

Over 30 years ago, Robert Parker created a quality ranking system that made wine increasingly accessible to more people. His numbering system, now broadly applied, gives some consumers the confidence to make their choices. Parker's 100-point scale opened up the world of wine to those who, without that guidance, shied away from wine altogether.

Yet the scale reflects Parker's palate, not everyone—or anyone—else's. The apparent precision of the measurements, and the impact of Parker

's judgments on consumers' choices, tempt winemakers to aim toward such standards, but his ratings can contradict the elusive, individual quality of wine. What is most important in a wine is whether you enjoy it.

Educators and executives seek effective and accurate ways to measure people and their abilities, achievements, and character. The 100-point grading system, used in many schools, is but one of many flawed assessment alternatives attempting to distinguish one person or group from another. What makes it challenging is that people are unique. Precise measurement is not easy—if it is possible at all.

Wines, like humanity, are multi-nuanced and difficult to define. Each wine, like each person, is unique, subject to change over a span of time. With so many to choose from, it is no wonder that we turn to measurements and standards to help make the selection process more tenable.

The human desire for a rating scale—and the reality that such scales are flawed— accentuate the human-like characteristics inherent in wine, reflecting life in all its complexity. Beyond generalities and numbers is the reality that what you have in your glass is unique: a combination of a particular moment, a friend with whom you share it, and the taste of the wine in that context.

Wine is not math. One person's grade of 83 may be another person's grade of 92, whether evaluating the same person or the same wine. That is what makes life, and

enjoying it with a glass of wine, so special. You are right about what you are drinking, and Robert Parker is right, too. Yet, your scores may be very different.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR SIPPIN':

1. How much do you rely on expert input in selecting books, movies, wine, and other things?
2. How do you allow for human factors, variations, and flaws in choices you make?
3. What ways do you find most useful or rewarding to help you discover wines you love, and how does it compare to ways you evaluate people?

{comments off}