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# Reading a Graded Coin Slab — Label & Barcode Explained

*What the label and barcode tell you — and how to verify it's real*

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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# What's Inside

*Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.*

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THE 60-SECOND VERSION

# 1 The 60-Second Version

*The whole label in a breath.*

A graded coin slab is a sealed plastic holder with a label that tells you four things: what the coin is (its date, mint mark and type), how good its condition is (a grade from 1 to 70, where higher is better), who graded it (the service's name and seal — the big two are PCGS and NGC), and a unique certification number with a matching barcode.

That certification number is the key to everything, because you can enter it on the grading service's website — PCGS.com or NGCcoin.com — or scan the barcode with their free app, and see the official record for that exact coin. If the record matches the slab in every way — grade, coin, often a photo — you can trust it.

If it does not match, or the seller will not share the number, be very cautious, because counterfeit slabs do exist. Reading and verifying the label is how you buy, sell or inherit these coins with real confidence.

- The label tells you: the coin, the grade (1-70), the service, and a cert number.
- The certification number is the key — it ties the coin to official records.
- Verify by entering the number on PCGS.com or NGCcoin.com, or scanning the barcode.
- If the online record doesn't match the slab, be suspicious — fakes exist.

WHAT IT IS

# 2 What a Slab Actually Is

*Why coins get sealed in plastic.*

A 'slab' is the nickname for the tamper-resistant plastic holder that a professional grading service seals a coin into after examining it. The point is twofold: it protects the coin from handling and the air, and — more importantly — it certifies, on the record, that experts looked at this coin, judged it genuine, and assigned it a grade. A coin in a slab is a coin whose authenticity and condition someone reputable has vouched for.

Two companies dominate this world and are the ones most trusted: PCGS (the Professional Coin Grading Service) and NGC (Numismatic Guaranty Company). There are others, but these two set the standard, and a coin in one of their holders carries weight in the market. The label on top is where they record what they found — and the subject of this whole guide.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The grade a coin gets is not just a formality — it can swing the value enormously, as a small difference in condition can mean a large difference in price. That is exactly why slabs exist, and why being able to read and verify the label matters so much when money is involved.

THE IDENTITY

## 3 Reading What the Coin Is

*The plain description part of the label.*

The first thing the label tells you is simply what the coin is — its identity — written out in the hobby's shorthand. Once you know the pieces, it reads easily.

- The year the coin was made, right on the label.
- The mint mark — a small letter telling you which U.S. Mint struck it (for example D for Denver, S for San Francisco).
- The type or series — the coin's name, like 'Morgan Dollar' or 'Lincoln Cent.'
- The denomination — what the coin was worth as money, like one cent or one dollar.
- Sometimes a variety — a note about a specific known version, which can matter a great deal to collectors.

Together these pin down exactly which coin you are looking at, which matters because value depends heavily on the precise date, mint and variety. Two coins that look alike to the eye can be worth wildly different amounts because of a mint mark or a variety noted on the label.

**TIP**

If a variety is noted on the label, pay attention — varieties (special or error versions) can be worth far more than the ordinary coin, and the grading service noting one is a meaningful part of what you are paying for.

THE GRADE

## 4 The 1-to-70 Grade Scale

*The number that drives the value.*

The grade is the heart of the label, and it is a number from 1 to 70. The scale runs from a coin barely identifiable through to a perfect, flawless example, with higher always meaning better condition. A well-circulated coin might grade in the teens or twenties; a coin that never circulated ('mint state') grades from 60 up to a perfect 70.

| Grade range | Roughly means | Condition |
|---|---|---|
| 1 to about 58 | Circulated — it saw use and wear | From barely readable up to lightly worn |
| 60 to 70 | Mint State — never circulated | From a worn-free coin up to flawless 70 |
| Letters before the number | A prefix like MS (Mint State) or PR (Proof) | Describes the kind of coin |
| Letters after the number | A designation, like a special strike or color | A bonus quality note |

You will usually see letters alongside the number. A prefix such as 'MS' means Mint State (an uncirculated coin), and 'PR' or 'PF' means a proof (a special collector strike). Letters after the number are designations that note an extra quality. You do not need to memorize them all — just know that the number is the condition, higher is better, and the letters add context.

**WATCH OUT**

A one- or two-point difference in grade can mean a large difference in price, especially at the high end. That is precisely why counterfeiters alter labels to show a higher grade than the coin earned — and why verifying the number, covered next, matters so much.

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.

**THE KEY**

# 5 The Certification Number and Barcode

*The unique fingerprint that lets you check.*

Every graded coin gets a unique certification number — the 'cert number' — printed on the label, usually with a matching barcode. This is the single most powerful thing on the slab, because it ties this specific coin to the grading service's own database. It is the coin's fingerprint, and it is how you confirm the whole label is honest.

Each service formats its number its own way. A PCGS certification number carries a sequence number and the grade together, with the unique cert digits after a slash. An NGC number identifies the submission and the coin's place in it. You do not need to decode the parts — you just need the number itself, because the website and the app do the decoding for you.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

The barcode is simply the cert number in a form a camera can read. Scanning it with the grading service's app is the fastest way to pull up the record — no typing, no transcription errors. For older slabs without a barcode, you type the number instead (and some apps can even read the printed number with the camera).

VERIFYING

## 6 How to Verify the Coin

*The step that turns trust into certainty.*

Here is the step that separates confident buyers from hopeful ones. Both major services let you look up any coin by its certification number and see the official record — free, in seconds. Do this before you buy, and before you trust any slab you are handed.

1. Find the certification number on the label (and the barcode, if there is one).
2. Go to the grading service's website — PCGS.com or NGCcoin.com — and find its 'Verify' or certification-lookup page.
3. Enter the cert number (or scan the barcode with the service's free phone app), and open the record.
4. Compare the record to the slab in your hand: the coin, the date and mint, the grade, and — where the service provides it — the photograph of that exact coin.
5. If everything matches, you can trust it. If anything differs, stop and investigate before parting with any money.

**WATCH OUT**

A red flag worth taking seriously: if the online record shows a different grade, a different coin, or a photo that does not match the slab in your hand, something is wrong. Genuine records match their slabs exactly. A mismatch means a fake label, a swapped coin, or worse — walk away.

THE FAKES

## 7 Spotting a Counterfeit Slab

*Because sadly, they're out there.*

Counterfeit slabs are a real problem, and it helps to know the common tricks so you are not caught out. The good news is that verification defeats most of them — but knowing the patterns sharpens your eye.

- A genuine coin in a fake holder with an inflated grade on the label — the coin is real but graded far higher than it deserves.
- A genuine-looking holder with a cert number that does not exist in the database, or that belongs to a different coin.
- A counterfeit coin inside a counterfeit slab, trading on the slab's air of authority.
- A seller who will not share the certification number or barcode, or rushes you past checking it.

The thread through all of these is that the verification step catches them. A fake cert number will not look up; a real number attached to the wrong coin will show a mismatch; a seller dodging the number is telling you something. This is exactly why 'verify before you trust' is the single most important habit with graded coins — the label can be faked, but the official record it points to cannot be, as long as you actually check it.

> **TIP**
>
> When buying online, insist on seeing the certification number or the barcode before you commit, and verify it yourself. A legitimate seller will share it without hesitation; reluctance to do so is a reason to pass.

QUESTIONS

## 8 Plain Questions and Answers

*The things people ask most.*

### "I inherited some slabbed coins. How do I know what they are?"

Read each label for the coin's identity and grade, then verify the cert number on the grading service's site to confirm it is genuine and see the official record. That tells you exactly what you have. For value, remember that the grade matters enormously, and check recent sold prices — or ask a reputable dealer.

### "Should I break a coin out of its slab?"

Almost never. The slab protects the coin and carries its certification; breaking it out destroys that and can harm the coin. The grading and the sealed holder are a large

part of what gives the coin its established value. Leave it sealed.

### "The cert number won't look up. What does that mean?"

It is a serious warning sign. A genuine graded coin's number will be in the service's database. If it does not appear, the slab may be counterfeit or the number mis-read — double-check your typing, and if it still fails, do not trust the slab or buy the coin.

### "Are PCGS and NGC the only ones that count?"

They are the two most trusted and carry the most weight in the market, which is why most serious slabs are theirs. Other services exist, and some are reputable, but coins in lesser-known holders are treated more cautiously by buyers. When in doubt, the big two are the safe ground.

**WRAP UP**

## 9 A Label You Can Trust — If You Check

*Read it, then verify it.*

A graded coin slab stops being intimidating the moment you know what its label is telling you: what the coin is, how good it is on the 1-to-70 scale, who graded it, and a certification number that lets you check the whole thing against the official record. That verification step is the heart of it — enter the number on PCGS.com or NGCcoin.com, or scan the barcode with the app, and make sure the record matches the slab in every detail.

Do that and you can buy, sell or inherit these coins with real confidence; skip it and you are trusting a label that, sadly, can be faked. Read the label, then verify it — that simple habit is what turns a wall of codes into certainty.

- The label gives the coin, the grade (1-70), the service, and a cert number.
- Higher grades mean better condition — and can mean much higher value.
- Verify the cert number at PCGS.com or NGCcoin.com, or scan the barcode.
- The online record must match the slab exactly — a mismatch is a red flag.
- Never trust a seller who won't share the certification number.

**GOOD TO KNOW**

If you have inherited a box of slabbed coins, or are thinking of buying or selling, I am glad to sit down and go through them with you — reading each label, verifying the cert numbers on the grading sites, and making sure what you have is genuine before any money changes hands. It is a satisfying afternoon, and it can save real money.

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... |
|---|---|
| Read the coin's identity | The label names the date, mint, and type of coin |
| Read the grade | A number from 1 to 70 — higher is better condition |
| Find the cert number | The unique number that ties the coin to the records |
| Verify it online | Enter the cert number at PCGS.com or NGCcoin.com |
| Scan the barcode | The grading service's app reads it and shows the record |
| Spot a fake | If the lookup doesn't match the slab exactly, be suspicious |
| Get help | Call Bill: (330) 200-8042 |

AT A GLANCE

# A Picture to Follow Along

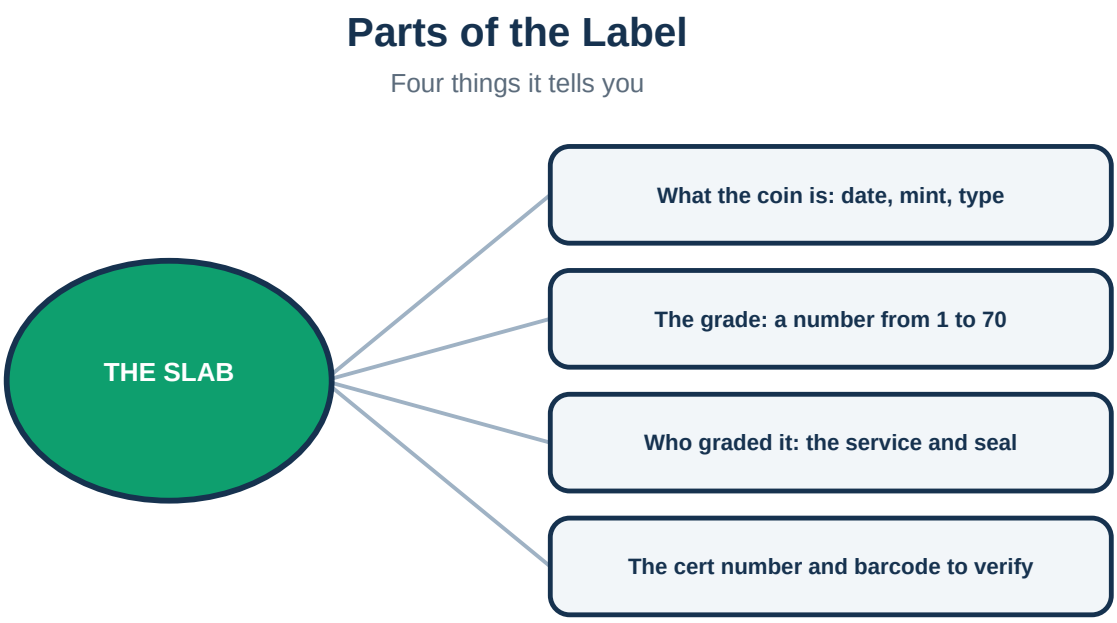



Illustration — a schematic. Set-up screens differ; each takes only a few minutes.

AT A GLANCE

# A Second Look

## Reading and Checking

Four steps

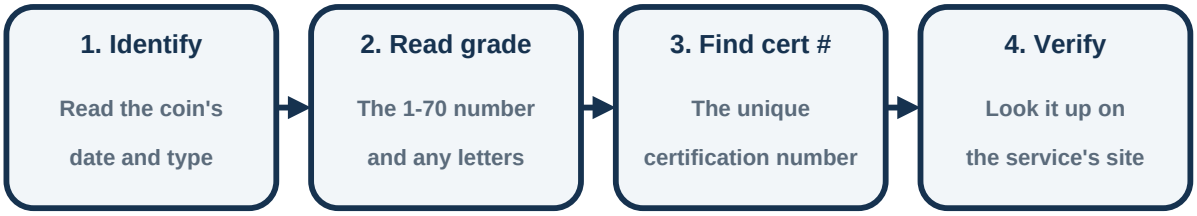



**Illustration — a schematic. The order is a suggestion; do one box at a time.**

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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