
**Coffee — Sensory analysis —
Vocabulary**

Café — Analyse sensorielle — Vocabulaire

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Foreword

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This document was prepared by Technical Committee ISO/TC 34, *Food products*, Subcommittee SC 15, *Coffee*.

Coffee — Sensory analysis — Vocabulary

1 Scope

This document defines terms relating to coffee sensory analysis.

This document covers definitions applicable to green, roasted and ground coffee, coffee extracts and soluble coffee.

The terms are given under the following headings:

- a) basic terms of sensory analysis;
- b) generic terms in the sensory assessment of coffee;
- c) terminology relating to coffee-specific odours and tastes;
- d) terms commonly used in sensory assessment of coffee by practitioners.

2 Normative references

There are no normative references in this document.

3 Terms and definitions

ISO and IEC maintain terminological databases for use in standardization at the following addresses:

- IEC Electropedia: available at <http://www.electropedia.org/>
- ISO Online browsing platform: available at <http://www.iso.org/obp>

NOTE 1 For additional information on sensory analysis, see ISO 5492:2008.

NOTE 2 For additional terms and definitions on sensory analysis of coffee, see Reference [4].

3.1 Basic terms of sensory analysis

3.1.1

acidity, noun

acid taste, noun

basic taste (3.1.4) produced by dilute aqueous solutions of most acid substances (e.g. citric acid and tartaric acid)

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.3]

3.1.2

aroma, noun

<English sense and French informal language> *odour* (3.1.9) with a pleasant or unpleasant connotation

Note 1 to entry: The terms “aroma” in English and “arôme” in French are not exactly equivalent.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.24]

3.1.3

aroma, noun

<French sense> sensory attribute perceptible by the olfactory organ via the back of the nose when tasting

Note 1 to entry: The terms “aroma” in English and “arôme” in French are not exactly equivalent.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.25]

3.1.4

basic taste, noun

distinctive *taste* ([3.1.12](#)), any one of: acid/*sour* ([3.3.31](#)), bitter, salty, sweet, umami

Note 1 to entry: These tastes are affected by the botanical species of coffee, the degree of roasting and other brewing/extraction procedures.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.2, modified — The definition has been reworded and the note has been replaced.]

3.1.5

bitterness, noun

bitter taste, noun

basic taste ([3.1.4](#)) produced by dilute aqueous solutions of various substances such as quinine, or caffeine

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.5]

3.1.6

flavour, noun

complex combination of the olfactory, gustatory and *trigeminal sensations* ([3.1.15](#)) perceived during tasting

Note 1 to entry: Flavour may be influenced by tactile, thermal, painful and/or kinaesthetic effects.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.20]

3.1.7

mouthfeel, noun

mixed experience derived from sensations in the mouth that relate to physical or chemical properties of a stimulus

Note 1 to entry: Assessors differentiate the physical sensations (e.g. density, viscosity, particulate) as *texture* ([3.1.13](#)) properties and the chemical sensations (e.g. *astringency* ([3.2.2](#)), cooling) as *flavour* ([3.1.6](#)) properties.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.62]

3.1.8

note, noun

distinctive and identifiable feature of an *odour* ([3.1.9](#)) or *flavour* ([3.1.6](#))

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.28]

3.1.9

odour, noun

olfactory, adj

sensation perceived by means of the olfactory organ in sniffing certain volatile substances

Note 1 to entry: The olfactory organ may be stimulated by the volatiles of roast coffee or coffee brew, with the inhaled air stream through the nose or from the mouth cavity via the retronasal route.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.18, modified — The term “olfactory” and a Note 1 to entry have been added.]

3.1.10**saltiness**, noun**salty taste**, noun*basic taste* (3.1.4) produced by dilute aqueous solutions of various substances such as sodium chloride

Note 1 to entry: This taste can mean high mineral concentration in the water used for brewing/extraction of coffee.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.6, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

3.1.11**sweetness**, noun**sweet taste**, noun*basic taste* (3.1.4) produced by dilute aqueous solutions of natural or artificial substances such as sucrose or aspartameNote 1 to entry: Commonly associated with sweet *aroma* (3.1.2) descriptors such as fruity, chocolate and caramel. It is dependent on the ripeness of the coffee cherry. (This could also be affected by processing method.)

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.7, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

3.1.12**taste**, noun

sensation perceived by the taste organ when stimulated by certain soluble substances

Note 1 to entry: The term “taste” should not be used to designate the combination of gustatory, olfactory and *trigeminal sensations* (3.1.15) which are designated by the term *flavour* (3.1.6).

Note 2 to entry: Taste organs are the epithelial cells in the mouth cavity, stimulated by the coffee brew.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 2.12, modified — A sentence has been deleted from the Note 1 to entry and a Note 2 to entry has been added.]

3.1.13**texture**, noun<in the mouth> mechanical, geometrical, surface and *body* (3.2.4) attributes of a product perceptible by means of kinaesthesia and somesthesia receptors and (where appropriate) visual and auditory receptors from the first bite to final swallowing

Note 1 to entry: Beverage preparations with foaming influence the texture of the coffee brew.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.41, modified — The two notes have been replaced with a new Note 1 to entry.]

3.1.14**smell**, verbperceive or to attempt to perceive an *odour* (3.1.9)

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 2.15]

3.1.15**trigeminal sensation**, noun**oro-nasal chemesthesia**, nounsensation resulting from irritation caused by *chemical* (3.3.8) stimuli in the mouth, nose or throat

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 2.19]

3.2 Generic terms in the sensory assessment of coffee

3.2.1

after-taste, noun

residual taste, noun

olfactory and/or gustatory sensation that occurs after the elimination of the product, and differs from the sensations perceived while the product was in the mouth

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.65]

3.2.2

astringency, noun

astringent, adj

complex sensation, accompanied by shrinking, drawing or puckering of the skin or mucosal surface in the mouth

Note 1 to entry: Produced by substances such as kaki tannins, sloe tannins, cranberry, Spanish lime, green plantain peel or unripe green skin.

Note 2 to entry: Astringency is a *mouthfeel* (3.1.7) suggested to be directly transmitted to the brain through trigeminal nerve endings in the mouth.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.10, modified — The definition has been reworded and notes to entry have been added.]

3.2.3

balanced, adj

coffee with an adequate proportion of each characteristic under evaluation and with none of them excessively dominant

3.2.4

body, noun

consistency, compactness of *texture* (3.1.13), fullness, richness, *flavour* (3.1.6) or substance of a product

Note 1 to entry: This concept along with *acidity* (3.1.1) and *aroma* (3.1.2) is used to assess the quality of coffee.

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.27, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

3.2.5

creamy, adj

mild, unctuous and persistent sensation in the buccal cavity

Note 1 to entry: Caused, basically, by suspended lipids in the coffee brew.

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.84, modified.]

3.2.6

dry aroma coffee, noun

fragrance, noun

odour (3.1.9) of roasted and ground coffee before adding hot water

Note 1 to entry: This term is often used in coffee cupping.

3.2.7

flat, adj

product perceived to be below the expected organoleptic level

Note 1 to entry: Not to be confused with *insipid* (3.2.10).

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.71, modified — Note 1 to entry has been added.]

3.2.8**hard**, adjperception characterized by high levels of *bitterness* (3.1.5) and *astringency* (3.2.2)**3.2.9****heavy**, adj**dense**, adj

sensation of lingering mouth after-feel caused by high contents of soluble solids or fine suspended particles in a coffee brew

Note 1 to entry: Not to be confused with “body”.

3.2.10**insipid**, adjproduct with a much lower level of *flavour* (3.1.6) than expected

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.68]

3.2.11**neutral**, adj

product without any distinct characteristic

[SOURCE: ISO 5492:2008, 3.70]

3.2.12**smooth**, adj

gentle and pleasant sensation which does not produce harshness in the buccal cavity

Note 1 to entry: Indicating certain levels of fatty suspended substances and allowing for easy beverage ingestion due to moderate amounts of lipid in the coffee brew.

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.93, modified.]

3.2.13**strong**, adj*flavour* (3.1.6) indicative of *balanced* (3.2.3) coffee with high *body* (3.2.4) and intense *taste* (3.1.12) remaining in the mouth**3.2.14****thin**, adjcoffee brew of poor *body* (3.2.4) features

Note 1 to entry: Due to few soluble solids, essentially derived from a light roasting or inadequate preparation.

3.2.15**wet aroma coffee**, noun**cup aroma**, noun*odour* (3.1.9) of roasted and ground coffee perceived after adding hot water upon preparation

Note 1 to entry: This term is often used in coffee cupping.

3.3 Terminology relating to coffee-specific odours and tastes**3.3.1****acrid**, adj*rough* (3.4.10), bitter, *astringent* (3.2.2), *spicy* (3.3.32) and sharp *note* (3.1.8)

Note 1 to entry: Usually associated with particularly black beans.

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.28, modified.]

3.3.2

animal-like, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling the *odour* (3.1.9) of animals

Note 1 to entry: It is not a fragrant odour like musk but resembles wet fur, sweat, leather, hides or urine.

3.3.3

ashy, adj

having an alkaline *taste* (3.1.12) and an *odour* (3.1.9) resembling the *smell* (3.1.14) of ash

3.3.4

baggy, adj

agave-like, adj

sack-like, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling natural fibre such as jute or fique

3.3.5

burnt, adj

coal-like, adj

note (3.1.8) characteristic of coffee with very dark roasting

Note 1 to entry: It may arise from the roasting process taking too much time.

Note 2 to entry: The coffee has a *flavour* (3.1.6) resembling burnt vegetable oil.

3.3.6

caramel-like, adj

caramelized, adj

note (3.1.8) produced when sugar is heated to a high temperature without burning it

3.3.7

cereal-like, adj

malty, adj

toast-like, adj

descriptor that includes *notes* (3.1.8) similar to cereal, malt, toast, freshly baked bread or roasted corn, barley or wheat

Note 1 to entry: Can be present in some light-roasted coffees.

Note 2 to entry: Note of rice roasted could be present from medium to dark roasted coffees.

3.3.8

chemical, adj

medicinal, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling chemical compounds such as disinfectants or pesticides

Note 1 to entry: "Medicinal" is most often used in the case of iodine or *phenolic* (3.3.25) *flavours* (3.1.6).

3.3.9

chocolate-like, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling cocoa powder, dark chocolate or milk chocolate

Note 1 to entry: This *flavour* (3.1.6) is sometimes described as "sweet".

[SOURCE: Reference [3], modified.]

3.3.10**earthy**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling fresh earth, wet soil or humusNote 1 to entry: This *flavour* (3.1.6) is sometimes caused by mould growth.

[SOURCE: Reference [3], modified.]

3.3.11**fermented**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling decomposed organic materialNote 1 to entry: This *flavour* (3.1.6) is sometimes caused by enzymatic over-fermentation of organic compounds.

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.48, modified.]

3.3.12**floral**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling the fragrance of flowers

Note 1 to entry: Associated with the slight scent of different types of flowers including honeysuckle, jasmine, dandelion and nettles.

[SOURCE: Reference [3], modified.]

3.3.13**fruity-citrus**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling ripe, fresh, citric fruit or coffee cherry**3.3.14****fruity-pulpy**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling overripe fruit or coffee pulp

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.29, modified.]

3.3.15**fuel-like**, adj*note* (3.1.8) typical of coffee contaminated with oil derivatives such as fuel oil or gasoline while in processing, transport, storage or roasting**3.3.16****grassy**, adj**green**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling recently mown grass

Note 1 to entry: It may be transitorily present in recently harvested or recently processed coffee or be a result of harvesting unripe coffee.

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.90, modified.]

3.3.17**hay-like**, adj**straw-like**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling dry grass or hay**3.3.18****herbal**, adj**herby**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling fresh weeds or foliage

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.91, modified.]

3.3.19

metallic, adj

note (3.1.8) similar to the *taste* (3.1.12) of water in direct contact with recently polished metallic surfaces

Note 1 to entry: This taint can occur due to excessive polishing of green coffee or due to contamination of water in rusted pipelines.

3.3.20

musty, adj

mouldy, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling mould, must, black soil or damp

Note 1 to entry: It may occur in coffee where there was poor control of water content during processing, particularly during coffee drying and storage in damp closed-air spaces.

3.3.21

nutty, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling fresh nuts but not *rancid* (3.3.27) nuts or bitter almonds

[SOURCE: Reference [3], modified.]

3.3.22

onion-like, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling onions

Note 1 to entry: It may occur in coffee which has had inadequate fermentation.

3.3.23

papery, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling Kraft paper or cardboard

Note 1 to entry: It may occur in coffee packed or in contact with paper bags or cardboard or in coffee brew prepared using poor quality or unrinsed paper filters.

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.63, modified.]

3.3.24

pea-like, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling *odour* (3.1.9) or *flavour* (3.1.6) characteristic of peas

Note 1 to entry: It may arise from incomplete or deficient roasting.

3.3.25

phenolic, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling halogen compounds such as creosol, chloride or iodine

Note 1 to entry: Could be used to describe coffees with a *flavour* (3.1.6) such as Rio.

3.3.26

potato-like, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling raw potato

3.3.27

rancid, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling rancid nuts

Note 1 to entry: It may occur in coffee by lipid oxidation of roasted or roasted and ground coffee while exposed to air.

Note 2 to entry: This attribute usually increases with time because of inadequate coffee processing, packing and storage.

3.3.28**roasty**, adj*fragrance* (3.2.6) feature typical of freshly roasted coffee

Note 1 to entry: This attribute is the most important, intense and outstanding scent of coffee.

3.3.29**rubber-like**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling of hot tires, rubber bands and rubber stoppers**3.3.30****smoky**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling smoke

Note 1 to entry: This attribute usually arises when smoke has contaminated coffee during processing or storage.

3.3.31**sour**, adj**vinegary**, adj*note* (3.1.8) different from natural *acidity* (3.1.1) that is excessively sharp and biting

Note 1 to entry: This attribute is associated with *flavour* (3.1.6) of acetic acid.

3.3.32**spicy**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling the *flavour* (3.1.6) characteristic of spices

Note 1 to entry: In coffee brew is possible to identify sweet spicy notes such as cinnamon, or savoury spicy notes such as black pepper.

Note 2 to entry: Practitioners commonly describe spicy notes of a coffee brew with the name of the spice, e.g. cinnamon notes or pepper notes.

Note 3 to entry: For further definitions of species notes, see Reference [4].

3.3.33**stinking**, adj**rotten**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling putrid organic material

Note 1 to entry: This attribute usually arises from excessive enzymatic fermentation of coffee cherries or can be caused due to faulty drying-process.

3.3.34**tobacco-like**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling of the *flavour* (3.1.6) of tobacco

Note 1 to entry: Not to be used to describe the flavour of burnt tobacco.

3.3.35**winey**, adj*note* (3.1.8) resembling the *flavours* (3.1.6) experienced when drinking wine

Note 1 to entry: This term is often used when a *strong* (3.2.13) acidic or fruity note is experienced.

Note 2 to entry: Assessors should be cautioned not to apply this term to a *sour* (3.3.31) or fermented coffee flavour.

[SOURCE: Reference [3], modified.]

3.3.36

woody, adj

note (3.1.8) resembling cedar, oak barrel, dry wood, balsa wood or aged wood

Note 1 to entry: It may arise from coffee being aged, or coffee being subjected to different humidity conditions for a long period.

Note 2 to entry: It may also arise from the direct contact with wood for a long period.

3.4 Terms commonly used in sensory assessment of coffee by practitioners

3.4.1

aromatic, adj

coffee having a distinctive *smell* (3.1.14) characteristic of its nature and origin

3.4.2

clean, adj

coffee free from all negative *taste* (3.1.12) attributes and off *notes* (3.1.8) and where all coffee characteristics are easily perceived

3.4.3

delicate, adj

coffee possessing subtle, sweet and complex *flavour* (3.1.6) *notes* (3.1.8) and without aggressive *odours* (3.1.9)

3.4.4

dirty, adj

coffee *flavour* (3.1.6) associated with certain flavours (such as dust, dirt) and *heavy* (3.2.9) to the palate

Note 1 to entry: Can be produced in different stages of the process from harvest to cup.

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.73, modified.]

3.4.5

fine, adj

coffee of outstanding *delicate* (3.4.3) and distinctive sensory qualities, *clean* (3.4.2), mild and *aromatic* (3.4.1) in the cup

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.15]

3.4.6

foreign taste, noun

unidentified *flavour* (3.1.6) in coffee, often caused by contamination outside the production process

3.4.7

fresh, adj

note (3.1.8) typical of recently harvested coffee or freshly roasted coffee

3.4.8

oily, adj

fat, lipid/oily *mouthfeel* (3.1.7) *after-taste* (3.2.1) in a coffee brew

3.4.9

overall impression, noun

judgement integrating and summarizing all sensory features of evaluated coffee

[SOURCE: NTC 2758:2002, 4.9]