

Coffee Brewing & Tasting — Workbook

This workbook is your hands-on companion to the Coffee Brewing & Tasting course. Each section mirrors one course module and gives you exercises, worksheets, and checklists you complete at your brewing station — with real coffee, real water, and a scale. Work through it sequentially or jump to the section that matches your current brewing challenge.

Beans, Roasts, and Flavour Science

Build your origin and roast vocabulary by running a structured side-by-side tasting and documenting what you find.

Exercise: Origin and Processing Tasting Drill

Buy three coffees: a washed Ethiopian, a natural Ethiopian, and a washed Colombian. Brew each with identical parameters (15 g, 240 g water, 93 °C, 3-minute steep). Taste all three side-by-side and answer the prompts below.

- What is the most obvious difference between the washed and natural Ethiopian? Describe in two sensory words (e.g., 'the natural is darker and jammy; the washed is lighter and tea-like').

- Where does the Colombian sit between the two Ethiopians on acidity? Mark it on a 1–10 scale (1 = flat, 10 = sharp and bright).

- Which processing method would you choose for an espresso blend intended for milk-based drinks, and why?

- Write one sentence predicting what a Kenyan Kirinyaga washed would taste like, based on the origin profile table in Module 1.

Worksheet: Roast Level Observation Log

For each of three roast levels of the same origin, record your observations before and after brewing. Use a consistent brew method (French press recommended for this exercise).

Coffee name and origin

Roast level (light / medium / dark) and Agtron estimate if visible on bag

Dry fragrance (1–2 descriptors before hot water)

Colour of brewed liquid (pale gold / amber / deep brown / near-black)

Acidity rating 1–5

Sweetness rating 1–5

Bitterness rating 1–5

Body rating 1–5 (thin / medium / full)

Overall preference ranking (1 = favourite) and one reason why

Checklist: Freshness and Sourcing Standards

- Check the roast date (not best-by date) on every bag before purchasing — reject bags without a roast date.
- Confirm the bag has a one-way degassing valve.
- Buy whole bean, not pre-ground.
- Store beans in an airtight, opaque container at room temperature.
- Finish the bag within 4 weeks of the roast date.
- If buying in bulk, divide into 200 g portions and freeze each in a sealed bag.
- Thaw frozen beans sealed at room temperature for at least 12 hours before grinding.
- Record the roast date and open date on a label stuck to the container.

Grind Science and Brew Ratios

Quantify your grind and ratio decisions using a scale, and build a personal dial-in log that makes every future brew adjustable.

Exercise: Grind Size Isolation Experiment

Using your current grinder and one bag of medium-roast coffee, brew three identical cups (same dose, water weight, temperature, and brew method) with only the grind size changing: your current setting, two clicks coarser, and two clicks finer. Taste and record.

- Describe the taste difference between the finest and coarsest cup. Use at least two specific words from the SCA Flavour Wheel for each.

- Which cup was closest to the 18–22% extraction sweet spot in taste terms (balanced, sweet, clean)? What grind size produced it?

- If your current grinder only has 5 grind settings, describe the challenge this creates for fine-tuning and what your workaround would be.

- At what point did over-extraction become detectable (bitter, drying, harsh)? Note the grind setting.

Worksheet: Brew Ratio and Recipe Builder

Fill in this worksheet for each new bag of coffee you open. Use it as the starting recipe, then update columns B and C as you dial in over 2–3 brews.

Coffee name and roast level

Brew method chosen

Starting dose (g)

Starting water weight (g)

Starting ratio (e.g., 1:16)

Water temperature (°C)

Grind setting (click number or descriptor)

Total brew time (mm:ss)

Tasting notes (3 words max)

Adjustment made for next brew (and reason)

Final dialled-in recipe after 3 brews

Checklist: Water Quality Pre-Brew Checklist

- Use filtered or Third Wave Water-treated water — no unfiltered tap water unless tested.
- Confirm water is not distilled (TDS must be above 50 ppm).
- Set kettle to the correct temperature for your roast level (light 93–96 °C, medium 90–93 °C, dark 85–90 °C).
- Allow kettle to reach target temperature before starting the brew timer.
- Rinse any paper filter with hot water before adding coffee grounds.
- Pre-heat your brew vessel and cup with the rinse water to maintain temperature stability.

Exercise: Ratio Sensitivity Test

Brew two cups of the same coffee at 1:14 and 1:18 using the same grind size, temperature, and method. Taste both and answer:

- Which cup tastes stronger? Is the stronger cup also better, or does higher concentration reveal a defect (e.g., harshness, bitterness)?
- Where on the spectrum between 1:14 and 1:18 would you want your everyday cup? Write your target ratio.
- If you had to serve this coffee to a guest who normally drinks dark-roast drip coffee, which ratio would you use and why?

Four Brewing Methods

Document a complete dial-in run for at least two of the four brew methods and build a reference card for each method you plan to use regularly.

Worksheet: Pour-Over Dial-In Log

Record three consecutive pour-over brews as you dial in a new bag. Capture every parameter so you can reproduce the best result.

Brew date

Coffee name and roast date

Dose (g)

Water weight (g)

Water temperature (°C)

Grind setting

Bloom weight (g) and bloom time (s)

Pour 1 weight and time

Pour 2 weight and time

Total draw-down time (mm:ss)

Tasting notes

Overall rating 1–10

One change to make next time

Exercise: Method Comparison: French Press vs AeroPress

Brew the same coffee (same bean, same grind setting, same ratio) as a French press and as an AeroPress inverted in the same session. Taste side-by-side and answer:

- Describe the body difference in one sentence each. Which is heavier, and why (think about what each method filters)?
- Which method produces a cleaner cup? What does 'clean' mean to you in sensory terms?
- Which method would you choose for a camping trip where weight matters, and which for a leisurely Sunday morning at home? Justify each.
- If you could only keep one of the two brewers, which would it be and why?

Checklist: Espresso Dial-In Protocol

- [] Weigh the dose into the portafilter basket (start at 18 g) before tamping.
- [] Use a WDT tool or tap-and-level to distribute grounds evenly before tamping.
- [] Tamp with level, vertical pressure — place thumb against portafilter rim to check level.
- [] Weigh the output in the cup on the scale (target 36 g for 1:2 ratio).
- [] Run a shot timer from first drop; target 25–28 seconds.
- [] If under 20 seconds: grind one step finer for the next shot.
- [] If over 35 seconds: grind one step coarser for the next shot.
- [] Taste the shot before adding milk — assess balance, sweetness, and aftertaste.
- [] Record dose, yield, time, and tasting notes for every dial-in shot.
- [] Stop changing variables when three consecutive shots taste the same and land in the target window.

Tasting, Cupping, and Going Further

Run a full cupping session, build your personal tasting vocabulary, and map out your next 90-day coffee learning goals.

Worksheet: Home Cupping Score Sheet

Use one row per coffee. Evaluate in this order: fragrance !' aroma !' break !' flavour !' acidity !' body !' aftertaste !' balance. Taste at 70 °C (about 8–10 minutes after pouring).

Coffee name and origin

Roast date and processing method

Fragrance (dry grounds): descriptor + score 1–5

Aroma (wet, after pour): descriptor + score 1–5

Break (crust crack): intensity of aroma release (low/medium/high)

Flavour: 2–3 SCA Wheel descriptors

Acidity: score 1–5 + quality (bright / tart / harsh / clean)

Body: score 1–5 (thin / silky / medium / full / heavy)

Aftertaste: duration (short/medium/long) + character (clean / bitter / sweet / astringent)

Balance: score 1–5 (do the attributes support each other?)

Overall score 1–10

Would you buy this coffee again? (Yes / No / Maybe) and one reason

Exercise: SCA Flavour Wheel Mapping Exercise

After cupping two different coffees, use the SCA Flavour Wheel to map your tasting notes from specific (outer ring) to primary (inner ring). Do this for three flavour attributes per coffee.

- Start with your most prominent flavour note from the outer ring. Which mid-ring and inner-ring categories does it belong to? Write the full path (e.g., 'raspberry !' berry !' fruity').

- Find one aroma note that surprised you — something you did not expect from the origin profile. Write the outer-ring descriptor and speculate on which processing or roast variable may have produced it.

- Compare your cupping notes to the roaster's tasting notes on the bag. Where do you agree? Where do you disagree? What might explain the gap (freshness, water, grind, palate)?

- Pick one descriptor from your cupping notes and identify a real-world food reference that matches it (e.g., 'the acidity reminds me of a Granny Smith apple, not a lemon — it is tart but not sharp').
-

Checklist: 90-Day Coffee Growth Plan

- Buy one new single-origin coffee from a region you have never tasted (e.g., Yemen, Burundi, or a Gesha variety) within the next 14 days.
- Complete a full cupping session (SCA protocol) at least once before the end of the month.
- Download and print the SCA Flavour Wheel and laminate it for your brewing station.
- Fill in at least 10 rows in the Brew Ratio and Recipe Builder worksheet across different coffees.
- Follow at least one specialty coffee roaster's social media or newsletter for ongoing origin and harvest updates.
- Attend one local specialty cafe bar-side tasting event or open cupping session if available in your city.
- Complete a blind taste test with a friend: three coffees, no labels, rank and describe before revealing names.
- Read at least one chapter of James Hoffmann's *The World Atlas of Coffee* (2nd ed.) relevant to an origin you are currently drinking.
- Set a 90-day equipment upgrade goal: identify one grinder or brewer upgrade and save toward it deliberately.
- Record a 2-sentence voice memo or written note after every brew this week — build the habit of articulating what you taste before it fades.

Your Action Plan

1. Buy one washed Ethiopian, one natural Ethiopian, and one washed Colombian on your next specialty shop visit — these three coffees cover 80% of the tasting vocabulary in this course.
2. Check every bag for a printed roast date before purchasing; if no roast date is visible, choose a different bag.
3. Purchase or borrow a kitchen scale accurate to 0.1 g — this single tool removes more guesswork than any other purchase under \$30.
4. Run the grind size isolation experiment (Module 2, Exercise 1) within 7 days of completing Module 2.
5. Brew the same coffee using your primary method three days in a row with identical parameters to confirm your recipe is repeatable before changing any variable.
6. Schedule a cupping session with at least two coffees on a weekend morning when you have 45 uninterrupted minutes.
7. Print the Home Cupping Score Sheet and use it for every cupping session for the next 90 days.
8. Download the SCA Flavour Wheel PDF from [sca.coffee](https://www.sca.coffee) and refer to it during every tasting until you can recall the primary and mid-ring categories from memory.
9. Choose one brew method to master first — pour-over is recommended for beginners because it isolates your technique most clearly.
10. After dialling in your first bag, write a 3-sentence recipe card (dose, water, grind, time, notes) and tape it inside your cupboard — use it as the baseline for the next bag.

