas and flavors changes because of the phenomenon of simultaneous contrast. At the end of each round you've selected your favorite from that round's ordering. At the end of the 3rd round you've selected your favorite from among the four chocolates in this group.

Looking back through your notes you should be able to discover which flavor and aroma characteristics comprise your favorite - the *WHY* it is your favorite.

PYRAMID TASTING

