

Apprentice to Master Scoresheets in Five Steps

Many people taking the BJCP Beer Tasting Exam don't do as well as they could on the exam not because they lack knowledge of beer and brewing, but because they don't know what to write on the scoresheets. While there is an excellent article on writing and grading scoresheets (http://www.bjcp.org/docs/Grading_Scoresheets.doc) on the BJCP web site, and some examples of very bad and very good scoresheets, there isn't as much information on what middling level scoresheets look like, nor is there any information on how experienced judges think as they write their scoresheets. This guide is an attempt to rectify that, by showing how to prepare high-quality, possibly even master-level scoresheets, step by step.

If you are prepping for the BJCP Tasting Exam, you can get away with just reading one or two sections of this guide in detail and skimming the rest. If you are hoping to get a high score on the exam, read the "average" and "excellent" scoresheets in detail. If you are a novice grader, consider reading the whole thing.

Scoresheets created for this document are fictional, but are based on scoresheets I have seen on the 90+ exams I've graded to date.

Let's imagine a hypothetical flight of beers, an American Amber Ale (10B) with a multitude of faults, a middling Ordinary Bitter (8A), a problematic Dry Stout (13A) which is actually an outstanding brown porter, a world-class Helles Bock (5A), a slightly flawed Belgian Witbier (16A) and a decent but uninspired Belgian Dubbel (18B). This represents a fair cross section of beer styles which might be covered on the BJCP tasting exam.

For each beer, I have written five scoresheets, one terrible, one bad, one borderline acceptable, one middling and one excellent.

Beer #1 - American Amber Ale (Category 10B)

Let's start with the worst beer in the flight, an American Amber Ale with lack of hop aroma and flavor, slight chlorophenolic, diacetyl and acetic notes, moderate grainy astringency, some oxidation and very low carbonation. In addition to all that, it's medium brown in color, hazy and has some distinct roasted grain aroma and flavor. After smelling and tasting the beer, the proctors decide to give it a score of 17 - very hard to drink and not to style, but not so terrible as to get the minimum courtesy score of 13.

A lazy or very inexperienced judge might write a scoresheet like this.

Category: 10 **Subcategory:** B

Subcategory: AAA

Aroma: Very Little. (No score given)

Appearance: Hazy, Dark, No Head. (No score given)

Flavor: Sour. Nasty! (No score given)

Mouthfeel: (Left blank, No score given)

Overall Impression: (Left blank, No score given)

Total: 13

Checkboxes left blank.

This is completely unacceptable. The judge isn't doing himself or the brewer any favors by reviewing the beer in such a cursory and negative fashion. Scoresheets like this reflect badly

on the judge, the competition organizers, and the BJCP and waste everyone's time.

Note: If you're preparing to take the BJCP tasting exam, or are a novice grader, try to pick out all the errors in this badly botched scoresheet.

A very inexperienced judge who's making an honest effort might write something like this:

Category: 10 **Subcategory:** B

Subcategory: American Amber Ale.

Aroma: Very little aroma. Medicinal. No hops. Score: 3

Appearance: Hazy, Dark, No Head. I think this beer is too dark for the style. Score: 1

Flavor: Sour. Medicinal. A flavor I can't recognize. Hops are too low for style. I think amber ale should have caramel malt. Score: 4

Mouthfeel: Flat. Harsh bitter and aftertaste. Score: 3

Overall Impression: Hard to drink. You might have an infection in this beer. Amber ale should be hoppy and light brown. Score: 1

Total: 13

Checkboxes left blank.

This is a bit better, but still doesn't describe most aspects of the beer and doesn't give the brewer much help in improving his next batch.

The judge also shows his inexperience by confessing his ignorance of brewing and troubleshooting skills and also by citing the BJCP Style Guidelines rather than describing the beer in front of him. After all, the brewer can look up the style guidelines himself and, if he cares to do so, he can compare the judge's description of the beer to the guidelines.

Additionally, there are several other mistakes. While the beer is (barely) drinkable, the judge falls victim to "extreme scoring" and gives the beer an unwarranted score of 13. He also doesn't add his scores for each section correctly, and he describes flavor sensations (bitter and aftertaste) in the

mouthfeel section. On the exam, this sort of scoresheet would likely receive a failing grade.

A Recognized level judge, or a Certified or National judge who's seriously slacking, might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 10 Subcategory: B

Subcategory: American Amber Ale.

Aroma: Very little aroma. Medicinal. Hint of sourness. Some butterscotch from malt. No hops. Score: 5

Appearance: Hazy, Dark. Low tan head falls quickly. Score: 1

Flavor: Sour. Medicinal. Butter flavor. Medium malt - needs more. Hops too low for style. Balanced to malt. Score: 5

Mouthfeel: Almost flat. Medium Body. Harsh astringency in aftertaste. Score: 2

Overall Impression: Hard to drink. Too dark for style with sourness and astringency. Watch Sanitation. Don't use so much dark malt. Score: 4

Total: 17

Checkboxes for Astringency and Sour checked. Other checkboxes left blank.

This is a borderline acceptable scoresheet. It provides a better and more accurate description of the beer, but it still leaves out a lot of information and misses some facts. And, while the judge provides some suggestions for improving the beer, they're a bit vague and could be confusing to the brewer.

The score is in the right range, however, and the scores are added correctly.

While I've seen scoresheets this bad in competitions from Certified or even National judges, on the BJCP tasting exam this is the bare minimum acceptable quality. You should expect no better than a Recognized (i.e., low to mid-60s) score if this is your best effort on the exam.

A Certified level judge, or a National judge who's slacking off, might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 10 Subcategory: B

Subcategory: American Amber Ale.

Aroma: Very little aroma. Low Band-Aid and vinegar aromas. A bit of butterscotch as beer warms - might be diacetyl. No hops. Score: 5

Appearance: Hazy, Dark. Low tan head falls quickly. Score: 1

Flavor: Vinegar, Band-aid and butter flavor. Medium malt - needs more. Some roast malt that shouldn't be there. Hop bitter is low for style. No hop flavor - need more. Balanced to malt. Score: 5

Mouthfeel: Almost flat. Medium Body. Harsh astringency. Score: 2

Overall Impression: Hard to drink. Too dark for style with sourness and astringency. Review sanitation procedures.

Filter your brewing water. Don't use so much dark malt. Add more hops. Try again! Score: 4

Total: 17

Checkboxes for Astringency, Diacetyl and Sour checked. Checkboxes for Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles all checked off (1 out of 5 in all cases).

This is a "pretty good" scoresheet. It still misses a lot of things, the description of the beer could be more complete, and the feedback could be a bit clearer and more detailed, but it's clear that the judge knows his stuff.

Even better, despite the fact that the beer is terrible, the judge tries to give the brewer some encouragement. Any judge worthy of passing the BJCP exam should be able to write a scoresheet which looks like this.

If you can consistently write scoresheet of this quality you are guaranteed to pass the BJCP Tasting Exam with at least Recognized rank and more likely a Certified (i.e., low to mid-70s) score. Any National or better judge who writes a scoresheet like this in competition is slacking.

A National or better judge who's doing his job right will write a scoresheet something like this:

Category: 10 Subcategory: B

Subcategory: American Amber Ale.

Aroma: Very little aroma. Persistent low Band-Aid (chlorophenol) and vinegar (acetic) notes. Hint of papery staleness. Touch of coffee-like roast. No esters. No hops. No alcohol. Very low butterscotch (diacetyl - not malt) as beer warms. Score: 5

Appearance: Mahogany brown - too dark. Murky. Low loosely-formed tan head falls quickly but can be roused. Needs more CO2. Score: 1

Flavor: Low persistent vinegar, Band-aid and buttery flavors. Medium low dull, husky, bready pale malt backed by low coffee-like dark malt. Needs firmer pale malt presence and no roast. No esters. Low hop bitter. Very low citrusy hops just barely there. Low papery oxidation. Balanced to malt but off flavors dominate. Finishes quite dry with light lingering unpleasant mouthwash and vinegar aftertaste. Score: 5

Mouthfeel: Medium body. Almost flat carbonation. Not creamy. Buttery slickness masked by medium-high harsh astringency. No alcohol warmth but slight numbing from chlorophenols and sourness. Score: 2

Overall Impression: Hard to drink. Too dark for style with infection, astringency, oxidation and chlorophenol problems. Review sanitation procedures. If mashing/steeping, get a proper grain crush and watch steep/mash temp. Avoid oxygen pick-up - don't splash wort, rack carefully, store beer cold. Filter brewing water and rinse sanitizers thoroughly. Diacetyl might be from yeast stress - practice good yeast management. Substitute 60 °L crystal malt for some or all of your dark malt. Boost flavor hops by ~1/4 oz. @ 5 gal.

Carbonate or bottle condition to get 2.0 vol. CO₂. Try again!
Score: 4

Total: 17

Checkboxes for Astringent, Diacetyl, Oxidized, Phenolic and Sour checked. Checkboxes for Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles all checked off (1 out of 5 in all cases).

This scoresheet mentions every sensory descriptor keyword on the scoresheet, shows good understanding of the style, and expert understanding of troubleshooting and brewing techniques. It picks out all the faults and gives a massive amount of detailed feedback to the brewer while providing a bit of encouragement and some polite but evocative descriptions of the beer.

This is the sort of scoresheet I try to write, and the sort of scoresheet I love to see as a brewer and as a grader. On the tasting exam, if you're consistently writing scoresheets of this quality you're a shoo-in to get at least a National (80%+) score. With some luck on the Scoring Accuracy and Perceptions sections of the exam you have the potential for a Master (90%+) level score.

Note: The numerous suggestions for improving the beer are overkill, since you really only need to give two suggestions for improvement. In competition, judges should split up the work of providing suggestions to improve the beer. For example, one judge could give advice on fixing Astringent, Diacetyl and Oxidized problems, while the other judge gives suggestions on improving the Phenolic and Sour problems. On the tasting exam, any three of the suggestions would be enough to get full marks for Feedback. Unless you write very fast, you won't have time to mention them all on the exam.

Beer #2: Ordinary Bitter (Category 8A)

The next beer is a less familiar style of beer for most North American judges, but has less severe problems. It is an English Ordinary Bitter (8A) with slight grain-derived astringency due to mash water chemistry being out of adjustment (maybe a "second runnings" beer from a grist originally intended for an English barleywine), diacetyl slightly high for the style due to yeast strain, and not enough aroma hops.

Otherwise, the beer is fresh with moderate, pleasant yeast-derived ripe apple and cherry esters and low bready, slightly sweet pale malt character. Body is medium-light, but not watery and carbonation is medium-low. The proctors' consensus score is a 33.

This is the sort of beer you often get in competitions and which you are likely to encounter on the BJCP tasting exam. It's not bad, but not outstanding either.

Category: 8 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Bitter

Aroma: (Left blank, No score given)

Appearance: Low head. (No score given)

Flavor: Some hops. (No score given)

Mouthfeel: Bitter. Weak. (No score given)

Overall Impression: Couldn't get a buzz off this if I tried.
(No score given)

Total: 20

Checkboxes left blank.

Don't be this guy! This is another very bad scoresheet. In addition to most of the faults on the judge's first scoresheet, he gives the beer an unfairly low score because it isn't a style he likes. He also describes bitterness (a Flavor descriptor) in his discussion of Mouthfeel. But, at least he's within the acceptable scoring range this time.

Our "trying but failing" judge might write something like this:

Category: 8 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Ordinary Bitter.

Aroma: Very little aroma. Fruity. Some hops. Score: 5

Appearance: Clear, Amber, Low head. Score: 2

Flavor: Some malt. Fruity. A bit of hops. Buttery. Score: 10

Mouthfeel: Bitter. Low carbonation. Score: 5

Overall Impression: OK. Is butter alright in this style?
Score: 5

Total: 27

Checkboxes left blank.

Again, the judge doesn't describe most aspects of the beer. He also shows his ignorance of the style by faulting the beer for low head (which is acceptable). On the other hand, he misses the astringency in mouthfeel, and doesn't recognize that if he faults the beer for low head he probably should also fault it for low carbonation, as well. So, he gives an undeservedly high score for Mouthfeel. Furthermore, in addition to giving no feedback at all, he undermines his credibility as a judge by asking the brewer if "butter" is acceptable in the style. Finally, as with the "waste of time" judge, he describes bitterness in the Mouthfeel section. At least his overall score is in the ballpark.

On the exam, this sort of scoresheet would likely receive a failing grade.

Our Recognized level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 8 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Ordinary Bitter.

Aroma: Very little aroma. Fruity. Some hops and malt.
Score: 5

Appearance: Clear, Amber, Low white head. Score: 3

Flavor: Some malt. Fruity. Medium hop bitter. Medium buttery notes (diacetyl). Score: 13

Mouthfeel: Medium low body. Low carbonation. No alcohol. Low astringency. Score: 2

Overall Impression: An OK beer. You might have an infection in this beer. Could use more hops. Score: 6

Total: 29

Checkbox for Diacetyl checked. Other checkboxes left blank.

This is a borderline acceptable scoresheet, although it still leaves a lot unsaid. The judge also misses one of the main problems (astringency) and misdiagnoses the source of the diacetyl problem (hence his suggestion that the beer might be infected). While he provides two suggestions for improving the beer one is incorrect and the other is so vague that it is more likely to confuse the brewer than help him. The score is in the right range, however, and the scores are added correctly.

Our Certified level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 8 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Ordinary Bitter.

Aroma: Medium-low fruity esters. Low bready malt. Low hop aroma. Light buttery aroma. Score: 7

Appearance: Clear. Amber, Low persistent, off-white head. Score: 3

Flavor: Medium low malt. Medium fruity esters. Medium hop bitter and medium low hop flavor. Medium buttery notes (diacetyl). Balanced. Dry finish and aftertaste. Score: 13

Mouthfeel: Medium low body. Low carbonation. No alcohol warmth. Astringency too high and a fault for the style. Score: 2

Overall Impression: An OK beer. You might try fermenting at a lower temperature to reduce diacetyl. Add more aroma hops. Try again! Score: 6

Total: 31

Checkbox for Astringency and Diacetyl checked. Other checkboxes left blank. Checkboxes for Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles all checked off (3 out of 5 in all cases).

This is another “pretty good” scoresheet. Most of the comments that apply to the judge’s first scoresheet apply to this one as well.

But, our “pretty good” judge has made three new mistakes. First, he mentions the astringency as a fault, but he doesn’t give its level of intensity. He also spends too much time writing about how it is a fault and then he doesn’t give any suggestions for fixing the problem! Second, he gives couches his feedback in somewhat tentative terms, as if he isn’t sure of his advice. Third, his suggestion that the brewer ferment the beer at a lower temperature to fix the diacetyl problem could well have a negative impact on the beer’s ester profile - which is one of the good things about the beer.

A National or better judge will write a scoresheet something like this:

Aroma: Medium-low ripe apple and sweet cherry esters. Low bready malt with hints of treacle. Very low earthy and herbal hop aroma - needs more. Light buttery aroma (diacetyl). Score: 7.

Appearance: Clear. Amber. Low persistent, fine-beaded off-white head. Some lacing on glass. No alcohol “legs.” Score: 3

Flavor: Medium low bready malt, hints of treacle and light toast. Complex medium fruity ripe apple and sweet cherry esters - nice! Medium hop bitter. Medium low earthy, woody and light sage-like herbal hop flavor. Medium buttery notes (diacetyl) - too much. Balanced to hops, but not by much. Finish dry with fruity and grainy aftertaste. Score: 14

Mouthfeel: Medium low body. Low carbonation. No alcohol warmth. Medium-low puckering astringency - a fault. Too high and a fault for the style. Mineral water powdery dryness. Score: 3

Overall Impression: A good beer, but aroma hops too low, diacetyl a bit high and astringency a fault. Get a proper grain crush to avoid carrying grain husks into boil. If mashing, keep mash/sparge pH at 5.2-5.8. Be careful with sulfate additions to water. Try a different yeast strain to reduce diacetyl. Boost aroma hops by ~1/4 oz. @ 5 gal. Try again! Score: 6

Total: 33

Checkbox for Astringency, Diacetyl and Estery checked. Other checkboxes left blank. Checkboxes for Stylistic Accuracy (3 out of 5), Technical Merit (2 out of 5) and Intangibles (4 out of 5) all checked off.

This scoresheet mentions all the sensory descriptors, describes the beer fully using some evocative language and gives five different detailed accurate suggestions for improving the beer. Again, feedback is a bit of an overkill. Any three of the suggestions on improving the beer should be good enough to get full marks for feedback on the exam.

Beer #3 - Dry Stout (Category 13A)

This beer is a bad example of the category in which it is entered, but actually a very good example of a somewhat similar style, Brown Porter (12A).

The beer is fresh, with minimal hop character, some yeast-derived plum and cherry esters in aroma and flavor, and lots of biscuity and dark toast malt character. It has medium body and is a dark brown color (25 SRM) rather than being black. Flavor and finish are a bit sweet for a dry stout. Dark roast character emphasizes chocolate with a hint of coffee rather than the expected coffee-like and burnt grain character. As a Dry Stout, the proctors’ consensus score would be a 28, as a Brown Porter the proctors’ consensus score would be 40.

Our “bad example” guy might write a scoresheet like this.

Category: 13 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Stout

Aroma: Some. (No score given)

Appearance: Dark. (No score given)

Flavor: Good. (No score given)

Mouthfeel: (Left blank, No score given)

Overall Impression: Not like Guinness but I'd drink it.
(No score given)

Total: 35

Checkboxes left blank.

At least he recognizes that one commercial example of Dry Stout is Guinness Draught Stout. Of course, there are many other excellent dry stouts which aren't made by Guinness, so he's not exactly helping the brewer.

Our "trying but failing" guy might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 13 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Dry Stout.

Aroma: Some malt. No hops. Score: 7

Appearance: Dark. Some head. Score: 3

Flavor: Malty. Some hops. Sweet finish. Score: 12

Mouthfeel: Good body and carbonation. Score: 5

Overall Impression: I think that this beer is too light. Add more dark malt. Score: 7

Total: 34

Checkboxes left blank.

In addition to not mentioning most aspects of the beer and just giving one very vague suggestion for improving the beer, this judge doesn't realize that "dark" isn't a color and that "some" doesn't describe intensity levels very well. The judge's also score misses the fact that the beer isn't to style.

A Recognized level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 13 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Dry Stout.

Aroma: Very little aroma. Low dark malt. No hops or esters. Score: 6

Appearance: Dark brown, clear. Thick persistent tan head. Score: 3

Flavor: Medium dark malt. Slightly fruity and sweet. Low hop bitter. Balanced to malt. Score: 12

Mouthfeel: Medium body. Medium carbonation. No alcohol. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: Pretty good, but not enough dark malt. Add more roast barley. Mash at a lower temperature. Score: 6

Total: 31

Descriptor Definition checkboxes left unchecked. Stylistic Accuracy checkbox checked (2 out of 5). Other checkboxes left blank.

In addition to many of the problems with previous scoresheets, this scoresheet has the problem that the judge doesn't tell the brewer that the beer has any problems until the Overall Impression section. His (lack of) description also makes it hard to tell whether the beer actually hits the style.

The judge's suggestion that the brewer add more roast barley is correct, but excessive amounts of roast barley can ruin a beer, so it's potentially risky feedback. His advice that the brewer mash at a lower temperature might be useful - but only if the brewer is actually mashing! If the brewer made the beer using an extract or partial-grain recipe, that suggestion is useless.

A Certified level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 13 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Dry Stout.

Aroma: Low coffee aroma, lots of toast and bready malt. Low fruity esters. No hops. No diacetyl. Score: 6

Appearance: Dark brown, clear. Thick persistent tan head. Score: 3

Flavor: Medium toasty, bready malt. Low coffee malt. Moderate chocolate malt. Slightly fruity and sweet. Low hop bitterness. Very low hop flavor. Balanced to malt, finish semi-sweet. Score: 11

Mouthfeel: Medium body and carbonation. No alcohol. No astringency. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: A good beer, but too light in color, too sweet for style and not enough dark roast malt. Boost dark roast malt and add a bit of roast barley. If mashing, mash a couple of degrees lower. Might do better as a porter. Score: 6

Total: 30

Descriptor Definition checkboxes left unchecked. Stylistic Accuracy checkbox (2 out of 5), Technical Merit checkbox (3 out of 5) and Intangibles checkbox (3 out of 5) all filled in.

This is yet another "pretty good" scoresheet. It still misses a lot of things, and the description of the beer could be more complete, but overall it's not bad. Feedback is pretty good but could be more detailed. And, the judge could have been more explicit about what sort of porter style the beer resembles.

A National or better judge will write a scoresheet something like this:

Category: 13 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Dry Stout.

Aroma: Medium complex bready, biscuity and dark toast malt. Medium low chocolate malt. Hints of caramel, toffee and Dutch chocolate. Lacking expected coffee and roast grain notes.

No hops. Medium low cherry and plum esters. No diacetyl. No alcohol. Score: 5

Appearance: Mahogany brown - too light. Clear. Medium, densely-formed tan head persists to finish. Plenty of lacing on glass. No alcohol "legs." Score: 3

Flavor: Rich, complex dark toast, nutty, biscuity, breadly malt. Low caramel, molasses and Dutch chocolate. Low espresso coffee notes. Medium low cherry and plum esters. Medium low hop bitter. Very low herbal, woody hop flavor. Balance firmly towards malt, but finish semi-sweet and lacking expected dark grain drying. Aftertaste pleasantly chocolaty-sweet. No diacetyl. No alcohol. Score: 11

Mouthfeel: Medium body and carbonation. Slightly creamy. No alcohol warmth. No dark grain astringency. No other mouthfeel sensations. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: An excellent beer, but not to style - too light in color, lacking dark roast notes and too sweet for the style. If entered as a Brown Porter (12A) it would score in 38-42 range. If mashing, do starch conversion rest at ~146 °F. Otherwise, eliminate crystal malts and/or use more attenuative extract. Perhaps substitute a bit of medium dark molasses for ~5% of extract to thin body and dry flavor. If mashing/steeping, substitute dark chocolate (600 °L) malt for light chocolate and/or brown malt. Perhaps steep/cap mash with +1/4 oz. @ 5 gal. roasted barley - but not too much! Try again! Score: 5

Total: 28

Descriptor Definition checkbox for Estery checked. Checkboxes for Stylistic Accuracy (2 of 5), Technical Merit (3 of 5) and Intangibles (5 of 5) all checked off.

In addition to perfect completeness, great descriptions and massive amounts of detailed accurate feedback, this scoresheet also nails the fact that the beer is actually an outstanding brown porter.

For the tasting exam, mentioning that the beer would do better as a brown porter and providing one suggestions each for how to darken the color and dry out the finish should be enough to get a good score for feedback.

Beer #4 - Helles Bock (5A)

This beer is a great beer which hits the BJCP Style Guidelines in all ways and which is near the peak of condition, but which still has a few minor points where it could be improved. Let's say it's got a touch too much caramel in the flavor and is a bit lacking in hop aroma. The grist is mostly Pils malt with a bit of light crystal malt. Hopping is reminiscent of a German Pilsner although the beer is still malt-focused. The proctors' consensus score for the beer is 45.

Our "bad example" guy might write a scoresheet like this.

Category: 5 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Bock

Aroma: Hoppy. (No score given)

Appearance: Light. (No score given)

Flavor: Strong. (No score given)

Mouthfeel: (Left blank, No score given)

Overall Impression: I love this one! (No score given)

Total: 50

Checkboxes left blank.

Well, at least he's happy . . . In addition to all the usual faults, he's again fallen victim to extreme scoring and given the beer a perfect score.

Our "trying but failing" guy might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 5 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Hellis Bock.

Aroma: Malty. Some hops. Score: 8

Appearance: Light. Big head. Score: 3

Flavor: Sweet malt. Some hops. Score: 15

Mouthfeel: Good body and carbonation. Score: 5

Overall Impression: Lots of alcohol. I could drink this one all day. Score: 7

Total: 38

Checkboxes left blank.

In addition to very sparse descriptions, the judge doesn't give any feedback. Also, "light" isn't a color and vague descriptors like, "big," "some" or "good" don't tell much about the beer. He also misspelled "helles." Unlike "Don't be this guy," he's given the beer a very low score, perhaps because he's not familiar with the style or is afraid to use the full scoring range.

A Recognized level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 5 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Helles Bock.

Aroma: Medium malt aroma. Low hops. Some alcohol. Score: 10.

Appearance: Golden, clear. Thick persistent white head. Score: 3

Flavor: Full pale malt. Slightly fruity. Medium hop bitterness. Balanced to malt. Score: 15

Mouthfeel: Medium body. Medium carbonation. Some alcohol. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: I think this is a very good beer. I'm not sure how to improve it. Score: 8

Total: 40

Descriptor Definition checkboxes left unchecked. Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 5 out of 5).

This scoresheet repeats the problems of the judge's previous scoresheets. In this case, the judge not only doesn't know how to improve the beer but tells the brewer as much. This speaks to poor understanding of the style on the judge's part.

A Certified level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 5 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Helles Bock.

Aroma: Medium bready malt. Low Nobel hops. Low fruity esters. Low alcohol. Score: 10.

Appearance: Golden, clear. Thick persistent white head. Score: 3

Flavor: Rich bready sweet malt. Low fruity esters. Medium hop bitterness and Nobel hop flavor. Some alcohol. Balanced to malt. Finish semi-sweet. Score: 16

Mouthfeel: Medium body and carbonation. Low smooth alcohol. No astringency. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: A very good beer. Hard to suggest improvements, perhaps add more hops. Score: 9

Total: 42

Descriptor Definition checkboxes left unchecked. Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 5 out of 5).

Like the judge's previous scoresheets this one is "pretty good," with the exception that he can only offer one vague suggestion for improving the beer, perhaps because he is unfamiliar with the style or because his perceptive ability isn't as well-developed as it could be.

A new fault on this scoresheet is that the judge consistently misspells the term "noble" as "Nobel" and he assumes that all noble hops taste alike. "Nobel" is the prize, "noble" is the hop. And, different noble hops have unique flavor and aroma profiles.

On the tasting exam, you aren't likely to lose points for misspelling words, but you will lose points for using vague terminology such as "American hops" or "Belgian yeast."

A National or better judge will write a scoresheet something like this:

Category: 5 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Helles Bock.

Aroma: Rich, intense bready, lightly sweet and Graham cracker Pils malt. Medium low caramel notes - a tad high. Slight ripe apple esters. Very low floral and slightly gingery hops - could be a higher. Low, smooth alcohol notes. No diacetyl or acetaldehyde. No DMS. Score: 10

Appearance: Golden. Bright clarity. High rocky ivory head falls quickly but easily roused. Plenty of lacing on glass and some alcohol "legs" visible when glass is swirled. Score: 3

Flavor: Rich, complex bready, lightly caramel, Graham cracker Pils malt. Med. low caramel notes - a bit high. Low ripe apple esters, otherwise clean lager character. Medium hop

bitterness, Medium floral and lightly spicy hops (linden blossom and ginger flowers). Balanced firmly to malt with some hops to counter, finish semi-sweet, but not cloying. Pleasant lingering malt and hop aftertaste. Some alcohol flavor. Hint of grainy DMS - OK. No diacetyl, acetaldehyde. Score: 17

Mouthfeel: Medium body and carbonation. Slightly creamy. Low smooth alcohol warming. No astringency. No other mouthfeel sensations. Score: 5.

Overall Impression: Delicious! Superior to many commercial examples. Could benefit from slight boost to aroma hops (+1/4 oz. @ 5 gallons). Reduce caramel malt additions or, if decoction mashing, be careful about the degree of caramelization. Score: 9

Total: 44

Descriptor Definition checkboxes for Alcoholic, DMS and Estery checked. Checkboxes for Stylistic Accuracy (5 of 5), Technical Merit (5 of 5) and Intangibles (4 of 5) all checked off.

This is another very good scoresheet. But, you'll notice that the feedback isn't as detailed or complex as it might be and that the judge's score is actually a point off the proctors' consensus score. Even high level judges have trouble giving good feedback on how to improve great beers and even high level judges can differ somewhat in their impressions - even of very good beers.

Beer #5 - Belgian Witbier (Category 16A)

This beer is a pretty good beer, but it's a bit stale (a common vulnerability for wheat-based beers), the esters and herb character are a bit low and it's a bit "hammy" due to the use of the wrong sort of orange zest and coriander. In addition to that, the wheat flour has dropped out of solution so it's a bit clearer than it should be. The beer has a very low level of lactic sourness. The proctors' consensus score for the beer is 31.

Our "bad example" guy might write a scoresheet like this.

Category: 16 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Wit

Aroma: (Left blank. No score given)

Appearance: Light. (No score given)

Flavor: Sweet. (No score given)

Mouthfeel: Fizzy. (No score given)

Overall Impression: Tastes like baked ham. (No score given)

Total: 22

Checkboxes left blank.

In addition to all its other faults the judge also indulged in extreme scoring (possibly because he didn't like the style).

Our "trying but failing" guy might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 16 Subcategory: A

Subcategory: Witbier.

Aroma: Orange like aroma. Score: 5

Appearance: Light. Frothy head. Score: 3

Flavor: Sweet malt. Low hops. Spicy. Score: 8

Mouthfeel: Light. High carbonation. Score: 4

Overall Impression: Pretty good but there might be an infection. Score: 5

Total: 26

Checkboxes left blank.

In addition to the usual faults, the judge has mistaken impressions of the beer (possibly due to lack of familiarity with the style) and assumes that there is an infection where there actually is none. The judge has also added his scores wrong.

A Recognized level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 16 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Witbier.

Aroma: Medium malt aroma. Low hops. Some orange aroma but no banana and clove esters. No alcohol, acetaldehyde or solventy notes. Score: 6.

Appearance: Golden, hazy. Thick persistent white head. Score: 3

Flavor: Light malt. Some oranges and spices. Medium low hop bitterness. Balanced to malt. A bit sour. Lacks banana and clove esters expected for the style. No alcohol, acetaldehyde or solventy notes. Score: 9

Mouthfeel: Medium light body. High carbonation. No alcohol. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: OK beer. Mash at a higher temperature to get fuller body. Change yeast to get more banana esters. Score: 6

Total: 28

Descriptor Definition checkboxes left unchecked. Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 3 out of 5).

This scoresheet has all problems of the judge's previous scoresheets. But, a new problem is that the judge comments on alcohol, acetaldehyde and solventy notes which aren't likely faults for this style. While describing relevant characteristics which aren't present (e.g., lack of hop aroma in an American IPA) is an excellent habit when writing scoresheets, it's pointless to list the absence of every fault. It's like pointing out that there are no tigers at the North Pole or no polar bears in the jungle.

An additional problem is that the judge seems to repeatedly use the advice to adjust mash temperature up or down even when it's not appropriate. Different problems have different solutions, so don't assume that there is always just one fix for the same (or similar) problem.

A third problem is that the judge confuses the Hefeweizen (Category 15A) and Witbier (Category 16A) styles and assumes that lack of banana esters in a Witbier is a fault.

A fourth problem is that he assumes that clove-like notes are caused by esters, when they're actually a type of phenol.

Given the mistaken perceptions and incorrect feedback, in addition to all the other problems, this scoresheet would receive a nearly failing grade on the tasting exam.

A Certified level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 16 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Witbier.

Aroma: Light bready malt. Very low Nobel hops. Medium fruity esters. Hints of orange. Some spices. Score: 6.

Appearance: Golden, hazy. Thick persistent white head. Score: 3

Flavor: Medium bready sweet malt. Medium fruity esters. Low hop bitterness and Nobel hop flavor. Balanced to malt. Finishes semi-sweet. Very low sourness which is OK for the style. Seems like it's a few months old. Score: 10

Mouthfeel: Light body. High carbonation. No alcohol. No astringency. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: A pretty good beer, but it seems oxidized like it's a few months old. Avoid hot side aeration. Serve when fresh. Score: 7

Total: 30

Descriptor Definition checkbox for Oxidized checked. Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 3 out of 5).

In addition to the usual faults, a new fault on this scoresheet is that the judge makes assumptions about the beer's age and the brewing process used to make it. Oxidized can occur very quickly, and is especially obvious in delicately flavored ester-focused (or late hop-focused) beers, so the judge can't assume that it's as old as he believes it is. His advice to avoid hot side aeration is only applicable if the brewer is using all grain technique and is recirculating his mash runoff. Also, oxygen can be introduced into the beer at just about every phase of the brewing process, so it's not particularly helpful to just focus on just mashing and sparging technique. A final problem is that Witbier doesn't necessarily use noble hops.

Given the problems with feedback, in addition to its other problems, on the tasting exam, this scoresheet would nearly fall into the Recognized scoring band.

A National or better judge will write a scoresheet something like this:

Category: 16 **Subcategory:** A

Subcategory: Witbier.

Aroma: Low bready sweet malt with a hint of wheat sourness. Very low spicy herbal hops complemented by a touch

of orange and ginger spice. Chamomile and other expected fruity, floral esters are lacking. Hint of smokiness as beer warms. Score: 6.

Appearance: Golden. Somewhat hazy. Massive fine-beaded white head falls a bit quickly but easily roused. Plenty of lace on glass, no alcohol “legs” visible. Could be more turbid. Score: 3

Flavor: Medium bready sweet malt with a touch of wheat sour; seems a bit stale. Subtle clean lactic tartness - OK. Medium low orange and cherry esters. Low gingery, coriander and citrus zest spice. Ester and herb profile a bit dull, perhaps oxidation. Low hop bitterness and spicy, herbal hop flavor. Balanced to malt with some esters and spice to complement. Finishes semi-dry with slightly smoky, “hammy” aftertaste - a fault. Score: 12

Mouthfeel: Light body. High carbonation. Slightly creamy texture. No alcohol. No astringency. No other mouthfeel sensations. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: A good beer, but suffering from early phases of oxidation and improper spicing. Avoid oxygen pickup at all phases of the brewing process (except yeast pitch), store cold (~33 °F), drink when fresh. Be careful with coriander and orange zest varieties to avoid “hammy” notes. Boost herb notes by adding chamomile, possibly as tea, to secondary. Add soft wheat flour to boil to increase haze (~1/2 cup @ 5 gal.). Score: 6

Total: 31

Descriptor Definition checkboxes for Estery, Oxidized, Phenolic and Sour checked. Note next to phenols “-smoky.” Note next to sour “- lactic. OK.” Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 3 out of 5).

This is another very good scoresheet. A new feature is that the judge qualifies the Descriptor Definition checkbox information as necessary. It’s also obvious from his perceptions and feedback that the judge is familiar with tasting and brewing this somewhat obscure style. Less obvious is that fact that on this scoresheet, and all his other scoresheets, the judge is paying attention to how the beer “develops” over time. This is a good habit, since some aromas and flavors are fleeting while others take time to develop.

A slightly problematic aspect of this scoresheet is that the judge noticed a minor fault in appearance but decided not to reduce his score because of it. This is forgivable, though, given the narrow scoring range for Appearance. Again, judges can vary somewhat in their perceptions.

Beer #6 - Belgian Dubbel (Category 18B)

This beer is a pretty good Belgian Dubbel, but it is a bit underattenuated, very slightly solventy and a bit too phenolic due to yeast stress, with hop bitterness is a bit too high and harsh for the style. Additionally, the malt complexity could be better. The proctors’ consensus score for the beer is 35.

One last “don’t be this guy” scoresheet.

Category: 18 **Subcategory:** B

Subcategory: Double

Aroma: No hops. (No score given)

Appearance: Dark. (No score given)

Flavor: Yuck. (No score given)

Mouthfeel: (Left blank. No score given)

Overall Impression: Hangover fuel. Belgian beers suck! (No score given)

Total: 13

Checkboxes left blank.

This is the sort of scoresheet that competition organizers and the BJCP dread. In competition, judge coordinators and BJCP ranked judges should be proactive about preventing untrained judges from writing garbage like this.

If you have the misfortune to be paired with a judge of this caliber, politely inquire if he is going provide scores for each section, write more detailed descriptions, and/or fill in the checkboxes. While it’s unlikely that anything more than that is required, really hard cases might require the intervention of the judge director.

Mercifully, someone with this level of skill would probably fail the online qualifier exam and wouldn’t be allowed to take the tasting exam. (On the legacy exam, where there were no qualifications needed to take the exam, graders would occasionally see scoresheets this bad, but usually only because the judge was concentrating on the written portion of the exam and ran out of time to write his scoresheets.)

Our “trying but failing” guy might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 18 **Subcategory:** B

Subcategory: Dubbel.

Aroma: Some alcohol. Score: 10

Appearance: Dark. Good carbonation for style. Score: 3

Flavor: Sweet. Low hops. Score: 15

Mouthfeel: Big. Alcohol. No harsh bitter. Score: 5

Overall Impression: Not bad. Could use more hops. Score: 8

Total: 41

Checkboxes left blank.

This scoresheet has several new problems. First, the judge describes carbonation (a mouthfeel descriptor) in his discussion of Appearance. Second, “good carbonation for the style” doesn’t tell the reader much about the beer. Third, the judge doesn’t qualify the word “alcohol” in any way. Fourth, he conflates harshness (a mouthfeel descriptor) with bitterness (a flavor descriptor). Finally, in addition to engaging in extreme scoring, the judge only describes the beer as “not bad” despite the fact that he scored the beer in the “Excellent” range.

It is unlikely that someone as unprepared as this person would be allowed to take the Tasting exam.

A Recognized level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 18 **Subcategory:** B

Subcategory: Belgian Dubbel.

Aroma: Big malt aroma. No hops. Some alcohol. Maybe some cloves that shouldn't be there. Score: 5

Appearance: Brown, clear. Thick persistent tan head. Score: 3

Flavor: Full malt very sweet. Some bitterness. No hops. Balanced to malt. Some alcohol. Clove esters are a fault for the style. No diacetyl from malt. Score: 8

Mouthfeel: Medium full body. High carbonation. Low alcohol - a bit hot. Score: 4.

Overall Impression: Pretty drinkable. Mash at a higher temperature to get fuller body. Change yeast to reduce clove esters. Score: 6

Total: 26

Descriptor Definition checkbox for Alcohol and Estery checked. Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 3 out of 5).

In addition to the terse descriptions and scoring accuracy which is far from the proctors' consensus score, the judge demonstrates his lack of stylistic, technical and troubleshooting knowledge. Not only are clove-like notes acceptable in a Belgian Dubbel, they aren't esters. Although diacetyl is a fault in any of the Belgian strong ales, it isn't produced by malt (the judge is mistaking it for DMS).

The judge hurts his descriptive ability by contradicting himself by s first writing, "Some bitterness" and then writing, "No hops." He also states that, "Clove esters are a fault for the style" but doesn't actually tell us that there are clove notes in the beer!

Finally, while he provides two somewhat suggestions to improve the beer, they're both incorrect given the actual faults in the beer, although they do match his perceptions. He also falls back on his stock advice to alter mash temperature when it's not the most likely fix for excessive sweetness.

This is another very weak scoresheet due to the problems with perceptions and style knowledge. If written for the tasting exam it would score right at the borderline between passing and failing.

A Certified level judge might write a scoresheet like this:

Category: 18 **Subcategory:** B

Subcategory: Belgian Dubbel.

Aroma: Prominent bready, caramel and light plum malt notes. Very low Nobel hops. Medium fruity esters. Low spicy notes. Some alcohol. Score: 7.

Appearance: Medium brown, clear. Thick persistent off-white head. Score: 3

Flavor: Medium high bready, sweet malt. Medium caramel and some plum notes. Medium fruity esters. Low hop bitterness and very low Nobel hop flavor. Balanced to malt. Finishes sweet with lingering sweet aftertaste. Needs more complexity. Score: 13

Mouthfeel: Medium full body. High carbonation. Some solventy alcohol warming. No astringency. Score: 3.

Overall Impression: A good beer, but excessively sweet and with some solventy notes. Malt character could be better. Add more sugar and crystal malt. Ferment cooler. Might develop more character with age. Score: 6

Total: 32

Descriptor Definition checkbox for Alcoholic, Estery, Phenolic and Solvent checked. Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 3 out of 5).

All in all, this is a pretty good scoresheet. While it could be more complete and could use more descriptive detail, the judge picks up on the major faults (underattenuation, yeast stress) and gives two reasonably good suggestions to improve the beer. The suggestion that the beer might develop more character with age is a bit more problematic since the judge doesn't know how old the beer is. Also, aging might reduce some aspects of malt complexity and it won't help the excessive phenols and solventy notes that much.

A minor problem is that the judge describes plum notes for the malt. While Special B® malt can impart a distinct "dark fruity" character to a beer; those notes are more properly described as being esters.

A scoresheet like this would score a bit higher within the Certified scoring range, approaching the low end of the National level scoring range. Only lack of completeness and somewhat weak descriptive ability and feedback hold it back.

A scoresheet of this quality is a great performance for someone taking the tasting exam for the first time, especially if they have limited judging, tasting and brewing experience.

A National or better judge will write a scoresheet something like this:

Aroma: Prominent sweet bready and caramel malt. Hints of light toast and chocolate. Medium-high plum, dried cherry and fig notes. Medium ginger and clove phenols - too high. Very low herbal hops, mostly masked by other aromas. No diacetyl. Low harsh alcohol and solventy esters as beer warms. Score: 7.

Appearance: Dark copper, bright clarity. Thick persistent rocky off-white head with plenty of "Belgian lace" on glass. Lasts to finish. Alcohol "legs" evident when contents swirled. Nice! Score: 3

Flavor: Strong initial bready, caramel malt sweetness, backed by hints of bread crust and cocoa. Specialty malt character could be richer. Medium-high plum, dried cherry and fig notes. Medium "pear drop" and floral esters - a bit solventy. Medium ginger, white pepper and clove phenols - too high.

Medium low hop bitter - on the high side. Very low herbal hop flavor. Balanced firmly to malt. Sweet finish - almost cloying. Lingering sweetness with hop harshness in aftertaste. No diacetyl. Score: 15

Mouthfeel: Medium full body. Medium-high carbonation. Slightly creamy. Low peppery, solventy alcohol. Very low hop-derived astringency. No other mouthfeel sensations. Score: 3.

Overall Impression: A very good beer, but excessively sweet (underattenuation?) and with potential yeast stress. Specialty malt character could be more complex. Hop bitter excessively high and harsh. Pitch sufficient healthy yeast starter, oxygenate adequately at yeast pitch. Ferment at 2-3 °F lower temp. Boost medium dark (60-120 °L) crystal malt. If mashing, perhaps add some Munich, Vienna or Biscuit malt. Reduce IBU by 5-10, use lower cohumulone hop variety for smoother bitter. Score: 7

Total: 35

Descriptor Definition checkbox for Alcoholic, Estery, Phenolic and Solvent checked. Notes by Estery and Phenolic “-too high”. Stylistic Accuracy, Technical Merit and Intangibles checkbox checked (all 3 out of 5).

This is another very good scoresheet, except that the judge got esters and phenols at slightly higher levels than the proctors did and detected floral esters that none of the other judges did. Even on very good scoresheets, judges' perceptions will vary somewhat.

If the judge actually had time and space to write this scoresheet on the tasting exam, this could easily be a Master level scoresheet, with perfect scores for Completeness and Feedback and near perfect scores for Descriptive and Perceptive abilities.