

ONLINE COURSE

BARISTA INTERMEDIATE

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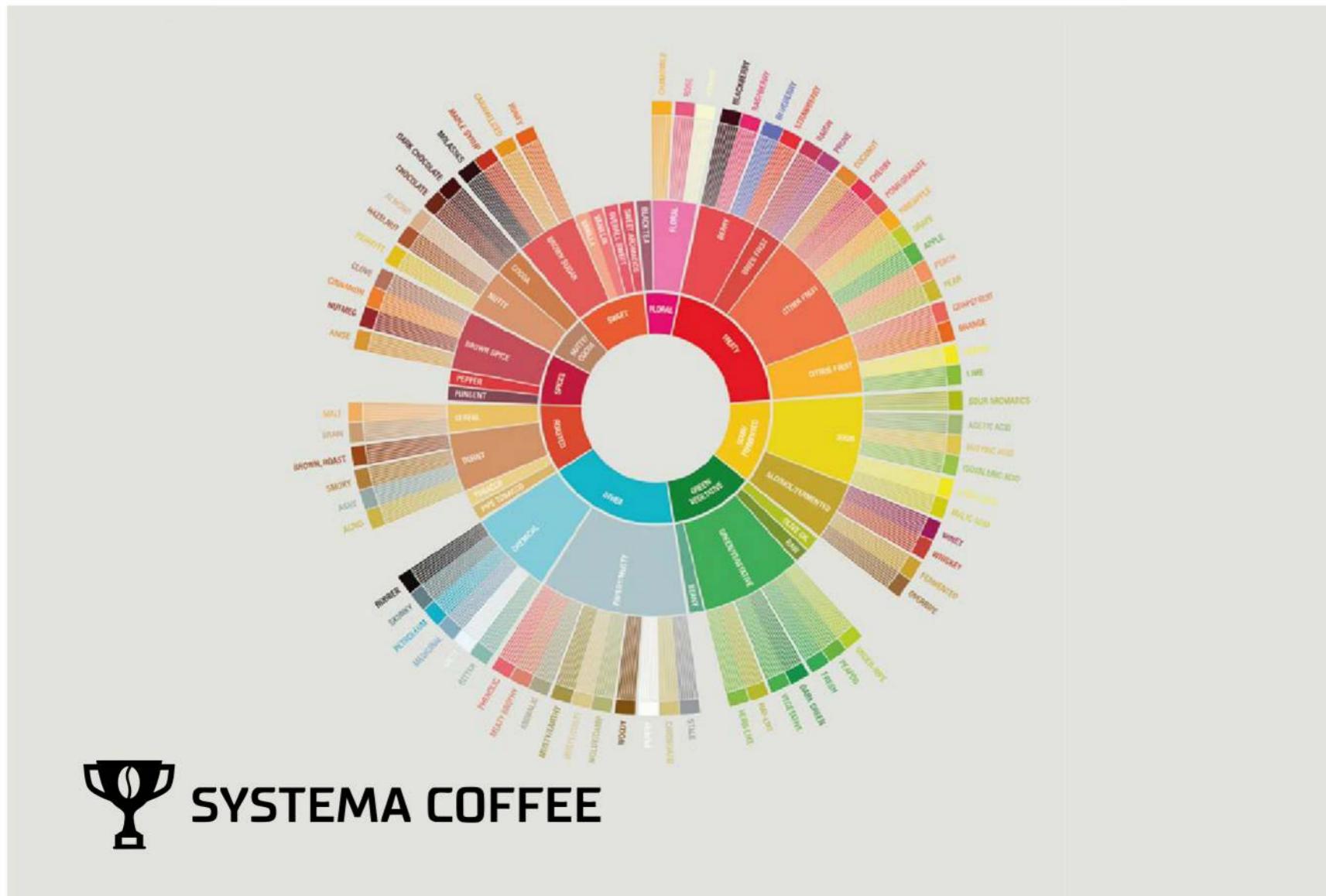
LESSON 3: SENSORY EVALUATION AND TASTING

Great baristas do not just make coffee- they can evaluate it, adjust recipes based on flavour, and communicate tasting notes clearly to customers and colleagues.

Why Sensory Skills Matter

When you brew coffee, you are not just aiming for “good” or “bad” you are aiming for balance. Sensory skills allow you to:

- o Detect when a coffee is under- or over-extracted.
- o Make recipe adjustments with purpose, not guesswork.
- o Communicate flavour clearly and building trust with customers.



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LESSON 3:

THE THREE CORE FLAVOUR COMPONENTS

When we talk about taste, there are actually five basic tastes our tongues can detect: acidity (or sourness), sweetness, bitterness, saltiness, and umami. But in coffee, the three main ones you'll really notice are acidity, sweetness, and bitterness.

ACIDITY

In coffee, acidity is that bright, lively sensation, often compared to fruitiness. Think citrus, apple, or berry-like flavours.

The right level of acidity brings life to a cup, but too much can make it taste sharp or sour.



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LESSON 3:

SWEETNESS

Sweetness balances out acidity and bitterness, often showing up as caramel, honey, or chocolate notes.

**When coffee is brewed well,
sweetness comes through naturally.**



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LESSON 3:

BITTERNESS

Bitterness is always part of coffee's profile. A touch of it adds depth, like dark chocolate.

But if it dominates, that usually means over-extraction or a roast that is too dark.



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LESSON 3:

SALTINESS AND UMAMI

These are also basic tastes, but they are not naturally found in coffee. Every once in a while, you might notice a salty note in an under-extracted espresso shot.

Umami, which we often describe as savoury or brothy, is not normally present in coffee.



LESSON 3:

HOW TO PRACTISE SENSORY EVALUATION

1. Cupping:

This is the standard method for tasting coffee in a professional setting. Multiple coffees are ground to the same size, brewed in identical cups, and tasted side by side.

2. Taste with focus:

There are tools, like the SCAA flavour wheel, or Sensory Lexicons that you can use to identify specific notes.

3. Slurp, and sip:

Slurping will help to spread the coffee across your palate and release aromas into your nose, enhancing perception.

4. Evaluate after cooling:

Flavours change as coffee cools, revealing notes you might not catch when it is hot.

Taste coffees without milk or sugar when training. Additives can mask subtle flavours.



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LESSON 3:

LINKING FLAVOUR TO EXTRACTION

- Extracting coffee is similar to cooking where you bring different flavours at different 'doneness'. You are almost always traveling in a two-way street that goes from sour, salty, umami, sweet & bitter. Understanding which flavours come at which point of the extraction, will save you a lot of time during dial in.
- If a coffee tastes overly sharp, thin, or sour, it may be under-extracted, try a finer grind, slightly higher brew ratio, or higher water temperature.
- If it tastes overly bitter, hollow, or dry, it may be over-extracted, try a coarser grind, slightly lower brew ratio, or lower temperature.

By linking your sensory findings to brewing variables, you can make targeted adjustments rather than random changes

BUILDING YOUR FLAVOUR VOCABULARY

One of the challenges for new baristas is describing flavours accurately. Here are some ways to improve:

- Keep a tasting journal, noting the coffee origin, process, roast level, and flavour notes you detect.
- Compare your notes with official tasting descriptors from the roaster.
- Taste different foods like fruits, nuts, spices, to build a mental library of flavours.



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HOMEWORK

SENSORY CALIBRATION

- o Select three coffees with different origins and processing methods.
- o Brew each to the same recipe and taste them side by side.
- o Identify the main notes of acidity, sweetness, and bitterness in each.
- o Compare your findings with another barista or tasting guide.

