

BC GUILD OF WINE JUDGES

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CLASS C5 – DRY WHITE PINOT

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this flight is to become familiar with, and to judge, the Dry White Pinots: Pinot Gris, Pinot Grigio and Pinot Blanc. The flight will include wines spanning a wide range of quality, from gold-medal examples to extremely simple, inexpensive wines, to sharpen discrimination at the Master Wine Judge level. In general, wines from these grapes can range from sweet to completely dry, from light to full-bodied, usually with good acidity and pleasant moderate to low aromatics.

Generally, Pinot Gris may show slight pink tones, whereas Pinot Blanc is usually straw-colored to clear; Pinot Gris tends to be richer with spicier, fruitier flavors, while Pinot Blanc is often crisp with mineral flavors. Judges are encouraged to review prior Guild Dry White Pinot tasting notes (2016, 2018, 2022) to understand how style and quality benchmarks have evolved over time.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After working with these notes and tasting the flight, judges should be able to:

1. Identify the technical definition of Class C5 – Dry White Pinot, including permitted varieties and structural expectations.
2. Name and describe the principal grape varieties within Class C5: Pinot Gris, Pinot Grigio, and Pinot Blanc.
3. Explain the stylistic differences between Pinot Gris and Pinot Grigio, and their typical regional expressions.
4. Outline the major global regions where Dry White Pinots are significant.
5. Summarize planting and production trends for Pinot Gris/Grigio in Canada, particularly in British Columbia and Ontario regions.
6. Understand the main viticultural and winemaking practices that shape style, texture, and balance in Dry White Pinots.
7. Recommend classic food pairings for the key expressions in this class, by style and region.
8. Anticipate the range of wines likely to appear in a Class C5 training flight and articulate what defines an exemplary example. This is a strange outcome

BCAWA DEFINITION AND TECHNICAL CHARACTERISTICS

BCAWA Definition – Class C5 Dry White Pinot

Wines in the Dry White Pinot class must contain at least 85% of one or more of the following varieties: Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, white juice from Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier or Gamay Noir. These wines are generally crafted in a dry style, often moderately aromatic and medium-bodied, expressing either a ripe, rich Alsatian character (Pinot Gris) or a crisp, mineral-driven Italian profile (Pinot Grigio).

BCAWA Technical Characteristics

Parameter	Range/Typical Value
Alcohol	11% to 13.5%
Color	Pale straw to light gold
Sugar	0.0% to 1.0%
Specific Gravity	0.990 to 0.995
Acidity	5.5 g/L to 7.5g/L
pH	3.1 to 3.4

THE GRAPES: PINOT GRIS, PINOT GRIGIO, AND PINOT BLANC

Genetic and Historical Background (High-Level)

Pinot Gris and Pinot Grigio are two names for the same grape variety, a natural mutation of Pinot Noir that likely originated in Burgundy before spreading to Alsace, northern Italy, and later the broader New World. Despite its close genetic relationship to Pinot Noir, its grey-pink skins and white juice produce wines of delicate color but notable textural range. Pinot Blanc is another mutation within the Pinot family, producing more neutral, citrus-mineral white wines.

The fact that pinot gris and grigio are just style choices of the same grape, Gris is French and Grigio is Italian.

Pinot Gris (mainly Alsace and New World style)

- General characteristics: Ripe pear, melon, peach, and honeyed stone fruit, often with hints of almond, spice, or smoke.
- Structure: Medium to full body, moderate acidity, sometimes an oily or viscous texture, with gentle phenolic grip.
- Style spectrum in C5: Ranges from Alsatian-inspired, textured, and powerful to more restrained New World examples that still emphasize ripe fruit and mid-palate weight.

Pinot Grigio (Northern Italian style)

- General characteristics: Lemon zest, green apple, white peach, and crushed stone; generally leaner and more citrus-driven than Gris. Structure: Light to medium body, crisp acidity, linear palate, often with saline or mineral notes and a brisk finish.
- Role in C5: Provides the “knife-edge” dry, refreshing end of the Dry White Pinot spectrum, especially in Italian and Italianate styles.

Pinot Blanc

- General characteristics: Subtle citrus, apple, and sometimes floral notes with a more neutral aromatic profile.
- Structure: Light to medium body, fresh acidity, often marked by mineral tones and a clean, precise finish.
- Role in C5: Offers a benchmark for restrained, gastronomic whites where texture and balance are more important than overt aromatics.

Comparative Sensory Benchmarks

- Pinot Gris: Rich, spicy, fruit-driven, potentially oily in texture.
- Pinot Grigio: Lean, citrus-driven, high acid, brisk finish.
- Pinot Blanc: Neutral to delicate fruit, mineral, crisp, quietly complex.

GLOBAL REGIONS AND STYLE BENCHMARKS

Europe

- France (Alsace): Pinot Gris is rich, oily, and aromatic with honey, spice, and white-peach flavors, frequently showing age-worthy complexity and sometimes a touch of residual sugar balanced by firm acidity.
- Italy (Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Alto Adige): Pinot Grigio is typically lean and crisp, with citrus, almond, and mountain-flower notes, dry and mineral-driven.
- Germany (as Grauburgunder / Weissburgunder): Styles often sit between Alsace and Italy, with crisp acidity, pear and apple notes, moderate texture, and some emphasis on balance rather than extremes.
- Hungary (Felső Magyar Ország, parallel to Venice but east): Pinot Grigio from this cool-continental, northern Hungarian region tends to be light to medium in body, crisp and dry, with green apple, pear and subtle stone-fruit notes, a clean mineral edge, and refreshing acidity rather than overt aromatics or sweetness.

New World

- United States (Oregon, Washington): Pinot Gris tends to be full-bodied with ripe pear and melon fruit and gentle spice; Oregon examples can echo Alsatian richness, while Washington may be slightly crisper.
- New Zealand (Marlborough, Central Otago): Fresh, fruit-driven Pinot Gris with nectarine and citrus blossom aromas and vibrant acidity.
- Australia (Tasmania, Mornington Peninsula, Adelaide Hills): Textural wines with white pear and apple-skin notes, moderate alcohol, and subtle phenolic grip.
- Chile (Casablanca, Limarí): Crisp, medium-bodied dry wines with citrus and saline minerality.
- South Africa (Western Cape): Textured, ripe tropical fruit balanced by acidity; floral and honeyed tones in warmer sites.

Canada

- British Columbia (Okanagan, Similkameen, Vancouver Island, Gulf Islands): Pinot Gris is a leading white variety, producing wines with refined acidity, structure, and intense pear and apple aromatics; styles range from bright and mineral to richer, honeyed expressions.
- Ontario (Niagara Peninsula, Prince Edward County): Cooler conditions often yield more Grigio-styled, citrus-forward wines with crisp structure and marked minerality; some Pinot Gris expressions can be more textural, particularly from select sites.
- Other Regions (e.g., Nova Scotia): Zesty, saline expressions reflecting maritime terroir, often light in body and high in acid, well-suited to bracing dry styles.

VITICULTURE, WINEMAKING, AND STYLE OUTCOMES

Viticulture

Pinot Gris and related Pinots respond strongly to site and yield management. In cool climates, long growing seasons allow full phenolic ripeness while retaining acidity; in warmer sites, controlling crop load and harvest dates is critical to avoid flabby or neutral wines. Yield control is especially important to prevent dilution and preserve concentration, aromatic expression, and texture.

Winemaking Choices

- Skin contact: Ranges from minimal (classic pale styles) to extended (Ramato and copper-tinged Gris), adding color, phenolic grip, and tactile richness.
- Pressing: Gentle pressing limits phenolic harshness; heavy pressing can increase bitterness and detract from class goals.
- Fermentation vessel: Stainless steel emphasizes freshness and linearity; neutral oak or larger casks can add volume, subtle spice, and complexity.
- Lees contact: creates texture, creaminess, and mid-palate weight, useful for Gris and some Blanc; overuse can blur precision.
- Malolactic fermentation: Used selectively to soften acidity and add roundness; excessive MLF can dull freshness in styles that rely on bright acid.

Style Axes for C5

- Lean vs textural: From steely Pinot Grigio to waxy, oily Pinot Gris.
- Neutral vs aromatic: From discreet Pinot Blanc to expressive Gris.
- Linear vs broad: From tight, laser-like wines to broad, layered, gastronomic examples.

Common Faults and Pitfalls

- Excess neutrality: High yields or overcropping leading to dilute, characterless wines.
- Harsh phenolics: Over-extraction or heavy pressing causing bitterness or coarse texture.
- Imbalance: Alcohol heat, searing acidity, or residual sugar that clashes with the “dry” mandate.
- Oxidation and instability: Particularly in wines with extended skin contact or low SO₂.

REPUTATION, MARKET PERCEPTION, AND RESURGENCE

Dry White Pinots, especially Pinot Grigio, have suffered from a reputation for being simple, neutral, and industrial, due largely to high-volume, high-yield production and a focus on inexpensive, anonymous wines. This mirrors the historical perception of Social wines as “Rodney Dangerfield” styles that “don’t get any respect,” despite their deep historical roots and consumer popularity. In recent years, quality-driven producers, particularly in Alsace, northern Italy, Oregon, British Columbia, and other cool-climate regions, have reframed Pinot Gris/Grigio as serious options for this terroir.

FOOD PAIRING FRAMEWORK FOR CLASS C5

Pairing Principles

Dry White Pinots are highly versatile food wines, but pairing should respect each wine’s weight, acidity, and texture. Lighter, high-acid styles favor delicate, simply prepared dishes, while richer, textural wines pair better with more complex or richer foods.

By Grape and Structure

Pinot Gris' richer texture and subtle spice pair best with dishes including:

- Roasted poultry, veal, or pork tenderloin
- Mushroom and truffle risotto
- Duck breast with orange glazed
- Mild curries or Moroccan chicken

Pinot Grigio's crisp and linear style complements:

- Shellfish, white fish, and ceviche
- Caprese salad or grilled vegetables
- Light pasta with lemon butter or pesto
- Fresh cheeses such as mozzarella or ricotta

Pinot Blanc:

- White fish
- Poultry
- Onion tart
- Munster cheese

USING FOOD IN TRAINING

In educational contexts, pairing can be used to highlight structural and stylistic contrasts: lean Grigio with bright, acidic dishes; Gris with richer, umami-laden plates; and Blanc to demonstrate how texture and neutrality can either elevate or disappear beside certain foods.

TASTING AND JUDGING APPROACH FOR CLASS C5 DRY WHITE PINOT

Calibration Objectives

The goal of this class is to calibrate judges to:

- Distinguish between simple, acceptable Dry White Pinots and truly exemplary, medal-worthy examples.
- Recognize varietal and regional typicity within the constraints of the class.

Visual Assessment

Expect pale straw to light gold color, with Pinot Gris sometimes showing a faint pink or copper hint from skin contact. Hue should be appropriate to style and age; excessive deepening, browning, or haziness may signal oxidation, instability, or poor handling.

Aroma and Palate

Judges look for:

- Clean, fresh aromatics that are consistent with the declared style (Gris, Grigio, Blanc).
- On the palate, a clearly dry impression with acidity in balance, no harsh phenolic peaks, and alcohol integrated into the overall structure.
- Sufficient flavor concentration, mid-palate presence, and length to justify higher medals; thin, short, or indistinct wines should be scored accordingly.

Distinguishing Class C5 Dry White Pinot

In C5, judges prioritize dryness, gastronomic suitability, and structural clarity over simple drinkability. Wine that relies on sweetness, such as semi-dry or soft structure may perform better for some preferences.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A CLASS C5 TRAINING FLIGHT

A well-constructed Class C5 Dry White Pinot training flight should:

- Included wines span the quality spectrum from basic commercial examples to gold-medal-level benchmarks.
- Represents multiple grapes (Gris, Grigio, Blanc) and regions to highlight stylistic breadth.
- Offers clear examples of both successful and less successful winemaking choices (e.g., well-judged versus excessive skin contact, balanced versus over-oaked or over-alcoholic styles).

The discussion encourages judges to articulate not only which wines are better or worse, but why: how structure, typicity, balance, and style alignment to Class C5 criteria drive scoring decisions. The aim is to create a shared calibration among BCGWJ members around what constitutes an exemplary Dry White Pinot in competition.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING AND DATA SOURCES

- Jancis Robinson – The Oxford Companion to Wine
- Karen MacNeil – The Wine Bible
- Wine Folly – Visual Guide to Wine and online Pinot Gris/Grigio resources
- British Columbia Wine Authority Statistics
- Wine Spectator and other trade articles on Pinot Gris and Grigio style evolution
- BC Guild of Wine Judges website and archived Dry White Pinot tasting notes (2016, 2018, 2022)