



# Cup of Excellence® Cupping Form

## Overview of Form:

The Cup of Excellence® cupping form rates the cup quality of submitted coffees using multiple categories: absence of defects, cleanness of cup, sweetness, quality of acidity and of mouthfeel, flavor, aftertaste and balance.

The form can also provide private notes for each cupper's future reference, since all judges will receive their completed forms back at the end of the competition, and since a list of the actual farm names for each coded coffee will also be given out at that time.

The Cup of Excellence® cupping form is loosely based on the scoring system described in Winetaster's Secrets by the late Andrew Sharp and on the original SCAA Cupping form, no longer in use.

## 1. Filling out the form:

There are **six steps** in filling out the cupping form.

**1.1 - General information:** the cupper fills the top of the page with his name, the round number and the session number; in the far left column, titled *Sample*, the cupper writes the sample numbers, beginning with 1 and continuing up to 10 (eight samples can be entered on one sheet).

**1.2 - Roast Color:** the cupper may view a tray, provided at each session, showing all the ground coffee samples to be cupped in the session, to observe the uniformity of roasts. A sample that is more darkly or more lightly roasted than the norm can be singled out by drawing a line to the left or the right of the center line:



**1.3 - Aroma:** the third column notes the coffee's *aroma*, first the dry grounds, then the crust that forms after water is poured on the coffee, and lastly when the cupper breaks the crust and smells the vapors that are released. Values are as follows:

-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3
	unpleasant			pleasant		
very		slightly		slightly		very

The cupper writes the number 2 for moderately pleasant this way:

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The cupper can also note the intensity of the aroma by drawing a line through the ladder structure. Thus a moderately pleasurable aroma of high intensity would be notated this way:

**1.3.1 - Notations on the aroma are not part of the score.** They are strictly for the cupper's future reference. The competition setting does not provide the adequate number of cups nor the proper amount of time to accurately measure the aroma of a rapidly cooling beverage.

**1.4 - The Defects column** records both the intensity of a defect and the number of cups (out of four glasses for each sample) on the judge's table which have that defect. The cupper must not include samples from other tables in an assessment. The intensity scale is:

1	2	3
Slight	Moderate	Intense

If more than one cup is defective, the cupper records the most defective cup's intensity. Then the cupper records the number of defective cups present on his table for the particular sample (a maximum of four). These two numbers are multiplied by a constant of 4 to derive the negative score.

Thus if sample #6 has two defective cups, one moderate, one intense, the cupper records:

[www.hijamacups.com](http://www.hijamacups.com)  $\underline{3} \times \underline{2} \times \underline{4} = \langle 24 \rangle$

intensity of defect  $\times$  number of cups  $\times$  constant = **negative score**

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**1.5 - Eight columns of cup quality criteria follow: Clean Cup, Sweetness, Acidity, Mouthfeel, Flavor, Aftertaste, Balance, Overall.** The judge indicates a score by drawing a line across the appropriate value. The scale of values is as follows:

Unacceptable	Poor	Ordinary	Fine	Great
0	2	4	6	8

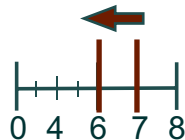
**1.5.1 -** A cupper may score half points. The following would be a score of 7½ points:



**1.5.2 -** The Cup of Excellence® cupping competition is primarily concerned with finding and rating coffee qualities from "fine" to "great". Therefore the quality "fine" is in the middle of each scale chart, allowing for greater differentiation beyond "fine".

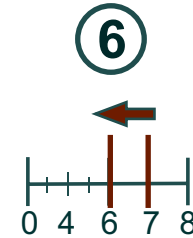
**1.5.3 -** If a judge rates any category as 0 unacceptable, then the total score of that coffee will be 0. No more time need be wasted on it.

**1.5.4 -** Placing lines across a graded scale allows the cupper to record changing perception as the coffee cools. For instance, when the coffee is hot one might give a 7 score in sweetness but later reduce it to 6 when tasted at a cooler temperature. Do not erase. Simply place an arrow pointing from the 7 line to the 6 line on the grading scale:



**1.5.5 -** If the cupper has recorded a changing perception, it is recommended that the last perception value should be used in totaling. It is the decisive score. Nevertheless, if preferred, the cupper can choose the median between the two extremes. The cupper must then take care to consistently do this for all coffees.

**1.5.6 -** Before totaling, the cupper should write the score for each category and circle it just above its corresponding graded scale. This makes totaling far easier. It makes the clerical task of recording all scores on a computer much quicker and easier as well:



**1.6 - Totaling:** once all eight of the quality criteria have been scored to the judge's satisfaction, the scores are tallied. The scores are added, using the following formula:

- Clean Cup
- Sweetness
- Acidity
- Mouthfeel
- Flavor
- Aftertaste
- Balance
- + Overall

**Sub-total + Defect Score = Raw Score** (small boxes on far right)  
 Positive!          Negative!

**The 100 Basis Score is achieved by adding 36 to the Raw Score:**

**36 + Raw Score = 100 Basis Score** (big boxes on right)

# Cup of Excellence® Cupping Form

## 2. Cup quality criteria:

**2.1 - Clean cup:** this is the basic starting point for coffee quality. Clean cup is complete freedom from taints or faults. It is the transparency necessary for a coffee's terroir to shine through.

**2.2 - Sweetness:** the sensation of sweetness correlates directly with how uniformly ripe a coffee was when harvested. Sweetness is not entirely dependent on how much sugar is in the roasted coffee, but also on other components which combine to create the impression of sweetness.

**2.3 - Acidity:** this is what brightens a coffee. It gives life. In wine it is often referred to as nerve (nervosité in French), backbone or spine.

**2.3.1 - Quantity of acidity is not directly related to quality.** The judge must score the quality of the acidity, not how much acidity is in a particular coffee. As with wine, not all coffees should be notably acidic. It is rather the expression of that acidity, whether powerful or very mild, that is important: is the acidity harsh or overly tart? Is the acidity refined or tangy or does it have a pleasant snap? These are the kinds of questions the judge should ask when scoring a particular coffee's acidity.

**2.3.2 - While not determining a coffee's quality it is nonetheless important to rank the amount of acidity in each coffee.** The vertical ladder-like structures below the line graphs provide a place to record the acidity's intensity, irrespective of its quality, for future reference.

**H represents high acidity, M is moderate, and L is light:**



**2.4 - Mouthfeel:** the tactile sensation imparted by a coffee. Mouthfeel can include the perception of viscosity, density, weight, texture and astringency.

**2.4.1 - As with acidity, the degree of mouthfeel presence is not the same thing as quality.** The judge must score the quality of the mouthfeel.

**2.4.2 - The cupper also wants to record how much body a coffee displays, and so a ladder-like graph has been provided for this purpose. In the case of body: H represents heavy body, M is medium, and L is light.**

**2.5 - Flavor:** this is a combination of taste (sweet, sour, bitter, salty and pungent) and aroma - or nose. This is where a fine coffee can truly stand out as an elegant, and even forceful, expression of place terroir. The judge must determine whether a coffee's flavor profile is merely generic or a genuine expression of terroir brought out by the care of the harvester and the skill of the processor. For example, a slightly off - fruity flavor determined by the fermenting process may be pleasant for many but it is a reproducible flavor the world over. What is worse, such a flavor masks what terroir the coffee might otherwise express.

**2.6 - Aftertaste:** the lingering flavor after the coffee has been swallowed can either reinforce the pleasure derived from a coffee's other attributes or it can weaken and even sabotage it. Does the coffee sweetly disappear or is there a harshness that emerges?

**2.7 - Balance:** is the coffee harmonious? Is something excessive? Is the coffee missing something?

**2.8 - Overall:** does the coffee have an exciting complexity or is it a simple but very pleasing coffee? Does the cupper simply not like it? This category is the cupper's personal call.

**Final points:** One way the coffee experience is truly different from wine is the perception of how it changes from hot to cold over a considerable amount of time. Most judge a coffee by their first impression. The first step to leaving the commodity world, however, is for consumers to discover delight in the elegant and slowly evolving transformations of the rare best coffees. Judges should take care to explore each coffee presented at the Cup of Excellence® competitions in this way.

The complexity of this form pales in comparison with many forms used in wine competitions. The present Cup of Excellence® cupping form is an attempt to develop coffee cupping along the lines wine has so successfully pioneered. It is easy to cite comparisons as well as differences with wine. What is clear is that quality coffee is not merely a product of nature, but a complex achievement resulting from craftsmanship, care, discipline and love. Such coffees deserve our going out of our way to properly express those

# Cup of Excellence® Scoring Categories

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## DEFECTS

Phenolic, rio, riado → automatic disqualification  
Ferment  
Oniony, sweaty

## CLEAN CUP

+ purity | free from measurable faults | clarity  
- dirty | earthy | moldy | off-fruity

## SWEETNESS (prevalence of...)

+ ripeness | sweet  
- green | undeveloped | closed | tart

## ACIDITY

+ lively | refined | firm | soft | having spine | crisp | structure | racy  
- sharp | hard | thin | dull | acetic | sour | flabby | biting

## MOUTHFEEL (texture, viscosity, sediment, weight, astringency)

+ buttery | creamy | round | smooth | cradling | rich | velvety | tightly knit  
- astringent | rough | watery | thin | light | gritty

## FLAVOR (nose + taste)

+ character | intensity | distinctiveness | pleasure | simple-complex | depth  
(possible notations: nutty, chocolate, berry, fruit, caramel, floral, beefy, spicy, honey, smokey...)  
- insipid | potato | peas | grassy | woody | bitter-salty-sour | gamey | baggy

## AFTERTASTE

+ sweet | cleanly disappearing | pleasantly lingering  
- bitter | harsh | astringent | cloying | dirty | unpleasant | metallic

## BALANCE

+ harmony | equilibrium | stable-consistent (from hot to cold) | structure | tuning | acidity-body  
- hollow | excessive | aggressive | inconsistent change in character

## OVERALL (not a correction!)

+ complexity | dimension | uniformity | richness | (transformation from hot to cold...)  
- simplistic | boring | do not like!