

How to spot a fake graded slab

A 10 minute checklist: the checks experienced buyers run before they hand over money. Free and printable, no sign up needed.

By the Mintdex team • Last checked: 29 October 2026

Read this first. No checklist can prove a slab is genuine. Good fakes exist, and some are made to pass a quick look. These checks reduce your risk. For an expensive card, buy from a source you can go back to, and if in doubt, walk away.

1 Look up the certificate number yourself

- ☐ **Type the grader's web address yourself.** Don't trust a QR code on the slab or a link from the seller. Fake slabs can carry codes that open a copy of a real lookup page (PreGrade).
- ☐ **Use the official lookup:**
 - PSA: psacard.com/cert
 - CGC Cards: cgccards.com/certlookup
 - Beckett (BGS): beckett.com/grading/card-lookup
 - ACE Grading: acegrading.com/cert
- ☐ **Match every detail.** The card name, set, number, year, language, variant and grade on the record must match the label and the card in your hand.
- ☐ **Compare the images, where the grader has them.** CGC's lookup shows a card and its images (CGC Cards), and PSA shows front and back scans for some certificates (PSA). Check centring, edges and the holo pattern against the card in the slab.
- ☐ **Remember a real number can sit on a fake slab.** Counterfeiters copy certificate numbers from genuine sold listings. A match on the lookup is necessary, not enough on its own.

3 Check the holder

- ☐ **Look along every seam for signs it has been opened:** cracks, cloudy or frosted marks, glue or uneven edges. PSA describes its sonically welded holder as tamper evident, not tamper proof (PSA, Security: A Buyer's Guide).
- ☐ **CGC holders are ultrasonically welded** and built to resist tampering (CGC Cards), so treat any sign of a reopened seam the same way.
- ☐ **The card should sit straight and still** in its inner sleeve or well, without movement that a genuine holder of that type wouldn't allow.
- ☐ **Compare size, weight and the embossed logo** with a slab you know is genuine from the same grader. A small digital scale and a ruler help.

5 Check the deal

- ☐ **Too good to be true usually is.** Compare the price with recent sold prices for the same card, grade and grader.
- ☐ **Watch for pressure.** "Someone else wants it", "cash only, today" and refusals to let you look closely are warning signs.
- ☐ **Ask for more photos** in good light: front, back, label close up and each edge. A genuine seller rarely minds.
- ☐ **Pay in a way that protects you.** PayPal says personal (friends and family) payments aren't covered by Buyer Protection (PayPal UK), and that a seller asking for one could be a scammer (PayPal UK). Use goods and services or a card.

2 Check the label

- ☐ **Printing should be sharp.** Look for fuzzy text, uneven spacing, wrong fonts, misspellings or colours that look off against a slab you know is real.
- ☐ **Check the security features the grader has made public:**
 - PSA's** 2017 label redesign added a "Lighthouse" hologram that turns on and off as you angle the label, a QR code on the back and fugitive ink on both sides, alongside covert features it doesn't describe (Sports Collectors Digest, 2017).
 - CGC Cards** says its label features "microprinting, UV ink, holographic foil and a unique certification number and barcode" (CGC Cards).
 - Beckett's** newest card label, launched in 2026, adds holographics, microprinting, UV reactive details and a QR code (Sports Collectors Digest, May 2026).
 - ACE Grading** offers a certificate lookup and an authenticate check on its site (ACE Grading). We couldn't find published label security features, so rely on the lookup.
- ☐ **A UV torch helps** where the grader uses UV ink. Compare against a slab you trust from the same grader and label era.
- ☐ **Label designs change over time.** An older label isn't a red flag by itself, but it should match the grader's design for that period.

4 Check the card

- ☐ **Look at the card itself, not just the label.** Print pattern, colour, font, holo or texture, and card thickness should match a genuine copy. A loupe helps.
- ☐ **Check it's the right card for the label.** A common trick is a genuine label with a cheaper variant or a reprint inside.

6 Buy from sources you can go back to

- ☐ **Established shops and dealers** with a real address and a returns policy.
- ☐ **Platforms with buyer protection**, where you pay through the platform and not off it.
- ☐ **Sellers with history:** reviews, feedback and a record you can check.
- ☐ **Keep everything:** the listing, the messages, photos of the slab on arrival and your payment record.

A note from Mintdex

We're building Mintdex so that buying a graded card doesn't depend on judging a slab in two minutes. Before a card gets a verified digital version on Mintdex, the shop or vault holding it takes four fresh photographs (front, back, label and seal), an automated pre-check reads them, a duplicate certificate check runs, and a **named reviewer who isn't the owner** signs it off. The reviewer is accountable, not the software.

That reduces the risk. It doesn't remove it, and we won't pretend otherwise.

Mintdex is in a private pilot. Join the waitlist to hear when it opens at mintdex.io.

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All accessed 29 October 2026.

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