

PHILATELIC GRADING; OBJECTIVE METHODOLOGIES

By David Waller

Advanced collectors often rely on grading to verify a stamp's condition and relative value. While the cost of professional grading is reasonable, it becomes expensive when there are a large number of stamps that require certification. In view of these costs, there is a balancing act (*i.e.*, a return on investment) when deciding which stamps to grade. Up until recently, most philatelic grading confirmed the general condition of the stamp (*e.g.*, used or unused and the condition of the gum) and whether it is "genuine" (*i.e.*, not altered or fake). Today, these physical certificates often help to establish value in the event the collection is sold.

As early as 2010, the author began working on methods that would replace the subjective aspects of stamp grading with physical measurements and in 2012 forwarded a manuscript to the American Philatelic Society for publication in *The Philatelist*. With continued research the manuscript was finally published by the Poway Stamp Club in 2023. Since that time, grading has introduced numerical assignments, but these grades often contain subjective determinations.

Methods based primarily on objective determinations are the subject of this exhibit and have been established for six grading criteria: 1) centering; 2) registration; 3) gum; 4) perforations; 5) color; and 6) engraving. While these methods were developed initially for grading early issue United States stamps because of their rarity and higher value, they may also be applied for grading more recent issues as well as foreign stamps. Three prototype grading certifications containing the data collected from these objective methodologies are presented below.

It is hoped that these methodologies will be used as a foundation on which to develop a more reliable and uniform system for assessing the condition and thereby value of stamps. Please note that methodologies for grading altered stamps (*e.g.*, stamps that have been repaired, reperfected, or otherwise modified from their original state) may require additional methodologies not addressed in this exhibit.

¹ www.collinsdictionary.com