



# Understanding “No Grade” Coins

A guide to the  
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that can cause  
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**H**ave you ever submitted coins to a grading service and had some sent back in soft flips with a sticker that said “No Grade?” If so, this booklet is for you.

NGC, like most grading companies, will return some coins as “No Grades.” In the case of NGC “No Grade” coins, a brief statement of the problem is attached to the flip containing the coin. NGC currently uses over 70 terms to specify coin problems. Although NGC believes these terms are in general use by coin grading companies, this booklet is designed to assist you in identifying and understanding “No Grade” designations.

To maintain the hobby’s confidence in the coins certified by NGC, there are certain coins that NGC will not certify. Some of the problems or characteristics that can cause a coin to be rejected are obvious, but others are very subtle and may slip past the eye of even experienced dealers and collectors.

While receiving a coin with a “No Grade” designation is disappointing, this should be viewed as an educational opportunity. By learning what conditions are not desirable in a coin, you will be able to distinguish those coins that are considered gradable by NGC. In much the same way that mint error coins teach us how normal coins are made, problem coins serve as a reminder to handle numismatic pieces carefully and to always look toward their long-term preservation.

One of our goals at NGC is to reduce the likelihood of coin buyers being sold problem coins. By restricting our certification service to only those coins that meet market standards of wide desirability, we hope that both dealers and collectors trading in NGC-certified coins will develop more discriminating tastes and will come to a greater understanding of what conditions can lead to NGC giving a “No Grade” designation.

In the following pages we will explain with words and pictures the reasons certain coins are returned by NGC uncertified as “No Grades.” This will help you better understand which coins to avoid submitting and will provide possible remedies for some types of problem coins.

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# UNNATURAL COLORATION

The composition of a coin is key in determining its color. Each coin's alloy reacts to atmospheric conditions in a different way and is a factor in the development of patina (toning). As an example, copper and silver coins are more susceptible to toning than gold coins are. Since most U.S. coins are made of alloys containing copper, most will tone.

The term **ARTIFICIAL TONING** refers to the process whereby patina is imparted to a coin in an accelerated reaction process using chemicals and/or heat. In many cases the purpose is to hide a defect that would otherwise be detected.

**ARTIFICIAL COLOR** refers to bronze, copper nickel and copper coins that have been chemically dipped or cleaned. Under natural conditions, most copper coins will darken over time, but examples that retain their original "red" color are highly valued. That's why "Red Brown" (RB) or "Brown" (BN) copper coins are sometimes treated to remove this toning. The resulting color usually has an unnatural and artificial look.

A coin that has been immersed in a diluted acid solution (or, commonly referred to as "dipped") and not properly rinsed will probably develop traces of **DIP RESIDUE**. This gives the coin a cloudy or unnatural brown look. If this staining is severe, the coin will not be graded.



*Artificial toning can be extremely difficult to detect, and even harder to explain once discovered. Perhaps the best explanation is that it just does not appear natural.*



# MECHANICAL DAMAGE

**T**here are many ways a coin may become **DAMAGED**. This general term is used when the coin displays any form of destructive contact that may not be defined more precisely.

The temptation to carve one's initials or some other message into a coin has damaged many a specimen, and such coins will be returned with the notation **GRAFFITI**. Trade dollars are commonly found with Asian characters stamped into them. These are commonly referred to as **CHOPMARKS**. Damage confined to the coin's rim or border is specified as **RIM DAMAGE**.

Coins with minor **SCRATCHES** may be certified, but a severe scratch will result in a No Grade verdict. A **SOLDERED** coin is one that has been used as an item of jewelry and still displays evidence of this traditional bonding agent. A coin removed from jewelry but still showing evidence of this soldering will be returned described as **MOUNTED**.

A **BENT** coin is one in which the planchet is no longer level and has become curved or creased after the minting process.

**WHEEL MARKS** occur when a coin counter has left a mark on the coin leaving a highly polished spot.



*After they leave the Mint, coins can inadvertently be damaged in a number of ways. This is an example of a scratched coin.*



## ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

**I**mproper storage can, over time, destroy the surfaces of a coin. When a coin displays the negative results of a hostile storage environment, but the exact cause of this damage is not known, it is said to have **ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE**. Environments detrimental to coins are those featuring extremes of heat and humidity, as well as atmospheric pollutants and saltwater. Sea-salvaged and treasure coins are often victims of environmental damage.

**CORROSION** is a problem for most metals, though gold and platinum are nearly immune to its effects. A natural chemical reaction, it causes the surfaces of a coin to form new molecular compounds. When corrosion is severe or unattractive, it will result in a No Grade verdict.

**GLUE RESIDUE** is self-explanatory, but other substances adhering to a coin's surfaces, whatever their nature, are categorized simply as **RESIDUE**.

A **STAINED** coin is one that displays a discoloration as the result of some form of environmental damage.



*Corrosion, as shown on this Morgan dollar, will result in a No Grade designation.*





## PVC CONTAMINATION

The term **PVC** is an abbreviation for polyvinyl chloride. PVC is a chemical compound used to make plastics more pliable. It is commonly found in the 2" x 2" double-pocket envelopes, or "flips," used to store and display coins. Over time, PVC breaks down, releasing a gas that may form a hazy, greenish film on a coin. In extreme cases, this gas combines with moisture in the air to create hydrochloric acid that etches the coin's surfaces, resulting in permanent damage.

It may be possible to remove PVC from a coin's surface, depending on the depth of the PVC film, and the length of time it has been on the coin. Only an experienced professional should perform this work. Improper PVC removal can result in a No Grade designation of **PVC DAMAGE** or **CLEANED**.



*This Peace dollar has a layer of PVC residue that is easily observed. Note the "off" color of light green haze on the coin's surface.*



## IMPROPER CLEANING

If a coin is brushed or polished in any way, this will cause damage to its surfaces, and such a coin is said to be **IMPROPERLY CLEANED**. Where such action is harsh, it will mar or destroy the natural luster and leave a scratchy, unnatural look. NGC will not grade coins it considers to be harshly or improperly cleaned.

Contaminant particles or spittle can result in black spots appearing on a coin. Attempts to remove these “carbon spots” through either chemical or mechanical means may cause damage to the coin. Such pieces will be returned with the notation **SPOT REMOVALS**.

A **WIPED** coin is one that has been rubbed with a dry cloth or other abrasive material, leaving fine “hairline” scratches on its surfaces. A **BRUSHED** coin will display similar, but much heavier, abrasive lines.



*Improper Spot Removal can result in damage to a coin, such as the scratch marks seen in the close-up, below, of this 1799 dollar.*



## MECHANICAL REPAIRS

A coin restored through mechanical means is described as being **REPAIRED**. There are several reasons why a coin may be repaired. Many older coins, particularly Bust type silver dollars and gold dollars, were worn as jewelry. This often caused them to be holed for suspension on a chain.

Subsequently, these coins were removed from the chain and their holes **PLUGGED**. Though this work is often skillfully performed, most experts will spot the repair.

Coins used as jewelry may also be contained within a circular bezel. While some bezels do no harm to the coin, older ones often crimped the coin's rims at one or more points. Such coins may later show evidence of **RIM REPAIR**. Similarly, coins formerly mounted on items such as pins and rings, will show traces of attachment. These coins will be returned with the designation of **MOUNT REMOVED**.

Many rim repair coins have been filed to remove irregular metal to even out the rims. This common form of repair is referred to as **RIM FILING**.

**TOOLING** refers to either the smoothing of a coin's fields to remove scratches, corrosion, and other forms of damage or the restoration of lost details through use of a graver or knife. **RE-ENGRAVED** coins are done in a similar fashion. However, the purpose is to strengthen lost detail through mechanical means.



*This Bust type silver half dollar from 1810 has been plugged.*



## COUNTERFEITS & MECHANICAL ALTERATIONS

A coin that was made by someone other than the individual, business, or institution that authorized it is **NOT GENUINE** or, more simply, counterfeit. When a coin's genuineness is uncertain, it will be declared as being of **QUESTIONABLE AUTHENTICITY**.

There are two basic kinds of counterfeits. Circulating counterfeits are contemporary with the coins they imitate and are intended to pass as money at their face value. Numismatic counterfeits are intended to deceive collectors and are typically made years after the originals to sell at numismatic values.

An otherwise genuine coin may show an **ALTERED DATE** to increase its apparent value. A coin may bear an **ADDED MINTMARK** when that mint's coins are at a premium. If the Philadelphia Mint issue is worth more than its branch mint counterparts, the coin may have a **REMOVED MINTMARK**.



*This struck counterfeit 1916 S \$5 gold piece is identified as not genuine by its "S" mint mark, seen below, which is the wrong shape and in the wrong position.*



## ALTERED SURFACES

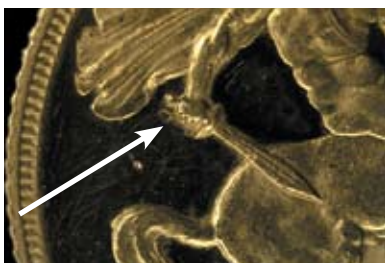
A coin that has been treated in some way that changes its general appearance is said to have **ALTERED SURFACES**. A coin's surfaces can be altered in many ways, but some of the more common methods include whizzing and polishing, and adding "fill in" substances to hide defects.

A **WHIZZED** coin is one whose surfaces have been treated with a rapidly rotating wire wheel in order to make the coin appear to be brilliant uncirculated. A **POLISHED** coin could be buffed by hand or machine, while a **BURNISHED** one is buffed by hand. In either case, it is often performed in an attempt to remove surface imperfections that could lower the coin's grade.

**LACQUER** is a clear chemical that is sometimes applied to the surface of the coin to protect it. Over time, however, this coating can crack, flake and discolor, giving the coin an undesirable appearance. In the past, countries lacquered coins at the mint before shipping. Therefore, this process can occur at the mint or afterwards.



*Upon closer examination, the altered surfaces of this 1887 Sovereign are revealed. Note the artificial "frosting" added on the coin's devices to enhance its cameo appearance but which have spilled over into the fields.*



## MINT-MADE FLAWS

Coins are sometimes flawed as made. NGC, as a general rule, will not grade coins having minor flaws such as rim clips or laminations. Major mint errors like off-centers and wrong planchets are graded under NGC's regular tiers as "Mint Error" coins.

**PLANCHET FLAWS** are the most common mint-made defects that can result in a No Grade designation. One of the most common is called a lamination (a separation of the metal). **RIM FLAWS** are typically due to errors in the planchet milling process, such as a **CLIPPED PLANCHET**, and may also be cause for a No Grade return.

NGC will also not grade coins that have a small part of the design missing, resulting in an **ILLEGIBLE DATE** or **ILLEGIBLE MINTMARK**. Such missing details are typically due to the dies being excessively worn or filled with grease. Major missing details due to filled dies that affect a large portion of the coin are graded under NGC's regular tiers as "Mint Error" coins.



*As a general rule, NGC will not certify coins with minor flaws such as rim clips or, in this case, lamination.*



## NON-ELIGIBLE TYPES

**N**GC lists within its Service Guide the categories of coins, tokens, and medals that it will certify. While these include nearly all coins of the United States, a wide range of World issues and a few specific types of tokens and medals, *certain types and periods are excluded*. Such items are designated **NON-ELIGIBLE TYPE**.

To be certain that your coins, tokens, and medals are eligible, check the NGC Service Guide or the NGC Web site at **www.NGCcoin.com** for a *current* list of eligible types and dates before submitting.



*Coins such as this Silver Round are not eligible for NGC certification.*





## PROFESSIONAL CONSERVATION & DETAILS GRADING FOR “NO GRADES”

Some of the No Grade designations described in this booklet are of a nature that no corrective measure can be taken that will allow the coin to be certified as a non-“problem coin.” With proper professional conservation, however, some types of “no grades” or “problem coins” can reach a state that would allow for certification. Some examples of the No Grade designations that can often be corrected with professional conservation are PVC, Artificial Toning, Dip Residue, Glue Residue, Residue, as well as a few others.

It is imperative that any attempt at coin conservation be performed by an experienced professional ONLY. As we’ve described in these pages, amateur or even inexpert conservation often causes greater damage. Many hundreds of thousands of pristine and desirable coins have been damaged when an expert’s touch would have both resolved any problems and protected the coin’s collectible value.

In cases when a detrimental surface condition cannot be remedied by professional conservation and made suitable for non-“problem coin” certification, the coin may still be suitable for certification as a problem coin by a company that specializes in such types of material. Problem coin grading, consisting of a details grade and description of the problem, is available through NCS, an affiliate of NGC.

To learn more about professional conservation or the certification of “problem coins,” we encourage you to consult Numismatic Conservation Services, LLC (NCS) for a recommendation on how to have your coins properly conserved or graded. Please see the NCS contact information on the last page.





# Questions about “No Grade” coins?



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# NUMISMATIC CONSERVATION SERVICES

**N**umismatic Conservation Services is devoted to the preservation of our rich numismatic heritage for future generations. Whether it is a single coin or an entire collection, NCS provides expert, professional conservation services for dealers and collectors. Our commitment is to you and your coins. Our pledge is integrity, impartiality, responsibility, and customer service. All of our efforts are performed with a commitment to the betterment of numismatics and to the expansion and enrichment of the hobby.

NCS provides conservation services for all U.S. and World coins, medals and tokens. For an NCS Authorized Dealer Application and Agreement, or for more information, please contact us directly. **NCS DOES NOT PERFORM REPAIRS OR MECHANICAL ALTERATIONS OF ANY KIND.**



*Before professional conservation*

*After professional conservation*



*Photos shown are of actual results*



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