

Book Collecting 101: The Fundamentals

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RESOURCES

Reference books to own:

A Pocket Guide to the Identification of First Editions by Bill McBride

Points of Issue: A Compendium of Points of Issue of Books by 19th-20th Century Authors by Bill McBride

Helpful sites for identifying first editions:

https://www.qbbooks.com/first_ed_pub.php This is the site run by Allen Ahearn and Quill and Brush Books. Ahearn is an active bookseller and leading published authority on first editions. This is a very useful site.

<http://www.fedpo.com> This site notes in detail the important “issue points” for particular well-known books (mostly novels), so you know whether any book you are looking at is the true first edition. The site does not cover as many books on the site as I would like, but it’s helpful for the books that are discussed

<https://www.dustjackets.com> Similar to above, but just for dust jackets. This site sells facsimiles of real dust jackets of important, well-known books; mostly novels, but also children’s books and some important nonfiction. Looking at these will help you identify exactly what the dust jacket should look like on the true first edition.

Buying books:

www.abebooks.com (Amazon-owned site geared towards rare and antiquarian books. The books are listed by individual dealers)

www.abaa.org (Website for the leading trade organization, the ABAA. Some dealers list their books on this site, and anything listed here will be a safe buy)

Protecting your books:

Gaylord Archival – www.gaylord.com Purveyor of book-protecting materials of all kinds, most importantly clear dust jacket protectors

E. Gerber Products: www.egerber.com Merchant of high-quality archival sleeves for paper materials, comics, pamphlets, etc

TALAS -- <https://www.talasonline.com> Another seller of high-quality book preservation materials, geared slightly more towards bookbinders.

CONDITION GRADES

FINE: very nice, bright, clean, tight, unmarked. Needn't be completely flawless, but any flaws should be minor/forgivable, and clearly noted (use caution for listings with terms like "mint" or "as new." Still OK terms, but not traditionally used by trained antiquarian booksellers).

NEAR FINE: Still strikingly nice, tight, fresh - possibly price-clipped dust jacket, owner's name on endpapers, spine a bit cocked, or a visible tear to the jacket. If all of those defects are present, then the book is probably not "near fine." Should still be "gift quality" to any appreciator of fine books.

VERY GOOD (+/-): Probably most of the books in your house, except for the ones you've read 20 times. Binding may be shaken, flattened creases, jacket has some tears or creases, owner's name, etc. Still attractive and not "beaten up."

GOOD (+/-): "Good ain't good." Book is complete, binding likely soiled or stained, some pen or pencil underlining or marginal notations. A "good" copy of a rare book might still be owned by a serious book collector, but they would likely want to replace it at some point with a better copy.

FAIR, POOR, BLASTED, ATROCIOUS, ETC: These are books everybody avoids - differences are generally not that important. A "fair" copy should still at least be textually complete (maybe missing an illustration or two), readable by someone who wants the book for the words.

MAINTAINING YOUR BOOKS:

- Use common sense (no oily or dirty hands, don't crack the spine or dog-ear pages). But remember that books are meant to be read, so don't treat them like priceless jewels.
- It's OK to write in your books (I do it every day) - light pencil, and use a **WHITE** eraser to gently remove markings.
- Put them on shelves, standing straight up, packed snugly, but not tightly (this can slant the spine).
- Direct sunlight = bad news for jacket spines (remember Flannery O'Connor?). Also bad for book's front and rear boards (covers), which dry out and warp.
- Water is obviously bad, but the more common and insidious enemy is moisture. Leads to mildew, dust-soiling, and foxing. If any books must be kept in a basement situation for any length of time, use a dehumidifier.