

Sensory Silence: Why Not Perceiving an Ingredient Does Not Establish Its Absence

Culinary Judgment and Taste Chemistry — Ahmad Issam Maadarani

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This essay distinguishes failing to perceive a property from its material absence. It proposes reporting language that prevents a limited tasting experience from becoming a chemical claim or an accusation about a recipe.

1. Boundaries of a negative statement

“I did not detect thyme aroma” describes a sensory search under particular conditions. “There is no thyme” concerns composition. The first may be true while the second is false. Low quantity, limited release, masking or individual sensitivity are possible explanations. None needs to be selected before recognising that sensory non-detection is narrower than material absence.

2. What was sought?

An absence report needs a defined target. “Herbal aroma” covers multiple effects, while an ingredient name may evoke expectations that vary with preparation. State the property, location and time being examined. Inspecting only the opening does not justify a conclusion about the finish. Searching after intense aromas also introduces conditions worth recording.

3. Hypothetical example

A sauce contains a small amount of an aromatic ingredient that one judge cannot distinguish. The justified observation is that its characteristic effect was unclear to that person in the tested bite. If highlighting the ingredient is required, lack of clarity may matter despite confirmed presence. Accusing the cook of omission requires independent information. Material presence does not guarantee successful sensory expression.

4. Examining alternatives

Compare a known formulation with an appropriate edible reference in a controlled session, specifying the question and using independent repetition. The reference should not reveal every sample’s identity and dictate the expected answer. Composition questions may require preparation information. Discriminating an effect and analysing ingredients are different tasks: perception evidence cannot automatically replace presence evidence.

5. A symmetrical limitation

Perceiving an ingredient-like aroma does not establish the ingredient either. Similar effects may arise through other routes, and recognition can be mistaken. The description remains useful as sensory resemblance rather than confirmed chemical identity. Restraint is especially important where the claim affects ingredient commitments: tasting cannot establish composition that requires separate verification.

6. A reporting rule

Separate “absent”, “not detected here” and “insufficiently clear for the purpose”. Each requires different evidence. This permits criticism without overstating recipe knowledge

and turns negative observations into examinable questions rather than certain endpoints. It is a rule of inference, not a study demonstrating a measured rate of judging error.

7. A Discussion Worksheet

Field	Question	What to Record
Negation	Existence or perception?	A statement naming the object of negation.
Function	Was clarity required?	A task condition independent of composition.
Verification	What additional evidence is needed?	Controlled tasting or preparation information.

Philosophical arguments belong to the author. Applications and worksheets are unvalidated proposals, and examples are hypothetical. This article presents no new experimental dataset, claim of worldwide priority or claim that this text has undergone peer review.

8. References and Source Limits

A philosophical analysis by the author; its arguments are not attributed to experimental findings.

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