

# Handling and Examining Coins

It is very important to always handle coins with care. If coins are handled incorrectly, they can be ruined forever. A few simple rules will help keep your coins in the best condition. Handle your coins as little as possible. If you have to pick up your coin, hold it only by the edges. **Never touch the front (obverse) or back (reverse) of the coin.** Even putting your coin in the palm of your hand can damage a coin. Our skin has oil, plus if there is any dirt on your hands, it can get on the coin. Never handle coins when your hands are dirty. Try to wash your hands before handling coins and make sure they are dry. You could also wear cotton gloves to be completely safe.

Do not eat or drink while examining your coins. If you have to cough or sneeze, put the coin down and turn your head. Try not to talk or breath on the coin, because even vapor can affect the surface of the coin. If you want to hold the coin to examine it, hold the coin between your thumb and index finger. Make sure you keep a soft mat on the table under the coin in case it falls. The condition of a coin has a great deal to do with its value. If a coin is dented, scratched, tarnished, or has ugly fingerprints on it, it will be far less valuable.

Do not attempt to clean a coin. If a coin shows signs of cleaning, it is worth far less. There are ways to remove some dirt using soap and water, but this should be left to the experts. It's not worth possibly of damaging your coins. Once a coin is cleaned it cannot be restored to its original condition. In the photo on the top left of the next page, the coin is first placed on a protective holder, then examined. In the photo on the right, the coin is being held between the thumb and index finger while being



When examining a coin, it is important to use good lighting. Without good lighting, it is hard to see if a coin has been damaged. It is important to examine all parts of the coin. The value of the coin mainly depends on the condition of the coin. For circulated coins, the amount of wear is the most important part in determining condition. For Mint State coins or coins that have no signs of wear from circulation, the number of marks, scratches, contact marks, nicks, color, and eye appeal are all important. Good lighting is needed to see these flaws. Remember, a small difference in the condition of the coin can have a big difference in the value of the coin. A strong light is recommended for viewing your coin. Halogen lights are very good. Having a lamp that can be moved around or tilted can be very helpful as you can change the amount of light and not have to move the coin themselves. Hold the coin about 2 to 3 feet from the light. When examining the coin, tilt the coin at an angle so that the light reflects from the coin's surface to your eye. Tilt and turn the coin so that different parts of the coin can be observed.

To look at a coin real closely, a magnifying glass is used. A magnifying glass is a glass that makes an object look larger. The power of the magnifying glass means how big the object is when you look through it. A magnifying glass that is 2x (x relates to the power) means that an object looks 2 times its normal size. A 10x magnifying glass makes an object look 10 times its normal size. There are many different types of magnifying glasses. They come in different shapes and different power levels. Some have lights attached with them. For normal coin examination a magnifying glass between 4x and 8x should be fine. For looking at very small parts of the coin, use a 10x to 16x. Some glasses are better than others because better glass is used. The coin looks much clearer through these. When buying a magnifying glass, bring a coin with you and examine it through different glasses to see which you like the best. One of the most popular is the 5x packette, which is made by Bausch and Lomb. Below are several different magnifying glasses.



# Grading Coins

Coin grading is an important part of coin collecting. It is the most important thing that you need to learn if you really want to collect coins. The grading of coins has to do with how much wear or circulation the coin has received. More use leads to the coin's design becoming more worn. This in turn affects the coin's condition and value. Always remember the grade of a coin is based on personal opinion. If someone tells you it is one grade and you disagree, then you should not buy the coin. There are no experts. Each person grades differently and you must learn to grade and trust your own experience that you learn through examining many different coins.

There are many books that can help you learn how to grade coins. Two of the standard books are: Photograde, and Official ANA Grading Standards for United States Coins. These books are helpful tools, but the best way to learn how to grade coins is to examine various graded coins and see the differences on the coin.

It is important when examining coins to use the right lighting and magnification. Four to eight power magnification should be fine. Ten power or more should be used to study small differences in a coin and to determine grading. When examining a coin, hold the coin on its edges between your fingertips. Make sure a soft padded surface is beneath the coin in case it is dropped. Tilt the coin at an angle so that the light reflects from the coin's surface to your eye. By tilting or turning the coin, different parts of the coin can be observed. Try not to breathe on coins, especially copper coins, and do not talk while holding one in front of you.

The grade of a coin reflects the condition. Wear, contact marks, hairlines, scratches, nicks, color, luster, and eye appeal all contribute to the grade of a coin. The grade of a coin is one of the most important factors in establishing the value of a coin. Grades for coins made for circulation are from 0 through 70, with 70 being perfect. Coins that show no signs of wear are assigned a grade of 60 through 70 and are known as Uncirculated (Unc) or Mint State (MS). The following are some of the general terms and standards used in the hobby to describe the grade of the coin. These descriptions are general; the exact descriptions will differ from series to

series.

The basic circulated grades are given first. Lincoln cents are shown as an example for each grade.

The design of the coin is the main image. For example, on the Lincoln cent, the obverse design is the image of President Lincoln. The lettering or legend are usually the lettering around the rim of the coin. The date is the date the coin was struck, which is usually at the bottom of the front of the coin. The highest point on the coin is the part of the design that is raised the highest above the surface of the coin and usually will begin to wear first.

The most important thing to learn about grading is that the more coins you study, the better you will be at telling what grade a coin is. Study as many coins as you can and compare coins to see differences.

## General Descriptions of Circulated Grades

**About Good (AG-3)** - Very heavily worn. Design worn smooth, but the general outline is still visible. Most of letters around the rim are only partially visible. The date is worn but visible, allowing you to tell which year the coin was struck.



**Good (G-4)** - Heavily worn. Most of the design is worn flat, but major parts of the design are visible. Letters around rim are worn but mostly visible. Date is fully visible.



**Very Good (VG-8)** - Well worn. Major features of design flat, but visible. Letters around rim are clear.



**Fine (F-12)** - Moderate to considerable wear. Entire design is bold, with some higher points visible.



**Very Fine (VF-20)** - Moderate wear on high points of design. Major details are clear.



**Extremely Fine (EF-40)** - Only slight wear. Major features of design are sharp and well defined.



**About Uncirculated (AU-50)** - Traces of light wear seen on most of the highest points of the design.



Mint State coins show no signs of wear. The grade of a Mint State coin is based on the coin's luster, number of bag marks, scuff marks, location of marks, color of the coin, and eye appeal. Remember, what grade one dealer or collector might consider a coin will usually vary from another dealer. It is always best to learn to grade yourself. The following are some general descriptions of Mint State coins:

**MS-60** - Many possible large contact marks, hairlines or scuff marks throughout. Possible rim nicks. Poor eye appeal. Surfaces may be dull or spotted. Dull luster.

**MS-63** - Only a few scattered large contact marks in prime areas, numerous small contact marks. A few small scattered patches of hairlines in secondary areas. Several possible scuff marks in fields and on the design. Attractive eye appeal. Surfaces have some original color. Luster may be slightly impaired.

**MS-65** - One or two large contact marks in prime areas or a few small contact marks. One or two small patches of hairlines. A few scuff marks on high points of design. Very pleasing eye appeal. Surfaces have full original color or tone. Attractive average luster throughout.

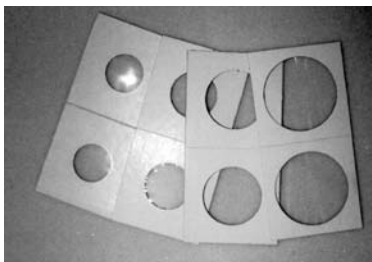
**MS-70** - Perfect coin. Outstanding eye appeal. Surfaces bright with lustrous original color. Very attractive blazing luster.

## Storing Coins

It's important to properly store your coins so they do not become damaged. You should not place your coins in a bag all together or throw them in your drawer, because the coins can bang against each other and they will become nicked and scratched. Also do not store them near something that is hot, because this can damage the surface of the coin. There are many different ways to store your coins to keep them protected. What you use depends alot on what you collect and what your goals are. For example, let's say you are trying to collect one of each date of the Lincoln cent series. There are books available specifically for storing these.

If you like to collect all types of coins and keep them together, the easiest way to store your coins is in 2" by 2" cardboard holders. These are safe for storage and because there is a plastic window, you can easily see the front and back of your coins. There are different sizes for different size coins. To insert a coin, first choose a holder where the window is the same size as the coin. Lay the holder flat, place the coin on top in the middle, fold over the holder, and staple it shut. When you staple, it is best to staple around the four sides. Make sure you do not accidentally staple your coin.

Once you have your coins in these holders, you can put the coins in boxes or in vinyl pages where you can put up to 20 coins in a page. These pages fit into a three binder and allow you to enjoy your coins in a book format. The photo on the top left of the next page shows different size cardboard holders. The photo on the right shows different albums that can hold these 2" by 2" cardboard holders. If you want, you can use smaller holders, so you can bring them to coin shows or a friend's house. With your larger book, you can set it up any way you want. For example, have Lincoln cents on one page, Jefferson nickels on another.



Another nice thing about cardboard holders is that you can write notes on them. For example, you could write when you bought the coin, how much you paid, or anything special you like about the coin. Make sure you also flatten down the staples so that they do not scratch other coins. Also, when taking coins out of a cardboard holder, make sure not to scratch the coin on a staple.

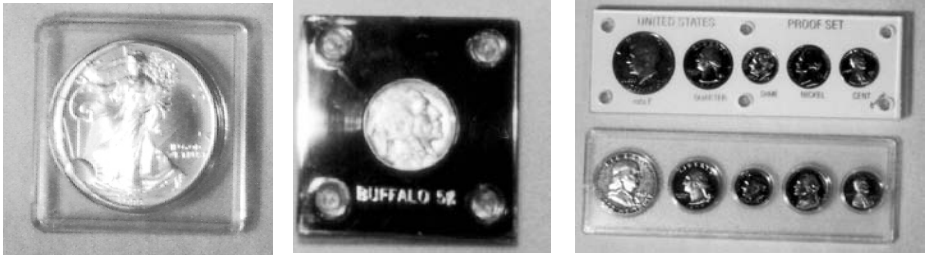
There are several other ways of storing single coins. Flips are clear plastic envelopes with two pockets. These can be used to display two coins, or a single coin with a description of the coin or any other information. Flips are made of vinyl, which is soft and easy to use, but not recommended for long-term storage because the oil in the vinyl can cause damage to the coins over long-term storage. Flips are also made of a different material that is safer but more expensive. These flips are of a stiffer material since the oil is removed from the vinyl to avoid damage over a long-term. Make sure you ask when you buy flips if they are safe for long-term storage.

Paper envelopes can be used as an inexpensive storage method. They are inexpensive; however, you have to remove the coin to view them. You can also write any notes on the outside of these envelopes. Below on the left is a 2-inch flip. The front pocket contains a coin, and the back is used to hold an insert with a description of the coin. On the right is a paper envelope holder.



The problem with a cardboard holder, flip, or paper holder is that the coin can still be damaged if it is dropped or banged into other coins. Hard plastic holders do not have this problem. Some of these also have the benefit of an air-tight seal. This is important because air can change the color of the coin. With hard plastic holders you get to see both sides of

the coin, the coin is protected, and you can use stickers to put notes on the holders. At the top left of the next page is a snap-together plastic holder. At the top middle of the next page is a holder that is screwed together. There are also holders you can get that hold all denominations for a given year. This would be useful if you want to store one of each proof coin for a year. At the top right of the next page are two different sets that hold each denomination. These holders are also good protection if the set is dropped, and some are air tight.



If you want to collect all the coins of a series, the most affordable way is to use coin folders. These are easy to use and a good way to start. These folders provide a space for each coin made for general use, including all dates and mintmarks. But, only one side of the coin can be seen. One problem is that there is no plastic protection for the front and back of the coin. When you put coins into the folder's holes, you may have to use a little muscle. The holes are made small so the coins will not fall out. If you are having a little trouble, try to put the top of the coin in first, then the bottom. Below is a folder for the Jefferson nickel series. Coin folders can be bought for almost any United States coin series.



If you are collecting a complete set of each date and mintmark for a single series and you want good protection for your coins, coin albums are the best choice if you can afford it. Remember as you start out, you have to keep to your budget. But as you save your allowance, maybe you can get a nicer album to save your coins. Coin albums are attractive books in which both sides of the coins can be viewed. There is a removable plastic slide to protect both sides of the coin, and these albums are probably the best and safest way to store your coins. When removing or inserting coins from these albums, make sure you use a glove, cloth, or piece of plastic so that you do not damage the coin. Do not push on the front or back of the coin with your bare finger. Below are different types of coin albums made for an entire series of coins.

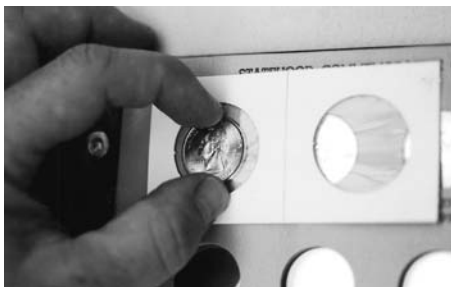


It is important when placing or removing the coin in a folder or album not to touch the front or back of the coin. First, holding the coins by the edge between your thumb and index finger, place the coin over top of the place you are going to place it in the album.



Second, use either a cardboard holder or cloth to place over the coin. With the cardboard holder, you can see the coin easily. With the thumb

and index finger, push down on the rim of the coin. Make sure the coin is even, not one side down further than the other. This is because air pockets might form around the coin.



Another way to store coins is in tubes. These are great for extra coins that are not very expensive. The tubes allow you to store many of your coins together. Tubes are clear rolls for coins.



Make sure your coins are stored in a safe place. They should not be near heat or moisture or a place where the temperature changes a lot. Usually you can store them in a desk or dresser drawer as long as it is not too close to a window or radiator.

There are many places to buy coins and accessories. You can try your local coin dealer or a coin show. If there aren't any nearby, try mail order. Check the classified ads in a coin paper or magazine to buy or sell coins or equipment. Most places are reputable and the editors do watch out for bad business, but be sure you can always check with the complaint department.