

# Grading Your Records

**By Tim Neely**

Originally published by Goldmine Magazine

---

Nothing is more important in determining the value of your records than their condition! Yes, rarity and demand matter, but a collector or dealer will pay much more for a record in Near Mint (NM) condition than in Very Good Minus (VG-) condition.

However, most people overestimate the condition of their discs. I've heard countless collectors say, "My records are all Mint!" Sure — and I've got some oceanfront property in Arizona to sell you.

## The Truth Behind the Grades

Most records, especially those from before the 1970s, are not in anything close to Mint or Near Mint condition. That's why collectors pay a premium for high-grade discs.

Very Good (VG) is the lowest grade many collectors will pay more than bargain-bin prices for — and some won't even do that. Lower-grade records are usually placeholders until better copies come along, unless the item is extremely rare.

LPs are often graded with two values: one for the vinyl, one for the cover. Goldmine simplifies this by listing a single averaged grade. For example, a VG cover and VG+ record averages to a VG+ value overall.

Grading is mostly visual — most dealers can't listen to every record. Scratches, warps, and wear are often visible, but things like groove wear can be subtle. Interestingly, older LPs (1950s–1971) often sound better than they look, while newer ones (to about 1989) tend to look better than they sound.

Grade under strong light and take all details into account. Mention issues like writing, stickers, seam splits, or promo status — even minor defects can be deal-breakers for some buyers.

The Goldmine grading guide is the most widely used vinyl grading standard. Conservative grading is best: underpromise and overdeliver.

## **Grading Scale (Best to Worst)**

### **Mint (M)**

Absolutely perfect. No defects whatsoever. Very rare. Use this grade only with extreme consensus.

### **Near Mint (NM or M-)**

Almost perfect. Looks unplayed. No markings or spindle wear. No ring wear, seam splits, or off-center pressings. Estimated only 2–4% of 1950s–60s records are truly NM.

### **Very Good Plus (VG+) or Excellent (E)**

Very close to NM with only minor flaws. Light scuffs or scratches that don't affect playback. Slight warp or ring wear okay. Minor signs of handling, slight center hole wear, or tiny seam splits allowed.

### **Very Good (VG)**

More pronounced flaws than VG+. Light surface noise or visible groove wear. Still playable and enjoyable. Obvious handling wear on the cover is expected. Often sell for 25% of NM value.

### **Good (G), Good Plus (G+), or Very Good Minus (VG-)**

Noticeable surface noise and heavy wear. Skips are rare but possible. Labels may be heavily worn or marked. Covers are often damaged or split. These grades bring 10–15% of NM value — only buy if rare or as placeholders.

## **Poor (P) and Fair (F)**

Records may be cracked, warped, or unplayable. Covers are usually trashed. These items usually have no value unless extremely rare.

## **Sealed Albums**

Sealed LPs can fetch higher prices but carry risks:

- May be re-sealed.
- May not be NM inside.
- May contain the wrong pressing or even the wrong record!