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Cataloging Watches, Jewelry, and Hallmarks Online — A Plain-English Guide

Read the tiny marks, record what you own, and know when to get it appraised

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

1 The 60-Second Version

The whole idea in a minute.

Jewelry and watches usually carry tiny stamped marks. The most useful is the purity mark — a number like 925 (sterling silver) or 750, 585, and 375 (18-karat, 14-karat, and 9-karat gold). A separate maker's mark may name who made it. With a magnifier and an online hallmark database you can decode most marks, record each piece in a simple catalog with photos, and know what you have — then take anything you believe is valuable to a professional for a real appraisal.

- Numbers like 925, 750, 585, and 375 tell you the metal and its purity.
- A maker's mark is a different stamp that identifies the maker.
- Hallmarks alone do not prove value or authenticity — appraise valuable pieces.

GOOD TO KNOW

Reading hallmarks is a lovely, almost detective-like hobby in itself. But it is for understanding and cataloging — when real money is at stake, a stamp is a clue, and a professional appraiser is the answer.

WHY BOTHER

2 Why Read the Marks and Catalog at All

Understanding, insurance, and family.

There are three good reasons to learn the marks and keep a record. The first is simple understanding and enjoyment — it is genuinely satisfying to pick up a piece and know it is solid 14-karat gold rather than plated, or to trace a maker's mark to a name. The second is insurance: a documented list with photos and values is what an insurer needs to cover your pieces properly, and what you would need to make a claim after a loss or theft.

The third reason is the one most people come to appreciate most — your family. Jewelry and watches often pass to people who have no idea which pieces are

precious and which are costume, and without a record a drawer of genuinely valuable gold and silver can be sold for a pittance, or kept as trinkets, or lost. A catalog that says what each piece is, what its marks mean, and roughly what it is worth turns a confusing jumble into something your heirs can understand and honor.

The marks turn mystery into knowledge, and a catalog passes that knowledge on — so a lifetime's jewelry is understood, not guessed at, by whoever comes after you.

PURITY MARKS

3 Purity Marks: What the Metal Is

The most useful stamp.

The purity mark tells you what a piece is made of, usually as a number giving the metal content in parts per thousand. These are the handful worth committing to memory, because they appear again and again and tell you the single most important thing about a piece — what it actually is.

Mark	Means
925	Sterling silver (92.5% silver)
800	An older, common European silver standard
750	18-karat gold
585	14-karat gold
375	9-karat gold
PLAT / 950	Platinum

You may also see words instead of numbers — 'STERLING' stamped on American silver, or '14K' spelled out on gold. These mean the same thing as the numbers and are simply a different regional style of marking. Once you recognize that a small '585' and a small '14K' are saying the identical thing, a great deal of the mystery in a

jewelry box clears up at once.

BEWARE PLATING

4 Telling Solid From Plated

The mark that changes everything.

A purity number is not the whole story, because some marks indicate the piece is only plated — a thin layer of precious metal over a cheaper base. Mistaking plated for solid is the most common and costly misread, and it is exactly the sort of error that leads families to sell real gold cheaply or to insure costume jewelry as if it were solid.

- 'GF' means gold-filled, and 'HGP' or similar means heavily gold-plated — both are plated, not solid gold.
- 'Vermeil' means sterling silver with a gold plating over it.
- A plain number like 925 or 750 with no plating letters usually indicates solid metal of that purity.
- Words like 'plate' or 'EP' (electroplate) on silver mean plated, not sterling.

The key habit is to read the whole mark, not just the number. A stamp reading '14K GF' is gold-filled — plated — and worth a small fraction of what solid 14-karat gold would be, yet the '14K' alone can fool a hopeful eye. The letters after the number are where the real value is decided, so slow down and read them before concluding you have found treasure or junk.

WATCH OUT

A stamp reading 14K GF is gold-filled, not solid 14-karat gold, and is worth a small fraction as much. Always read the whole mark — the letters after the number are where the real value is decided.

MAKER AND DATE

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Maker's Marks, Assay, and Date Marks

Who, where, and when.

Beyond purity, pieces often carry other small marks that identify the maker and, in some countries, where and when the piece was tested and stamped. These are what let a curious owner trace a piece's origins, and what can sometimes turn an ordinary-seeming item into something of real collector interest.

- The maker's mark: initials or a small symbol identifying the maker or sponsor, separate from the metal mark.
- The assay mark: in Britain and elsewhere, a symbol showing which office tested the metal.
- The date letter: a single letter indicating the year, used in formal British hallmarking.
- A full British hallmark often shows several of these little marks together in a row.

National traditions differ, and knowing which you are looking at helps. A British piece may carry a whole row of marks — maker, metal, assay office, and a date letter — that together can date the piece to a particular year. An American piece might simply read 'STERLING' and a maker's name. Neither is more genuine than the other; they are different national systems, and a little reading about the one that applies to your pieces makes the marks much easier to decode.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

LOOKING CLOSELY

6 Finding and Seeing the Marks

They are tiny — look carefully.

Hallmarks are small, often worn, and tucked in out-of-the-way places, so the first challenge is simply seeing them clearly. A little care and a magnifier turn a frustrating squint into an easy read.

1. Work in good, bright light — daylight near a window is ideal.
2. Use a magnifier or a jeweler's loupe; a phone camera's zoom can help too.
3. Look in the usual hiding spots: the inside of a ring band, the clasp of a necklace or bracelet, the back of a pendant or watch case.
4. Clean the spot gently so dirt is not hiding or obscuring a mark.
5. Photograph the mark up close so you can study and decode it without re-handling the piece.

> **TIP**
>
> Your phone can be a surprisingly good loupe: take a close-up photo of the mark and then zoom in on the picture. It is often easier to read an enlarged photo than to squint at the tiny stamp itself.

DECODE ONLINE

7 Decoding a Mark Online

Turning a stamp into an answer.

When you find a mark you do not recognize, online resources can help identify it. The trick is to photograph it clearly, note its shape and any letters or symbols, and then search patiently through hallmark databases and reference material.

1. Use a magnifier and good light to see the mark clearly; photograph it close up.
2. Note the shape of the mark and any letters, numbers, or symbols within it.
3. Search a hallmark database or reference site for the purity and the maker's mark.

4. Cross-check with a standard reference such as a well-known guide to gold and silver marks for maker initials.
5. Record what you find — and what remains uncertain — in your catalog.

WATCH OUT

Several dealers offer free 'identify from a photo' services. They can be a helpful starting point, but remember they are commercial — a shop hoping to buy has an interest in a low valuation. Treat their read as one opinion, not the final word.

CATALOGING

8 Keeping a Catalog of Your Pieces

A record worth having.

With the marks read, record each piece so you have a documented collection. A simple spreadsheet or a notebook is plenty — the point is to capture, for each piece, what it is, what its marks say, how you came by it, and a photo. That record is what serves you for insurance and your family for inheritance.

- For each piece, note the type, metal and purity, maker if known, and any date.
- Record how you acquired it and any family history — the story matters to heirs.
- Photograph the whole piece and a close-up of the marks against a plain background.
- Note any professional appraisal and its value, and keep the appraisal document with the record.

The family story is worth capturing alongside the facts. 'Grandmother's engagement ring, 18-karat, from the 1940s' means far more to the next generation than a bare line of specifications, and it helps them understand which pieces carry sentiment as well as value. A catalog that blends the hard facts with the human history is a genuine heirloom in its own right.

WHEN TO APPRAISE

9 Knowing When to Get an Appraisal

Where the hobby meets real money.

Reading marks and keeping a catalog is a wonderful thing to do yourself, but it has a clear limit: it tells you what a piece is made of, not precisely what it is worth. The moment real money is in question — a piece you suspect is a fine antique, a substantial diamond, a collectible watch — the stamp is only a clue, and a qualified professional is the answer.

- Get a professional appraisal for anything you believe is genuinely valuable.
- Use a reputable, independent appraiser rather than relying on a buyer's offer.
- Appraisals matter for insurance, for fair sale, and for dividing an estate fairly.
- Keep the written appraisal with your catalog, and update it periodically as values change.

Hallmarks also cannot by themselves prove a piece is authentic — marks can be faked, and genuine marks can appear on altered pieces — so for high-value items, authentication and valuation are jobs for an expert with the piece in hand. Think of your own mark-reading as the first, enjoyable step that tells you which pieces are worth taking that further professional step for.

WATCH OUT

Hallmarks alone are not proof of authenticity or value. For a piece that might be worth real money, a professional appraisal — not a stamp and a hopeful guess — is what you rely on.

PROTECT IT

10

Protecting the Record and the Pieces

Safe, backed up, and findable.

Finally, make sure both your catalog and your valuable pieces are kept safely, and that your family knows the record exists. A beautiful catalog helps no one if it is lost in a house fire alongside the jewelry, or trapped on a device no one else can open.

1. Back up your catalog and photos — in the cloud, or on a second drive kept elsewhere.
2. Keep a copy of the record separate from where the jewelry is stored.
3. Consider a safe or a safe-deposit box for the most valuable pieces.
4. Tell a trusted family member that the catalog and appraisals exist and where to find them.
5. Review your insurance against the catalog so valuable pieces are properly covered.

A little thought here protects everything else you have done. Storing the catalog apart from the jewelry means a single theft or fire cannot erase both the pieces and the proof of what they were. And a quiet word to a family member — this is where the jewelry catalog lives, and here are the appraisals — ensures that your careful work actually reaches the people it was meant to help, when the time comes.

Reading hallmarks and keeping this kind of record is, in the end, a quietly rewarding thing in its own right. It deepens your appreciation of pieces you may have worn for decades without ever really knowing what they were, and it leaves behind a clear, caring record for the next generation. Few small projects give back so much understanding for so little effort, and the drawer of mystery becomes a documented collection you can be proud of.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this page handy. It points you straight to what to do for each task.

I want to…	Do this
Purity numbers	925 is sterling silver; 750, 585, 375 are 18k, 14k, 9k gold
The maker's mark	A separate stamp naming the maker, not the metal
Look closely	Use good light and a magnifier — the marks are tiny
Decode online	Hallmark databases and reference books match unfamiliar marks
Beware plating	GF, HGP, or vermeil means plated, not solid
Get appraised	For anything you think is valuable, see a professional
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

AT A GLANCE

A Picture to Follow Along

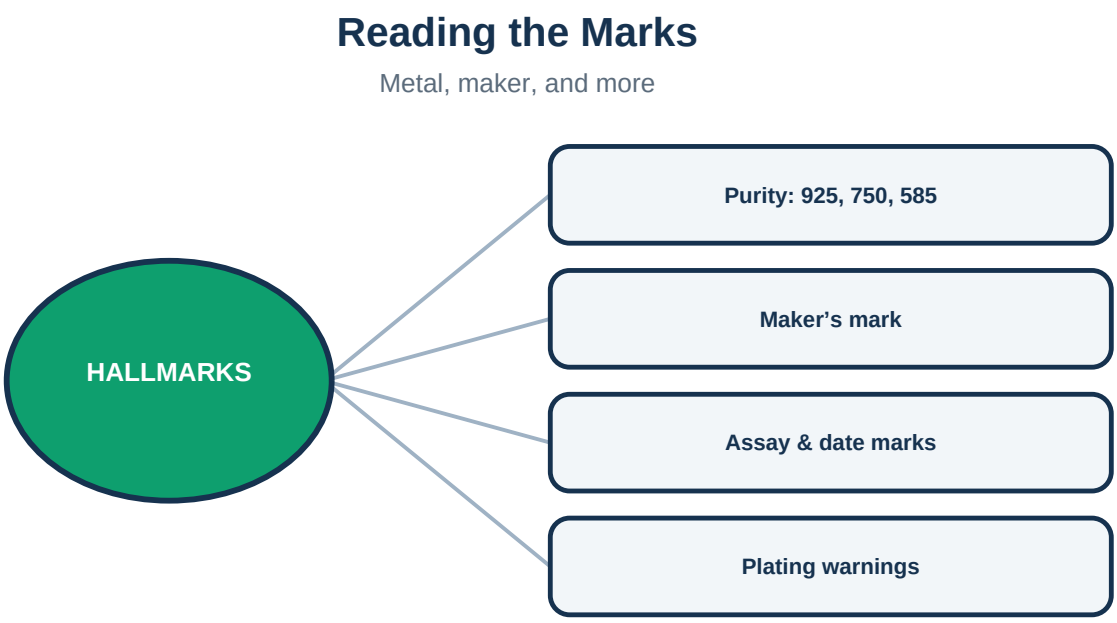


Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

A Second Look

From Mark to Catalog

A careful path

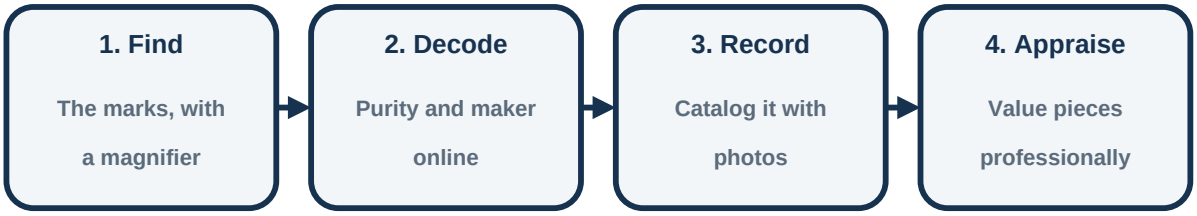


Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.

A schematic of the plan — company steps vary; the order does not have to.

BEFORE YOU GO

A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill. I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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