

Tis' the season for Porters and Stouts

By Matthew Clements

As the weather turns colder, heading into the winter season many beer fans begin to consume more of the darker styles of Porter and Stouts. These styles have a great deal of history behind their origins and incredible popularity today in the United States and abroad.

Porters and Stout have a rich tradition starting in Great Britain in the 1730's during the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution. At this time in Britain, there were three kinds of brew, 'ale', 'beer' and 'twopenny' — and the new beer style was known as the 'entire butt' a combination of all three.

Another theory on the origin of the new dark style of beer was that as malt prices began to increase there was more experimentation. Highly roasted dark malts added complexity to the beer style while being able to keep the brew affordable.

This beer style was particularly popular with the transportation employees around the Victoria Station. They supplied the market with fresh fish, meat and produce,

also known as "Porters"—which is where allegedly the new beer style took on its new nomenclature.

The Guinness brewery in Dublin was where the transformation in the brewery lexicon from Porter to Stout began with the production of Porter in the 1770s. There were three strengths of porter brewed by Guinness, the lowest gravity was X, followed by double X and finally triple X. Over time the double X was named Extra Stout Porter and the triple X into Foreign Export Stout.

When the single X porter was discontinued the double X was simplified into just Extra Stout and beer fans were hopelessly confused with what exactly was the difference between a stout and a porter. Basically a stout is a more robust porter—but one brewery's porter may be more hearty than a competing stout — thus the crux of the confusion.

Both the Stout and Porter style began to slide into obscurity in Great Britain around World War I — noted beer writer Michael Jackson theorized that the

energy restrictions during the Great War in England may have contributed to the difficulty of procuring the highly roasted malt for brewers. However, the styles continued to be popular in Ireland where the energy restrictions were less stringent.

An interesting spinoff of the Stout and Porter style came about from a visit from the Russian Czar, Peter the Great, to England in the late 17th century. The Czar of Russia enjoyed the dark stout beers on his visit to London and wanted to have some shipped to the Imperial Palace in Petersburg. However, during the long and cold transit the low alcohol and lightly hopped beer spoiled.

To regain face with the autocrat of Russia, the Barclay Brewery in London made a strong stout with increased alcohol percentage and plenty of hops — both of which serve as a natural preservative for the beer and a new style of beer was born — Russian Imperial Stout. Later Catherine the Great was renowned for her love of this bold beer style and many current breweries honor her love of this style by including her in the name of their brews

as a historical footnote for the beer style.

The craft beer revolution in the 1990s in the United States led to the resurgence and the Porter, Stout and Imperial Stout styles took off in popularity and proceeded to become more aggressively hopped and robust with intense roasted malt flavors.

The Carolina Brewery has featured a number of Stouts and Porters in its 17-year history. The mainstay is the Oatmeal Porter which is available throughout North Carolina at fine restaurants and bars as well as both Brewery locations. The Old North State Stout, Imperial Stout and Coffee Stout all periodically return to the tap for special occasions and are guest favorites.

A wonderful winter treat is in the combination of serving chocolate desserts with stout or porters or floating a scoop of decadent vanilla bean ice cream with the rich, dark malty beer for a great contrast for a liquid dessert as a Stout Float. Stouts and porters are also good additions to soups, stews or braising liquids.

Matthew Clements is Director of Food and Beverage at Carolina Brewery

SAT essay — piece of cake

By Michael Strong

Students, writing an SAT essay is not that hard. Let's put this bogeyman in perspective. We'll look at how the Essay Exam is structured. Then we'll examine how your essay is graded. Finally, we'll make a "common-sense" evaluation of various suggestions about how to prepare for the exam.

The SAT Essay Exam gives students a choice of "Prompts," which all begin with the following sentence:

"Think carefully about the issue presented in the following excerpt and the assignment below."

The "excerpt" will be three or four sentences taken from some article that

in a million years, you would never have seen before. Don't worry about it. What's important is that those sentences deal with some kind of issue.

Below the "excerpt" is the word "Assignment": followed by a sentence which is ALWAYS the essay exam question!

Then students see the following instructions, which are the same for every Prompt:

"Plan and write an essay in which you develop your point of view on this issue. Support your position with reasoning and examples taken from your reading, studies, experience, or observations."

These instructions are your actual "assignment." You have 25 minutes to read

the Prompt; consider the question; organize your response, and write your essay. In 25 minutes, no one reasonably can expect you to write a masterpiece.

Two teachers will be assigned to grade your essay. Each one assigns your essay a grade between 1 and 6. The College Board has stated for the record that the two people grading your essay have only three minutes to determine your score. In the scant three minutes graders have to evaluate your SAT Essay, they try to determine if you understood the issue contained in the excerpt; if your answer to the question related to that issue, and if the statements supporting your answer seemed plausible and relevant.

It is my contention that the key to receiving a score of at least 5 out of 6 is to write an essay that the graders can read easily. You do this by answering the question in the first sentence and stating three reasons for giving that answer. Then write three very short paragraphs (only two or three sentences in each) providing supporting detail for each reason. Conclude by restating your answer in a final, one-sentence paragraph. Following this format makes your essay seem logical and persuasive.

Online, there are many folks offering advice about how to "game" the SAT Essay Exam. Some suggest memorizing lists of large vocabulary words, and then weaving as many as possible into your essay. Others allege that the longer your essay, the higher your score. In my humble opinion, it's dangerous to insert words into your essay that are not part of your everyday vocabulary. In trying to write a "long" essay, you risk not finishing within the 25-minute time limit.

Remember, there is no "right" answer to the SAT Essay Exam question. Pick one that seems logical to you and state it clearly in the first sentence. List your reasons. Support those reasons with information you know to be true. Keep it simple to ensure you finish the exam in time. Later, when asked about the exam, you can shrug and say, "Piece of cake!"

Michael Strong, M.A.T., a Chatham resident, developed the ColorCode Essay Writing System. www.essaywritingsystem.com.

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