



# Q Guidebook

Version: v4.5.2 | Date: February 2021 | Created by: Coffee Quality Institute

Effective: Immediately and supersedes all previously published policies and procedures

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## **The Q Coffee System**

The core of CQI's Q Coffee System is built on the cupping skills of the Q Grader. The objective and standardized evaluation of the Q Grader is essential to maintain the integrity of the Q Coffee System.

CQI continuously monitors Q Graders that have participated in the Q Coffee System and reviews these evaluations. CQI also keeps track of all certified Q Graders in each country including their certificate expiration date. **It is the responsibility of a Q Grader to keep their certificate current if they wish to remain active in the Q Coffee System.**

## **BASIC Q RULES**

*NEW Students attempting to become Q Graders must be at least 16 years of age before the course start date. Students age 16 & 17 must receive authorization from the instructor and parent/legal guardian to attend a CQI course.*

- Q Cupping Essentials – strongly suggested
- Q Grader Exams - Required

***Students must pass all written and practical exams in order to achieve their Q Grader certificate.***

- The time frame allowed to complete all written and practical exams is eighteen (18) months from the original Q Grader course enrollment date.
- There are some exams that may be retaken within the same Q Course.
- Other exams will require visiting another Q Grader Course to be for retaken

*For Q Arabica and Q Robusta Graders:*

The Q Grader certificate is valid for thirty-six (36) months from the original Q Course end date. Renewal is accomplished by attending and passing the calibration exam.

## Q Course Protocols



### Course Protocols

| COURSES                             | COURSE LENGTH<br>(DAYS) | OPPORTUNITIES                                       | TIMEFRAMES                                                | CERTIFICATE<br>EXPIRATION<br>(YEARS) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Q Cupping Essentials                | 3                       | 2 Retakes                                           | 18 months to complete retake courses from original course | 6                                    |
| Q Combo Training and Exam           | 6                       | 2 Retakes                                           | 18 months to complete retake courses from original course | 3                                    |
| Q Exam                              | 3                       | 2 Retakes                                           | 18 months to complete retake courses from original course | 3                                    |
| Q Retake                            | 1                       | See rules for Q Combo Training and Exam, and Q Exam | 18 months to complete retake courses from original course | N/A                                  |
| Q Calibration Course                | 1                       | 1 Retake**                                          | 6 months before & after date of certificate expiration    | 3                                    |
| Q Recertification Course            | 3                       | 2 Retakes                                           | 18 months to complete retake courses from original course | 3                                    |
| Q Processing                        |                         |                                                     |                                                           |                                      |
| Q Processing Level 1 - Generalist   | 2                       | 2 Retakes                                           | 18 months to complete retake courses from original course | 3                                    |
| Q Processing Level 2 - Professional | 6                       | 2 Retakes                                           | 24 months to complete retake courses from original course | 3                                    |

\*\* If individual fails all 3 cupping sessions then no retakes are allowed. Must proceed to Q Recertification

## **Q EXAM RETAKE POLICY**

### *Q Retake(s) Permitted During Your Original Course Enrollment:*

- Triangulation
- Olfactory Recognition
- Green Coffee Grading
- Roasted Coffee Grading
- Sensory Skills
- Sample Roast Identification
- Matching Pairs

A Q Candidate may take one of the above exams up to two (2) additional times during a Q Course. Factors that can reduce the number of retakes offered are the availability of sufficient time, materials and facilities.

The Q Instructor leading the Q Course has the sole discretion to decide which retake exams are offered and how many opportunities. As a generally guide, the prioritization of retake exams is determined by the potential for the student to earn a Q in that course.

### *Q Retake(s) Requiring Joining an Additional Course:*

- Cupping Skills
- General Knowledge

After their initial Q Grader Course, students may request admission into a maximum of two (2) additional Q Grader Courses or Retake Courses in order to complete their retake exam(s). There are no restrictions for when a student can begin to retake their exam(s). ALL retake exams must be completed within eighteen (18) months of the original course date. Students who have not successfully passed all exams within eighteen (18) months of their original Q Grader Course must retake the entire course at a future date.

It is the responsibility of the Q Candidate to know what retake exams they need and how many Q Courses they may join. It is the instructor's responsibility to verify a retaker's eligibility status BEFORE administering exams.

An instructor may assess if the student needs additional training and/or practice before admitting the student into the Q Grader Course and may so advise the student. The Q Instructor leading the Q Course has the sole discretion to accept or deny admission of a retake student into their Q Course.

## **Q GRADING RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR Q GRADERS**

The goal of the Q Grader Course is to create a skilled and credible body of coffee graders to consistently and accurately assess samples submitted for evaluation. Q Graders are cuppers that maintain a current status with CQI and are skilled in evaluating the quality coffee and producing detailed reports for CQI. Q Certified lots, also known as certified Q Coffee (lots that meet or exceed the Q Standards for Specialty Arabica or Fine Robusta Grade) or CQI Q Technical Reports (lots that do not meet Q Standards).

A Q Grader's current status can be independently verified by referencing the CQI database and website under the Q Coffee System. <https://database.coffeeinstitute.org>

### **Q Grader Rules**

1. Q Graders hold a professional certificate in coffee grading and evaluation from CQI that qualifies them to perform these functions for fees mutually agreed to by the Q Grader and CQI's In Country Partner or ICP.
2. Individuals who have successfully passed CQI's Q Grader exams are certified as a Q Grader.
3. Only individuals with a current Q Grader certificate may use the authorized logo and the nomenclature "Q Grader" as a professional credential under the guidelines established by CQI.
4. When performing the functions of coffee grading and evaluation, a Q Grader is authorized by CQI to produce reports leading to the issuance of the following types of quality certificates:
  - a. Q Certificate, in conjunction with an authorized In-Country Partner (ICP).
  - b. Technical Report, in conjunction with an authorized In-Country Partner.
5. In preparing a grading and evaluation report on behalf of CQI, Q Graders agree to strictly follow the grading and cupping protocols established by CQI.
6. In preparing a grading and evaluation report on behalf of CQI, Q Graders agree to immediately report to CQI, any breach of protocol that would suggest or imply the evaluation and grading of the coffees submitted for evaluation was incorrectly or improperly made; these breaches would include but are not limited to the following:
  - a. Q Grader's personal knowledge of or contact by the owner of the sample.
  - b. Q Grader's knowledge of incorrect or incomplete use of CQI grading protocols.
  - c. Q Grader's knowledge of a submission of a false report.
7. A person with a current or lapsed Q Grader certificate may evaluate a coffee's quality outside of CQI's Q Coffee System. However, when preparing a grading and evaluation report on their own initiative it is explicitly forbidden to represent or suggest that their own personal ideas, opinions and conclusions regarding the grading and evaluation of said coffee represents a Q Score or is a part of CQI's Q Coffee System.

## Q evaluations on behalf of CQI requires three (3) certified Q Graders to:

- Roast sample to the sample roast standards at least twelve (12) hours before cupping.
- Evaluate the cup, use SCA form and protocols to perform the cupping. One grader to evaluate the green sample for defects; evaluate the roasted sample for quakers and report moisture content.
- Complete sensory evaluation and report within three (3) days of the sample's arrival.
- Enter results into CQI database within four (4) days of the sample's arrival.

## Codes to follow during grading and Q Graders ethics:

- BE HONEST in the evaluation
- Follow the rule of "Silent Work" as trained in the Q Grader Course
- Be precise and accurate in your evaluation
- Must maintain confidentiality and anonymity before, during, and after the grading assignment. This means the connection of the Q Grader to the lot evaluated must not be exposed and shall only be the knowledge of the ICP.

## Q Coffee Standards

The Q Coffee Course of the Coffee Quality Institute (CQI) is dedicated to promoting the highest principles of honesty, integrity, fair dealing, and professionalism in the grading and evaluation of specialty and fine grade coffees. A Q Grader agrees:

- To provide an impartial, professional evaluation of any coffees submitted for Q Grading.
- To meet or exceed the professional expectations placed on them by coffee producers, government agencies, non-government organizations, customers, or clients.
- To accurately and honestly represent their credentials, training, experience, and abilities.
- To maintain and advance their knowledge and skills in the technologies and procedures utilized in coffee quality evaluation.

## Denial of the Q Grader Certificate

Q Graders who violate their pledge to follow and uphold the Q Grader Rules and Regulations may face disciplinary action. A special investigation committee may be appointed by CQI to investigate allegations.

CQI, in its sole and absolute discretion, may deny – temporarily or indefinitely - a Q Grader certificate to anyone who:

- Does not meet any of the applicable qualifications for certificate or does not follow the procedures for application set forth in this guidebook.
- Is found cheating, copying answers from another student, or submitting work other than his/her own during any Q Grader examination or Calibration.
- Has made any false statement in or in connection with any application filed with the CQI

## **Q GRADER CALIBRATION AND RECERTIFICATION POLICY AND**

## **PROCEDURES**

### Allotted Timeframes for Q Calibration and Q Recertification

CQI's Q Courses are consistently being evaluated and improved for quality assurance purposes. The allotted timeframes outlined below are meant to maintain the highest quality and experience for all attendees. It is the responsibility of Q Graders to understand and comply with all policies and procedures laid forth by CQI.

Q Graders whose certificate has lapsed, and wish to participate in a Calibration exam **MUST** request a written extension from CQI by completing the [extension request form](#) also located on the [CQI website](#) before enrolling in a Calibration course.

- 1) Q Grader Calibration course must be completed within three (3) years from certificate expiration date. The window to calibrate begins six (6) months before the expiration date of the certificate. The window is also extended for six (6) months after the expiration for those with limited calibration opportunities.
  - a) Q Graders failing a Calibration exam may **retake a calibration exam one (1) time** in order to renew their Q Grader certificate. They must join another Calibration Course within six (6) months and successfully pass that course.
- 2) Q graders who have lapsed in their status and failed to attend any calibration course will have up to five (5) years from their last certificate expiry date to attend a Q Recertification course. After five (5) years, they **MUST** proceed to take a FULL Q Course and are not eligible for Q Recertification.
- 3) Q Graders who attempted a Calibration Retake and failed the retake exam or missed the retake window, have five (5) years from their last certificate expiry date to attend a Q Recertification Course. After this period, the Q Grader **MUST** take a **FULL** Q Course again and is no longer eligible for Q Recertification.

### Q Calibration Exam Details

Calibration exams are required for all Q Graders whose certificates are about to expire or have already expired (within the allowed six (6) month window).

Q Grader certificate will be reinstated and reissued for all Q Graders who pass their Calibration exams.

Being calibrated is necessary for Q Graders, keeping them engaged with any updates or improvements to the Courses. Additionally, calibration ensures a Q Grader's alignment to CQI's Standards for the quality of Specialty Arabica and Fine Robusta coffees.

Calibrating reestablishes the parameters of how to identify various quality levels in coffee, ranging from outstanding to very good (specialty grade), and down to commercial grade coffees. The activity

consists a brief presentation, a reference cupping and three (3) cupping exam sessions.

During a Calibration exam, the results of all cuppers are entered into a proprietary evaluation algorithm (The Matrix) to assess their capacity for rating coffee attributes compared to the other cuppers. This method is similar to the method in which they were evaluated in their Q Grader Exams, however, the allowed deviation is tighter, as the Cuppers are now considered more experienced. The Matrix indicates if the cupper is in calibration with the group or not, how consistent they are to themselves and the confidence in their range of scores based on the quality of each of the coffees on the table.

Q Graders must also demonstrate the cupping protocols/standards for a Q evaluation, including: the rule of silent work, objective evaluation of varying grades of coffees, identification of defects, repeat coffees, or lower grade coffees; cupping protocols, green grading standards, and roasting/quaker tests according to CQI Protocol.

1. A Calibration exam currently is a one-day (1-day) exercise conducted by a certified Q Grader Instructor in which coffees are cupped in three (3) separate cupping sessions of six (6) samples each:
  - One (1) of the sessions must contain an international mixture of Washed Process Coffees. These coffees will vary in quality.
  - One (1) of the sessions must contain coffees from Africa or Asia. These coffees will vary in quality.
  - One (1) of the sessions must contain an international mixture of Natural Process Coffees. These coffees will vary in quality.
2. Cupping and scoring protocols:
  - The coffees are to be cupped according to the cupping protocols taught by CQI and the scores recorded on the cupping forms used by CQI.
  - The cupping data for each Q Grader is entered into a Calibration Exam Matrix, which automatically calculates the Q Graders' pass/fail scores in regard to group Calibration.
  - Q Graders must receive a passing score of 86 or higher, and report defects accurately on two (2) of the three (3) cupping sessions, as well as show the proper use of the cupping form at all times, in order to renew their Q Grader certificate.

*\*\*NOTE: Maintaining a Q Grader Certificate is required in order to continue Q Grading coffees for an established In-Country-Partner (ICP).*
3. Q Graders failing their first attempt at a Calibration exam may retake the exam one (1) time and within six (6) months in order to renew their Q Grader certificate.
4. Q Graders failing both the Calibration and Retake exam are required to complete the Q Recertification exams as described below.

## Q Grader Recertification Exams Details

The Q Grader Recertification Course (if organized as a stand-alone course) is a two-day (2 day) course consisting of the following exam:

- **Sensory Skills Exam (same as Q Arabica / Q Robusta Grader course).**
- **Cupping Skills Exam – comprised of three (3) cupping sessions**
- **Washed Mild's (mandatory)**
- **Africa or Asia**
- **Naturals**
- **Triangulation Skills Exam – three triangulation exams, which correlate to the cupping exams administered.**
- **Olfactory Skills Exam – Parts A, B, C, D (same as Q Arabica/Q Robusta Grader course).**
- **Matching Pairs Skills Exam (same as Q Arabica/Q Robusta Grader course).**
- **A credentialed Q Arabica/Q Robusta Instructor must administer the course and exams. Exams must be given in exactly the same manner as the original Q Grader course.**

A Q Recertification candidate (student) may take these exams within the context of a full Q Arabica/Q Robusta course. The instructor must consult with the Recertification student regarding the schedule of events for the exam week and arrange for proper tracking through the database.

To successfully complete the Recertification Course, the candidate must pass ALL of the exams. The retake policy for these exams follows the full Q Exams policy. Please refer to the Q Grader Retake Policy.

Candidates failing to complete Recertification Course retake exams as detailed in the Q Grader Retake Policy must retake the Q Grader Training and Exams if they wish to reinstate their Q Grader certificate.

## **Q Grader Out of Calibration While Certificate is Current**

The following policies only apply to Q Arabica or Q Robusta Graders whose certificates are currently active and are participating in evaluations of Q coffees. While participating in an evaluation through the Q Coffee System, if a Q Grader is out of calibration, the ICP will notify CQI.

*CQI's policy is as follows:*

The first time the Q Arabica or Q Robusta Grader is out of calibration, the Q Grader is notified formally by CQI. The Q Grader will continue to hold an active certificate but must participate in a calibration and pass before being able to grade any further samples through the Q Coffee System.

## **Guidelines for Q Graders Participating in Evaluations of Q Coffees**

### *Required space, equipment and materials when performing an off-site evaluation*

#### ***For cupping***

- Room shall be well ventilated and without the presence of foreign odors or distractions such as continuous noise.
- Table space to set up cupping
- Commercial grinder
- Ability to heat water to approx. 93°C - 96°C (199.4°F - 205°F). Equivalent water temperature shall be calculated based on venue higher location's elevation when applicable.
- The water supply shall be clean and odor free, but not distilled or softened. Total Dissolved Solids (TDS) shall range from 75 ppm and not exceed 250 ppm. If this is not possible, bottled water, meeting the same TDS range, must be used.
- Uniform cupping bowls/vessels: minimum of 10 cups per sample to be analyzed – all bowls/vessels must be the exact same kind, make, size, model, and material
- Cupping spoons
- 2L water pitcher or kettle to pour water during the cupping
- Scales
- Computer/laptop with internet access
- SCA / CQI Cupping forms – most up to date version – ICP Coordinator can provide via email upon request

#### ***For roasting***

- Professional sample roaster
- Colorimeter
- Reference SCA/CQI roasting standards for cupping

#### ***If green grading***

- Moisture meter
- Black mat for green grading
- SCA/CQI Green Coffee Defect Handbook
- SCA/CQI Green Grading Form – ICP Coordinator can provide this via email upon request

### **Q Grading Protocols**

- For Arabica, Q Graders must follow the SCA Protocols for green grading, roasting and cupping. <https://sca.coffee/research/coffee-standards/>.
- For Robusta, Q Graders must follow the CQI Robusta Standards and Protocols for green grading, roasting and cupping. [CQI Fine Robusta](#)
- In preparation for roasting Q Grading samples, the roast master must calibrate the roaster with a sample batch so that target color and time are met before roasting for a Q Graded coffee.

## Roasting the sample

If you are receiving the sample as green coffee, prepare roasted samples no less than 8 hour and no more than 24 hours prior to cupping.

## Before cupping, please note the following

- Cupping form needs to be completed, legible, and in accordance to Q program Policy
- When inputting your results in the database, the requirements below are mandatory. Please keep this in mind when completing your cupping form.
  - Include at least three descriptors for fragrance / aroma and flavor
  - Notes should be included for fragrance / aroma, flavor, aftertaste, acidity, body, uniformity and overall.

## Results reporting in the database – please complete within 24 hours after your evaluation has been completed

- After you have completing the evaluation, results are recorded via the Q System Database
- Please make sure that your log in is active here <https://database.coffeeinstitute.org/login> . If you need assistance accessing your account, please contact [info@coffeeinstitute.org](mailto:info@coffeeinstitute.org) for assistance.
- After logging in, you will see the sample that has been assigned to you under “Current Grading Assignments”.
- To add your scores, click on the sample number and simply choose the scores from the bar at the top of each section.
- Please note that if there is not a defect present, you must choose N/A from the dropdown menu in the defect section at the bottom of the page.
- Additional descriptors can be added in the notes section.

**After you have completed your results in the database, be sure to double check that your information is accurate before submitting. After you have submitted your results, no changes can be made. Evaluating coffees in the Q Coffee System results in a score and data which impacts the producer. It is the responsibility of all Q Graders to ensure their evaluation and input of that data is accurate and represents the coffee evaluated.**

**REMEMBER to submit your cupping forms and / or green grading forms to ICP Coordinator within 24 hours following your evaluation!!!**