

- Hello, this is John from VJ Books, and we're talking books.

Today we'd like to continue with our Book Collecting 101 series, which gives you the basics of book collecting. Today our topic is book grading, or condition.

One of the most important things that you have to focus on when you're buying a collectible book is its condition. And different dealers have different conventions for grading their books. I came up with ours, because I was a longtime stamp collector, and using some of the similar criteria for a collectible item, I developed a series of different book grades that we use when we're grading books.

The book, and the jacket are graded separately, and both are important. It has been estimated that in modern fiction, book jackets comprise about 50-60% of the value of a book. So it's very important that the jacket is in good condition.

Our top grade is mint, new unread, in a flawless dust jacket. This would be fresh out of the box, and unhandled other than to have the author sign the book. Our next grade is fine in a fine dust jacket. It is still collectible. It may have been read. But it's in a very fine condition. Our third grade, and typically our lowest grade, is very fine, in a very fine dust jacket with discrepancies noted.

If it is price-clipped or has a bumped corner, depending on the scarcity of the book, the grading may be a little bit different on that. So be aware of this, and now we'll go into the different parts of a book.

Let's start from the outside going in, starting with the dust jacket. The dust jacket is the wrap-around art and it comes on most modern books. They should be vibrant color, no fading, clean and free from flaws.

Other things that you may want to consider is whether they are price-clipped. Well, what's a price clip? It's where the corner where the price usually is has been clipped off. Now usually this is for a gift where someone doesn't want to know the value of the gift being given, so they cut the price off of it. It does devalue the book and you see that less and less all the time. But price clipped will devalue the collectability of a book. On this particular book, *Flight of the Intruder* by Steve Coonts, it's pretty rare so it has less impact than it might on some.

Another thing that you might want to consider is whether the book jacket has faded. Sometimes they sit on the shelf for years and they're exposed to the sun, and the jackets will fade. Here's an example: *A Dance at the Slaughterhouse* by Lawrence Sanders. As you can clearly see, that one of these books, the spine has faded where the other is vibrant color. That's something that you'll want to consider. And finally when you're looking at the jacket, watch for wrinkles. Are the edges, or the top of it, if there's any wrinkles present, this also will devalue the collectability of a book. So, that's the jacket.

The next thing to consider is the cover boards. The boards need to be clean, free from stains, or marks of any kind. And you need to pay special attention to the corners. If these corners have been bumped, this will affect the value of a book. So these are the boards, they should be clean and straight, tight on the book, and the corners should be like new.

Next let's talk about the spine of the book, the exterior spine that is. Straight and clean, no bumping on the top or bottom, and check the embossing. Make sure that it's intact. These will flake off over time and then will again affect the value of a book. Another thing to watch for is spine slant. As books wear and overage, and if they've been read a lot of times, they start to slant. As you can see with this book, it's not straight.

Another thing to check for is the edges of the book, on the boards. They can be bumped or otherwise marred, and that's something else to watch for.

Next, take a look at the page blocks. They are the edges of the book. They should be clean, free of marks, free of stains, fingerprints, any discoloration of these will affect the value of a book. So those are the page blocks. One thing to watch for is whether they're yellow or stained. Here's an example. This is not a top desirable book.

Another thing to watch for is fading. Over time, books especially with some of the cheaper papers, will begin to yellow or fade over time. As you can see with these two examples of the same book. One of them is faded and one is vibrant white. One of them has been aged and is less valuable than the other one.

And finally, watch for remainder marks. These are marks on the page edges put there by the publisher when the books come back in from circulation. And it devalues the book. We've talked about these in a previous video. And you will find them typically on bargain tables. And watch for those in descriptions because they are something that will devalue the collectability of a book.

The last thing to consider is the interior pages of a book. They should be clean, free from any marking, highlighting or writing in the margins. This is rarer in fiction. Textbooks you see it all the time. But in a fiction book you should watch out. Make sure all the pages are clean, that there are no wrinkles or tears, and that the pages are intact. If you don't have the book in hand to inspect, you might want to ask and make sure that your book seller is credible and that they will represent that they are clean, and warrant that they don't have that kind of damage.

Another thing to consider is where they're signed. Often times you'll see an inscription. The book has been inscribed to somebody. This is not preferable, unless of course the person it's being inscribed to is as or more famous than the author. And then that has a degree of provenance that makes that book more collectible. But typically an inscription "to Dad at Christmas" will devalue the collectability of a book.

So that covers book conditions and grading, hopefully giving you something to consider. You might check out our other videos for other book collecting tips.

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