

AABC Taxonomy of Beer Styles and AABC 2009 Categories & Styles

Introduction.

The way in which beer styles are grouped into categories for the purposes of the Australian Amateur Brewing Championship and the associated State/Territory qualifying championships has been a contentious topic among AABA delegates for many years. A major influx of new styles in recent years has served to highlight some of the difficulties involved.

The following outlines for the first time a logical classification system for assigning beer styles to categories. It provides a logical way to combine categories for competitions with fewer entries, and to split categories to cater for future growth. It also provides a logical way to include new styles which may evolve and become popular with homebrewers.

1. AABC Taxonomy of beer styles

The AABC Taxonomy table on page 4 illustrates the classification system for assigning the large number of possible beer styles into categories, for use in AABC competitions. Styles are classified progressively according to the following hierarchy of criteria:

1. *Fermentation*
2. *Base Malt*
3. *Alcoholic Strength*
4. *Beer Colour*
5. *Bitterness*

These criteria identify the major sensory characteristics of a style, thereby grouping similar styles, which facilitates the judging and scoring of competing beers. Application of these criteria proceeds downwards from the top of the table, and is described step by step below:

1. Fermentation: There are four style groups, according to the species of micro-organism traditionally employed in fermentation (follows Linnaean taxonomy):

- **Ale:** traditionally fermented with ale yeast exclusively (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*)
- **Lager:** traditionally fermented with lager yeast exclusively (*Saccharomyces carlsbergensis*)
- **Wild Beer:** traditionally fermented with or with inclusion of wild microbiota (esp. *Brettanomyces*, *Lactobacillus*, *Pediococcus*) which may be introduced by spontaneous fermentation and/or direct inoculation.
- **Specialty Beer:** no predominant fermentation tradition (may include Ale, Lager, and Wild Beer versions – eg. Pumpkin Beer).

2. Base Malt: Ale styles are further classified into:

- Barley malt styles
- non-Barley malt styles (there are currently no non-Barley Lager styles).

3. Alcoholic Strength: Ale and Lager styles are further classified into 3 ABV ranges:

- Low
- Medium
- Strong (Medium and Strong non-Barley groups are combined).

4. Beer Colour: Medium ABV Barley styles are further classified into 3 colour ranges:

- Pale
- Amber / Brown
- Dark

Note that AABC taxonomy is a general classification scheme which simply specifies the criteria for separating styles. The extent to which these criteria are applied will depend on the number of styles and their popularity, in terms of competition entries received. For example, if Wild Beer styles became wildly popular, they could theoretically be separated further according to Alcoholic Strength and/or Beer Colour.

The sixth row of the table shows the **14 Generic Categories** obtained by applying the first four criteria as currently configured. These Generic Categories form the basis for constructing the AABC Category Format, as described in the following section.

2. AABC Category Format.

If the **14 Generic Categories** were used for AABC, there would be a very large variation in the number of entries in each category. Therefore a number of them are split or combined to produce a rational AABC Category Format, which delivers relatively even category size in terms of actual entries. This is necessary for practical judging purposes, and to ensure consistency and fairness to entrants across all categories.

AABC Categories are shown as coloured cells in AABC taxonomy table. The bottom two rows demonstrate how new AABC categories are created, by combining or splitting Generic Categories in the row above. The two different category types created, and the methods used to create them, are described below:

1. Style Specific Categories: This is the preferred method for creating new categories, because it keeps beers of similar styles together for judging. Methods are:

- Generic Categories attracting too few entries can be combined, eg:
 - Amber & Dark Lager Category
 - Low Alcohol Category (combines Low Alcohol Lager and Low Alcohol Ale categories).
- Generic Categories attracting too many entries can be split by applying the fifth taxonomy criterion **Bitterness**, eg:
 - Bitter Ale Category is separated out from Generic Brown Ale Category.
- Alternatively, entire style families can be extracted from a Generic Category, eg:
 - Pilsener family extracted from Generic Pale Lager Category.
 - IPA and Strong Stout families extracted from Generic Strong Ale Category.
 - Porter and Stout families extracted from Generic Dark Ale Category, leaving it vacant.
- Similarly, a single popular style may be extracted in isolation, if it attracts sufficient entries to warrant its own dedicated category, eg:
 - American Pale Ale extracted from Generic Pale Ale Category.

2. Country Specific Categories: A secondary option for category creation is to extract styles from a Generic Category according to their place of origin. However since most countries produce a diverse range of styles, this tends to group dissimilar styles, which is less desirable for judging. Occasionally however, it becomes necessary or convenient, eg:

- Belgian Strong Ale family extracted from Generic Strong Ale Category, as the only realistic option for further splitting.
- German Wheat & Rye Category is convenient, because all styles in Generic Wheat & Rye Category are German anyway.
- Farmhouse Ale Category is discussed in the following section.

3. AABC Categories & Styles

The 2009 AABC categories, as represented by the coloured cells in AABC taxonomy table, are reflected in the separate AABC Categories & Styles table on page 5, with the actual styles listed in their preferred judging order within each category. (It should be noted when evaluating style assignments, that no generic taxonomy for beer styles can be absolute, since many styles are quite broad, and style parameters may overlap). All AABC Styles have been classified according to AABC taxonomy, with the following exceptions:

- ***Baltic Porter:*** This is a Strong Lager but has been reassigned to Porter Category. As a version of English Porter, it is deemed more appropriate in the Porter style family.
- ***Classic Rauchbier:*** This is an Amber Lager but has been reassigned to Specialty Category. As a smoked style, the Specialty character is deemed more significant than the Amber Lager character.
- ***Farmhouse Ales:*** As a diverse class of beers characterized by small batch brewing and a wide range of ingredients, including a variety of grains, malted or raw, as well as herbs, spices, fruit flavourings, sugar, honey, and typically displaying characteristics associated with wild fermentation – phenolics, Brett character, acidity, these styles defy generic classification. Accordingly, Farmhouse Ale Category is represented horizontally in AABC Taxonomy table, spanning Barley and non-Barley, Medium and Strong ABV. As a low-entry Category, it is combined with Wild Beer Category in AABC Category Format, based on style similarities and common ancestry.

4. Category Format dimensioning.

The format expands the number of AABC 2009 categories to 18. This caters for recent growth in State/Territory qualifying championships, as well as the recent increase in judging time per beer, consequent upon judging to higher BJCP standard.

Anticipating future growth, AABC Taxonomy provides a pathway for rational Category Format expansion, towards maturity at around 24 currently identifiable categories, thereby enabling larger State/Territory qualifiers to cater for up to 500-600 total entries, while maintaining even entry distribution and realistic category size for one-day judging.

Similarly for smaller State/Territory qualifiers, AABC Taxonomy enables rational Category Format contraction, down to a minimum of 11 categories as shown on page 6 table, without affecting AABC qualification. That is, results would be separated to identify AABC qualifying entries.

This provides a degree of flexibility for State/Territory organizers to dimension Category Formats independently. As such it offers a means to accommodate a wide disparity in competition size across Australia, which will be amplified in the hoped for event of State/Territory qualifiers becoming established in Tasmania and NT.

Recognizing that a “one size fits all” common category configuration is problematic in the Australian first round context, this solution has the advantage of being a purely administrative mechanism, rather than a reconfiguration of actual judging schedules and procedures.

Adopted by AABA delegates, December 2008

AABC Taxonomy Table

STYLE GROUP	ALE						LAGER				WILD BEER	SPECIALTY BEER			
1. Fermentation	S. cerevisiae						S. carlsbergensis				Wild microbiota	various			
2. Base Malt	non-BARLEY		BARLEY				BARLEY				any	any			
3. Alcoholic Strength	Low <3.5%	Medium & Strong	Strong >6%	Medium		Low <3.5%	Low <3.5%	Medium		Strong >6%	any	any			
4. Beer Colour	any	any	any	Dark	Brown	Pale	any	any	Dark	Amber	Pale	any	any		
Generic Categories <i>(currently 14)</i> <i>derived from above four criteria</i>	Low Alcohol non-Barley	Medium & Strong non-Barley	Strong Ale	Dark Ale	Brown Ale	Pale Ale	Low Alcohol Ale	Low Alcohol Lager	Dark Lager	Amber Lager	Pale Lager	Strong Lager	Wild Beer	Specialty Beer	
Style-Specific Categories <i>preferred method</i> Combine generic categories, or extract style families to create new categories.	incl. in Low Alcohol		India Pale Ale	Strong Stout	Stout	Porter	Bitter Ale	American Pale Ale	Low Alcohol		Amber & Dark Lager	Pilsener			
Country-Specific Categories <i>non-preferred method</i> Styles grouped by place of origin - tends to group dissimilar styles, but occasionally necessary or convenient.		German Wheat & Rye Beer	Belgian Strong Ale												
		Farmhouse Ale													

AABC 2009 Categories & Styles

Category colour matches that used in AABC Taxonomy table. Styles listed in preferred judging order.

1. LOW ALCOHOL Light Australian Lager Light Wheat Beer Scottish Light (60/-) Southern English Brown Ale English Mild English Ordinary Bitter	10. PORTER Brown Porter Robust Porter Baltic Porter
2. PALE LAGER Australian Lager Australian Premium Lager Pale Continental Lager Munich Helles Dortmunder	11. STOUT Dry Stout Sweet Stout Oatmeal Stout
3. PILSENER Classic American Pilsener German Pilsener Bohemian Pilsner	12. STRONG STOUT Australian/Foreign Extra Stout Russian Imperial Stout
4. AMBER & DARK LAGER Oktoberfest/Marzen Vienna California Common Beer North German Altbier Munich Dunkel Schwarzbier	13. INDIA PALE ALE English IPA American IPA Imperial IPA
5. STRONG LAGER Strong Pale Lager Maibock/Hellesbock Traditional Bock Doppelbock Eisbock	14. STRONG ALE Old Ale (English Strong Ale) Strong Scotch Ale English Barleywine American Barleywine
6. PALE ALE Cream Ale Blonde Ale Kölsch Belgian Pale Ale Australian Pale Ale English Pale Ale	15. BELGIAN STRONG ALE Belgian Blond Ale Belgian Strong Golden Ale Tripel Dubbel Belgian Strong Dark Ale
7. AMERICAN PALE ALE American Pale Ale	16. GERMAN WHEAT & RYE BEER Weizen/Weissbier Dunkelweizen Weizenbock Roggenbier
8. BITTER ALE English Special/Best Bitter English Extra Special/Strong Bitter Düsseldorf Altbiere	17. FARMHOUSE ALE & WILD BEER Witbier Saison Biere de Garde Flanders Red Ale Flanders Brown Ale/Oud Bruin Berliner Weisse Straight (unblended) Lambic Gueuze Fruit Lambic
9. BROWN ALE Northern English Brown Ale Irish Red Ale Scottish Heavy (70/-) Scottish Export (80/-) Australian Dark/Old Ale American Brown Ale	18. SPECIALTY BEER Fruit Beer Spice/Herb/Vegetable Beer Christmas/Winter Spiced Beer Classic Rauchbier Belgian Specialty Ale Wood-aged Beer Other Specialty

Minimum category format for smaller competitions

In order to maintain competitive category size, State/Territory Championship qualifiers may use any or all of the following 11 categories, which include 7 Consolidated Categories (shaded subcategories show AABC Categories). AABC preferred judging order is maintained, and results will be separated to identify AABC qualifying entries.

LOW ALCOHOL

Light Australian Lager
Light Wheat Beer
Scottish Light (60/-)
Southern English Brown Ale
English Mild
English Ordinary Bitter

PALE LAGER

Australian Lager
Australian Premium Lager
Pale Continental Lager
Munich Helles
Dortmunder
Classic American Pilsener
German Pilsener
Bohemian Pilsner

AMBER, DARK & STRONG LAGER

Oktoberfest/Marzen
Vienna
California Common Beer
North German Altbier
Munich Dunkel
Schwarzbier

Strong Pale Lager
Maibock/Hellesbock
Traditional Bock
Doppelbock
Eisbock

PALE ALE

Cream Ale
Blonde Ale
Kölsch
Belgian Pale Ale
Australian Pale Ale
English Pale Ale

American Pale Ale

BITTER ALE

English Special/Best Bitter
English Extra Special/Strong Bitter
Düsseldorfer Altbier

DARK ALE

Northern English Brown Ale
Irish Red Ale
Scottish Heavy (70/-)
Scottish Export (80/-)
Australian Dark/Old Ale
American Brown Ale

Brown Porter
Robust Porter
Baltic Porter

STOUT

Dry Stout
Sweet Stout
Oatmeal Stout

Australian/Foreign Extra Stout
Russian Imperial Stout

STRONG ALE

Old Ale (English Strong Ale)
Strong Scotch Ale
English Barleywine
American Barleywine

English IPA
American IPA
Imperial IPA

GERMAN WHEAT & RYE BEER

Weizen/Weissbier
Dunkelweizen
Weizenbock
Roggenbier

BELGIAN, FARMHOUSE & WILD BEER

Belgian Blond Ale
Belgian Strong Golden Ale
Tripel
Dubbel
Belgian Strong Dark Ale

Witbier
Saison
Biere de Garde
Flanders Red Ale
Flanders Brown Ale/Ouid Bruin
Berliner Weisse
Straight (unblended) Lambic
Gueuze
Fruit Lambic

SPECIALTY BEER

Fruit Beer
Spice/Herb/Vegetable Beer
Christmas/Winter Spiced Beer
Classic Rauchbier
Belgian Specialty Ale
Wood-aged Beer
Other Specialty