

# MAKING THE GRADE:

## How to Grade Movie Posters and Related Memorabilia

A 10-Point System for Grading Movie Posters

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Collecting original movie posters and related memorabilia is gaining popularity in the United States and worldwide. The movie memorabilia areas on eBay are among their most popular, and a recent traffic report on Amazon.com showed that movie posters and related memorabilia was their #2 most popular area (behind Pokemon).

As coin and stamp collecting matured as a hobby, non-partial third party grading services formed whose purpose was to accurately grade and certify these items. Indeed, even sports cards and comic books now have third party grading services. Dealers and collectors in these fields report that selling a rare non-certified baseball card or comic book is becoming a nearly-impossible task. Many collectors in these hobbies seek to have their collections certified by these grading services. This certification is what creates a liquid market for "sight unseen" collectibles, with the certified grade being a sort of insurance policy or guarantee of authenticity and condition.

All of these services are based on some version of a 10-point scale. An item rated as a 10 is the highest degree of perfection, often called Mint, and an item rated as a 1 is in horrible condition, virtually worthless except for extremely rare items.

**I believe** someday all collectibles will be graded using a 10-point rating scale, and that this universality will be a factor in making collectibles a recognized investment like stocks and bonds. Grading services will exist for every collectible hobby, and these grading services will enable a liquid marketplace for massive trading in collectibles of all kinds. Collectors will view their collection "portfolio" as a source for retirement income in the same way that stock investors do today. EBay will be the "NASDAQ" for the

liquidation of these collectible investments. This isn't a great insight on my part, it is already happening in a small way, and I believe it is just beginning.

Until the introduction of our 10-point system, the movie poster marketplace suffered from a lack of a standardized system for ranking of condition. Each movie poster merchant more or less "invented" their own system, with one seller's "Fine" equal to another seller's "Condition B" and yet another's "Excellent." In our opinion, lack of grading consistency among merchants is a major obstacle to growth in our hobby. Why? Because buyers feel more secure with "sight unseen" internet buying when they are familiar with a consistent grading system. New collectors in any hobby become advanced collectors through knowledge, including knowledge of terminology. Without such a set of grading terms and definitions, buyers may feel confused and uncertain about the quality of items they are buying over the internet or through the mail. Confusion and uncertainty are not good for the growth of any hobby.

Our 10-point scale for rating movie posters is similar to systems already adopted in other hobbies such as coins, comic books, and sports cards. By using a set of standardized grading terms, we can ensure the growth of the movie memorabilia hobby now and in the future.

I welcome your feedback. Please e-mail me with comments and suggestions. My e-mail address is [jon@2ndmarkets.com](mailto:jon@2ndmarkets.com)

I have outlined the various grades, and described the specifications for each. These grading definitions are intended to help you rate the condition of your posters. As in any collectible, the better the condition of an item, the more valuable it is.

## ***THE ART OF DESCRIPTION***

When grading items, one should remember the goal: to paint an accurate picture in the mind of the potential buyer of what to expect upon receipt of the item. Of course, a picture is worth a thousand words, and often a seller can include high-quality images to help describe the poster, but too frequently an image does not clearly show all flaws. This is when a good grading description becomes invaluable. The buyer relies on the seller's honesty and accuracy in disclosure. It is therefore incumbent upon the seller to do the best job possible.

This being said, writing grade descriptions is more of an art than a science. One can be too brief, or too comprehensive, with equally bad effect. If too brief, the reader has an eerie feeling of uncertainty which causes a decision not to buy. Too much detail, and the opposite can happen: the buyer imagines the accumulation of flaws in the description of every tiny flaw and pictures an item that is in horrible shape, when truly this is not the case. Particularly in the higher grades, all flaws should be described (C8 or higher) in detail. Any obtrusive flaws should always be described, regardless of the grade.

It is our opinion that the buyer must be satisfied with the condition of the item upon receipt. If not, the seller must be willing to give a refund to the buyer upon return of the item in the same condition as when sent. This follows generally accepted policies in other mail-order retail activities. If you order a gadget from Sharper Image, are unhappy with it upon receipt, you have the right to return it for a no-questions-asked refund. This is as it should be in our hobby as well. We should follow the "customer is always right" rule.

Buyers are human too, of course, and are subject to the limitations of our species. In the course of your selling, you will encounter buyers who are "return prone" and who never seem to be happy with a description, no matter how detailed. You are under no obligation to sell to these people; and, once you have identified them you are within your rights to ask them to never purchase another item from you.

### *MINT 10.0      (M 10.0)      (C10)*

An extremely rare grade for all but the most recent items. Item is "as new" or in the same condition as the day it was made.

*The C10 grade represents an extremely rare state of preservation and should NOT be used unless the item is absolutely perfect!*

The item exhibits an amazing state of preservation with virtually no perceptible flaws of any kind, other than very minor flaws which may have occurred during the printing process.

Printing registration should be perfect. In many cases an otherwise "mint" poster may have printing flaws in the registration, or alignment, of colors causing one color to stand slightly offset from the others. This should be almost imperceptible otherwise reduce the grade to C9.

The folding/trimming process should not have resulted in any damage to the item of any kind. Sometimes a poster may have slight fold lines which occurred when the poster was put through the folding machine. If the fold line broke the ink, causing a faint white line, the item should not be graded C10.

No edge fraying or dents/impressions are allowed in this grade.

## ***NEAR MINT 9.0 (NM 9.0) (C9)***

Item may be in "never-used" condition or may have been used in the theater, but was carefully preserved after use. The poster should appear to be in absolutely superb, unusually excellent condition. Older posters in this condition are extremely rare.

The following flaws are acceptable in this grade, but should be described:

- One tiny pinhole in each corner, or a maximum of 4 pinholes
- Slightly offset color registration
- Very slight compression marks (indentations) from movie theater use (IE: Clamped in a display)
- No fold wear or if fold wear is apparent it should be almost invisible. Fold lines should not be white. All original color must be present.

The following flaws are NOT acceptable in this grade:

- Creases, except fold creases occurring at the time of manufacture
- Tape or tape stain residue
- Minor holes
- Writing, (marker pen, biro etc.) on the front of the poster
- Foxing (light brownish spots that look almost rusty)
- Dampness staining
- Paint staining
- Soiling, i.e. mildew or dustiness
- Minor Fading
- Minor Paper loss (very small piece missing)
- Censor stamp/sticker
- Border chips
- Staple marks

## ***VERY FINE TO NEAR MINT (VFNM 8.5) (C8.5)***

The observer should note that all of the above variables (from the C9 description) also apply to the C8.5 grade, so we won't repeat them here. The accumulation of flaws push the item to this lower transition grade.

## ***VERY FINE 8.0 (VF 8.0) (C8)***

Item may be in "never-used" condition or may have been used in the theater, but was carefully preserved after use.

If a C9 is almost like new, then a C8 is not as nearly perfect but still quite excellent.

Poster should be bright, supple, and clean.

An accumulation of more than two or three of the following flaws should cause the grader to assign a lower classification.

The following flaws are acceptable in this grade, but should be described:

- Tiny pinholes, up to a total of 10
- A border crease or corner crease, but should be a small one, and not more than one or two very small ones. Small is defined as less than one inch.
- Slightly offset color registration
- Very slight compression marks (indentations) from movie theater use (IE: Clamped in a display)
- Very slight fold wear, resulting in slight color loss at the folds; but, if the fold wear is such that a distracting white line results, then the item would not qualify for a C8 rating.
- One very small tape stain can be permitted but NO TAPE.
- Minor tears are allowed in this grade, but they should be MINOR, meaning less than 1/2 inch or 1 cm in length, and not more than two total tears on the item. Common areas for tears on posters are at the folds, especially the interior folds where the item may have been unfolded and then refolded. This kind of minor paper separation (tear) is common and is acceptable in a C8 grade notwithstanding other extenuating circumstances.
- Very slight edge or fold wrinkling or fraying is acceptable
- Writing, (pencil, light pen) on the front of the poster if it is very small and in an unobtrusive area (a mustache pencilled on Bogart's face would not qualify). Window cards may have writing in the appropriate area.

- Writing on the back of the poster which DOES NOT BLEED THROUGH is acceptable in this grade.
- Foxing (light brownish spots that look almost rusty) must be mentioned and is permissible only if very slight.
- Dampness staining can be permitted if it is a very small stain and is described.
- Very slight soiling, i.e. mildew or dustiness
- Censor stamp/sticker if it is very small and only if in an unobtrusive area of the item.
- A small border chip can be present if it is less than 1/2 inch square and is described in detail
- Staple marks if they are very slight and clean, not torn.

The following flaws are NOT acceptable in this grade:

- Tape
- Punch holes
- Heavy writing, (marker pen, biro etc.) on the front of the poster. The exception to this rule is window cards, which had a blank area at the top of the poster for writing show dates and which may have show dates written in heavy grease pencil and still quality for the C8 grade.
- Heavy writing, (marker pen, biro etc.) on the back of the poster which bleeds through
- Paint staining
- Heavy soiling, or dingy dirtiness
- Severe Fading
- Large Paper loss (one or more large pieces missing)
- Very large (more than 4" by 4") censor stamps or stickers
- Multiple Border chips
- Heavy and torn staple marks

### ***FINE TO VERY FINE 7.0 (FVF 7.0) (C7)***

A nicely preserved item. An item in this grade has many of the same flaws as the higher C8 grade, but, because of a greater accumulation of flaws, can not be assigned the higher classification.

Whereas a C8 grade may only have two or three of the above flaws, a C7 may have 7 or 8 of them.

The following flaws are to be expected in this grade:

- Pinholes or staple holes
- Tape
- Creases
- Fold wear, resulting in slight color loss along the fold lines
- Fold holes: one or two very small ones
- Very minor fading
- Heavy writing, (marker pen, biro etc.) on the front of the poster. The exception to this rule is window cards, which had a blank area at the top of the poster for writing show dates and which may have show dates written in heavy grease pencil and still quality for the C8 grade.
- Writing, (marker pen, biro etc.) on the back of the poster which may slightly bleed through
- Minor dampness staining
- Minor soiling
- Paper loss (one or more pieces missing)
- Censor stamps or stickers
- Border chips

Please note that all of the above variables (from the C8 description) also apply to the C7 grade, so we won't repeat all of them here. Instead, we would like to make it clear to the reader that the C7 grade is a transition grade, still quite nice, but obviously used and unable to honestly be credited with the higher C8 grade because of an accumulation of flaws.

### ***FINE 6.0      (FN 6.0)      (C6)***

A Window Card with the top border trimmed away should not be rated higher than C6, even if in otherwise C10 condition.

Several pinholes in each corner of the poster, from being displayed, is acceptable in this grade. Pinholes may be present in background, artwork or typography areas.

Tears in this grade should be no longer than 1 inch to 2 inches in length, and totalling not more than four tears. Minor fold tears are acceptable but should be described.

Light creasing is allowed in 1 or more of the four corners and/or along 1 or more of the four borders. Creasing may affect background, artwork or typography areas but should be described as such.

Minor writing and/or marks, i.e. (marker pen, biro etc.) on the front of the poster, is allowed in this grade, however, such writing should be described. Writing on the back of the poster, which DOES NOT BLEED THROUGH, is acceptable in this grade but once again should be described.

Posters which have been folded may have fold wear in this grade. This is acceptable, providing the wear does not significantly affect the eye appeal of the image, and has not damaged any print on the poster.

Poster should be bright and supple.

Poster should be the correct measurement for its size, and show no signs of it having been trimmed on any of its borders.

Minor edge fraying or wrinkling is allowed in this grade but should be described as such.

Minor surface paper loss is allowed in this grade if documented in the description.

The following flaws are acceptable in this grade, but should be documented and described:

- Numerous, countless pinholes
- Border creases which may extend into the image area of the poster
- Tape or tape stain residue
- Minor holes
- Writing, (marker pen, biro etc.) on the front of the poster
- Foxing (light brownish spots that look almost rusty)
- Dampness staining
- Paint staining
- Soiling, i.e. mildew or dustiness
- Minor Fading
- Minor Paper loss (very small piece missing)
- Censor stamp/sticker
- Border chips
- Staple marks

Linen/Paper backing can improve or eliminate the faults mentioned above. Cost of restoration will depend on the skill of the restorer, as well as the number of defects that need to be repaired.



## ***VERY GOOD TO FINE 5.0 (VGFN 5.0) (C5)***

The observer should note that all of the above variables (from the C6 description) also apply to the C5 grade, so we won't repeat them here. The accumulation of flaws push the item to this lower transition grade.

## ***VERY GOOD 4.0 (VG 4.0) (C4)***

Poster will exhibit any or all of the following flaws, which seller may or may not describe in detail:

- Numerous pinholes
- Numerous creases
- Numerous tears which should be noted
- Heavy creasing in all four corners/four borders, as well as in the background, artwork and typography areas of the poster.
- Writing and/or marks, in marker pen and/or biro, on the front and back of the poster
- Writing in bigger letters/numbers, such as displaying show times and/or dates
- Posters which will have been folded will have heavy fold wear in this grade.
- Fold separations or tears located anywhere on the poster
- Severe edge fraying or wrinkling
- Several holes, of from 1 to 2 inches in diameter each
- Pieces of tape and/or tape stain residue
- Severe damp staining
- Soiling or other signs of aging
- Severe to moderate fading over most areas of the poster
- Paper loss and/or small to medium portions of paper missing
- Censor stamps/stickers
- Trimmed borders
- Brittleness of paper

The poster shows many signs of wear and tear. This grade is applied to the average used poster or lobby card.

## ***GOOD TO VERY GOOD 3.5 (GVG 3.5) (C3.5)***

The observer should note that all of the above variables (from the C4 description) also apply to the C3.5 grade. The accumulation of flaws push the item to this lower transition grade.

### **GOOD 3.0 (G 3.0) (C3)**

Countless pinholes all over of the poster, from being displayed, are expected in this grade. Pinholes may be scattered around borders, background, artwork and typography areas. Some/many of these pinholes may be larger and may have been ripped/torn when the poster was removed from display.

Tears in this grade are to be expected. Tears may have caused heavy surface paper loss.

Heavy creasing in all areas of the poster is normal in this grade.

Heavy writing and/or marks, in marker pen and/or biro, on the front of the poster, is expected in this grade. Heavy writing and/or marks may be over faces/bodies of actors/actresses, and may include defacement. Heavy writing and/or marks which bleed through from the back of the poster is expected in this grade. Heavy writing in bigger letters/numbers, such as displaying show times and/or dates on the poster will be found over any background/main artwork or typography areas.

Posters which will have been folded will exhibit heavy fold wear in this grade.

Any or all of the following flaws are normal for this grade:

- Severe fold separation, either on borders or interior fold lines (where the fold lines meet), with the separation being 2 inches or more in length. A heavy area of surface paper loss around these separations is normal.
- Heavy edge fraying or wrinkling.
- Holes of more than 1 inch in diameter. These holes could affect any area of the poster.
- Pieces of tape/tape stain residue, of more than 2 inches in length. These tape/tape stain residues may affect any area of the poster.
- Heavy foxing
- Heavy water staining over most or all of the poster
- Heavy paint staining over most or all of the poster
- Heavy soiling, i.e. mildew

- Severe fading over most or all of the poster
- Heavy paper surface loss and/or large portions of paper missing, affecting any area of the poster.
- Poster may have censor stamps/stickers, and these may affect any area of the poster.
- There may be complete fold separation, along all/most of 1, or more, vertical/horizontal fold lines, causing the poster to be in 1 or more pieces.
- Poster may have fragile, brittle paper, which may break and come apart, when opening/closing the poster. Careful handling will be needed.
- Paper loss from borders
- Staple marks
- Poster may have one or all four borders trimmed

### ***FAIR 2.0 (FR 2.0) (C2)***

An extremely worn and torn example, heavily used, not preserved.

### ***POOR 1.0 (P 1.0) (C1)***

Item will exhibit some or all of the defects described in C2, but to a greater degree. Only the rarest of items will have any value in this grade.

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