TCGPLAYER

Card Conditioning Standards

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Introduction

Conditioning is one of the most important actions that we take within the Authentication Center. Performing this action well is the foundation of delivering quality to our customers. No matter where a card is going or where it's coming from, we want to make sure that our quality and our evaluations match the expectations of our customers.

In order to perform this action well, we need clear standards, processes, and training that empower us with the information and skills that are necessary to deliver consistency and repeatability. Given that a clear and universal guide for conditions doesn't exist within the trading card and hobby industry, TCGplayer has constructed this guide for both internal use and external communication. We have taken our experience and expertise and combined it with industry standards, seller feedback, and common definitions and practices to inform and develop this guide.

This guide includes **Definitions and Standards** for conditioning.

This guide will allow us to communicate our standards, train and measure our team members, and share our standards with the industry. TCGplayer firmly believes that a clearly defined and universally adopted conditioning standard is the best way to create an informed TCG community — a community where sellers and hobbyists speak the same language, and as a result, can trade even better.

What is Conditioning vs Grading?

Different sellers, companies, and industries use varying terms for the act of "determining the quality of a product". For consistency, TCGplayer uses the term "conditioning" to describe the act of evaluating a product and categorizing it with a non-numeric quality label.

We reserve the term "grading" for the act of determining numerical measures of quality, most often performed by professional grading services.

When we condition, we perform an evaluation of whether or not a card is within a range. While we include measurements and metrics around imperfections and severities, team members performing conditioning are not measuring imperfections. We include these measurements to create clear standards that are trainable and that create repeatability.

Conditioning and Subjectivity

One common theme in both conditioning and grading within the trading card industry, both gaming and sports cards, is a lack of clear criteria for different conditions and a willingness to attribute variance to subjectivity. We aim to minimize subjectivity by having the clearest definitions and standards possible.

Consistency can be achieved by clear, usable standards which allow for process and training to be developed to meet those standards. This commitment creates repeatability, and repeatability provides a predictable level of quality for all customers.

Consistency Across Cards and Printings

Many sources have created different standards for cards based on their printing (foil vs non-foil), a card's age, or the manufacturer. There's a number of valid reasons for doing so, but these need to be balanced with the need for consistency. Consistency helps to create the unified, trustworthy condition standards.

Consistency should take into account a card's manufacturer and print runs, composition, and it's lifespan. Cards can show wear differently, have different qualities of inking and foiling, and can have natural fading or color loss due to age. Conditioning standards and processes need to allow for these factors. We balance this consideration for manufacturing characteristics with a universal set of definitions and standards.

To achieve the highest level of consistency, all cards should be judged with the same criteria for any damage or wear that can't be attributed to the card's printing process. These types of imperfections occur after the manufacturing process, and should be applied universally for all cards, printings, and manufacturers.

To allow for differences in card composition and printing/manufacturing, cards should be judged in the context of their manufacturer and print run for any printing, ink, or manufacturing imperfections. These types of imperfections are a characteristic of the card and the card's production, inherent to the card itself.

Our Conditioning Guide outlines measurements based on standard card imperfections. Given that oversized cards are 1.4x larger than a standard card, we allow 1.4x the size of any imperfection for the different severities when measuring card imperfections.

Definitions

Integrity

There are three aspects to consider when determining integrity:

Structure: Is it still the intended shape?
Anything that affects the structural soundness.

Playability: Can it be used?
Anything that hinders the ability to function as a game piece such as wrong size, missing or obscured information, or an imperfection that causes tournament illegality.

Authentication: Can it be verified?
Anything that interferes with verifying authenticity such as misplaced, incomplete, or obscured authentication factor.

Imperfection

The condition of a card is determined by the number and extent of imperfections that a card exhibits. Imperfections are any atypical printing or manufacturing defects, and any wear or damage to the card after that printing process. Imperfections are characterized by both a Type and a Severity.

Imperfection Types

For a complete definitions list of imperfections, visit our help center.

Edgewear

Loss of color, sheen, or material along edges, borders, or corners.

Terms: Border Wear, Fraying, Nicks, Flaking, Rough(ed) Edges, Flap

Scratch

A score on the surface that removes material.

Terms: Score, Gouge

Scuffing

A group of scratches or abrasions.

Terms: Scratch Groups, Clouding, Binder/Sleeve Gloss, Buffing

Surface Wear

Material loss causing the internal layers to show through the image/color.

Terms: Eye Appeal (sport card term), Whitening, Wear Dots

Grime

Material on the surface from handling, use, or poor storage.

Terms: Dirt, Play Dirt, Smudge

Indentation

A notch or groove on the edge or surface that displaces material.

Terms: Ding, Indent, Dent, Impression, Pockmarks

Bend

A line or ridge from folding or pressing.

Terms: Crease, Fold

Fault

An expansion or splitting of the surface or material.

Terms: Split, Tags, Rippling, Drips/Drops, Peeling, Delamination, Fraying

Damage

A severe imperfection that impacts integrity.

Terms: Tear, Hole, Flimsiness, Sun Damage, Bleaching, Foreign Substance, Peel

Defect

A printing or manufacturing error.

Terms: Blurred/Missing Ink, Crimping, Miscuts, Centering, Shifted, Roller Line/Mark, Foil Bubbling, Speckled Foil, Extra Gloss

Imperfection Severity

Each imperfection can be present in varying degrees of severity. We use the descriptors below.

Slight

Impacting a **Minimal** surface area of the card.

Minor

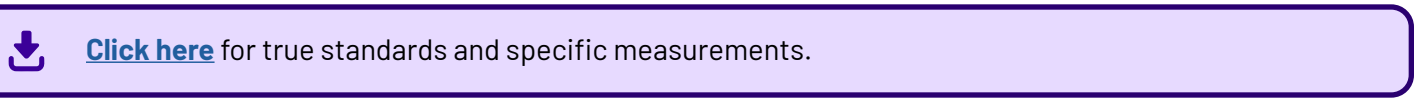
Impacting a **Noticeable** surface area of the card.

Moderate

Impacting a **Significant** surface area of the card

Major

Impacting the surface area of the card above the measures for other severities.



Defects

Some imperfections are printer or manufacturer characteristics. These defects and their severity are judged by their frequency within each manufacturer and print run. Some manufacturers have been able to provide extremely consistent printings, resulting in little variation in their card population. For manufacturers or print runs that exhibit a greater variation in ink quality, blurring or centering, our condition standards allow for those variations to be evaluated in the context of their manufacturing or print runs.

Defects are grouped into two categories:

Defects that impact the card's integrity

Defects such as crimping, miscuts, missing holofoil gems, and other imperfections that impact the integrity of a card would qualify as Damage. Cards with these types of defects require a Listing with a Photo, and can be listed under the condition the card would qualify for if it didn't have this defect.

Defects that do not impact the card's integrity

Defects such as print errors, ink errors, missing ink, and other imperfections that do not impact the integrity of a card are evaluated based on their severity. Slight imperfections are ignored in terms of evaluation. Minor and Moderate imperfections would downgrade a card by one condition level. Major imperfections should be listed as a Listing with a Photo under the condition the card would qualify for if it didn't have this defect.

Two common Defects are also evaluated during conditioning.

Curling

A card may exhibit a 5mm flex from curling (as measured by the gap between a card and the flat surface it rests on) without any impact on its condition. Any flex beyond that threshold would make the card Damaged.

Centering

A card may have up to 70 / 30 centering without any impact on its condition. Any Shifting beyond that threshold should be listed as a Listing with a Photo under the condition the card would qualify for if it didn't have this defect.

Standards for Conditions

Imperfections have different impacts on the evaluation of card conditions. For instance, Edgewear is common across all conditions, while Faults can only occur within Moderately Played, Heavily Played or Damaged cards. Additionally, each condition allows for different frequencies of imperfections, depending on the type of imperfection and the card's condition:

Points System for Severity

Each condition allows for a certain amount of "points" of imperfections. We use the following scale to determine the aggregate impact of imperfections:

Slight - 1 point | **Minor** - 2 points | **Moderate** - 4 points | **Major** - 8 points

Condition Standards

Near Mint
(NM)

Near Mint is a card with minimal handling or play wear.

Up to **3 points** of imperfections are allowed of the following types:

- Slight Edgewear
- Slight Indentation
- Slight Defect
- Slight Scuffing
- Minor Scratches

Not Allowed: Surface Wear, Grime, Bend, Fault, Damage

Lightly Played (LP)

Lightly Played shows signs of handling or play, but does not display significant imperfections.

Up to **6 points** of imperfections are allowed of the following types:

- Minor Edgewear
- Minor Scratches
- Minor Scuffing
- Minor Indent
- Minor Bend
- Slight Surface Wear
- Slight Grime
- Minor Defect

Not Allowed: Fault, Damage

Moderately Played (MP)

Moderately Played shows significant play, use or wear.

Up to **12 points** of imperfections are allowed of the following types:

- Moderate Edgewear
- Moderate Scratches
- Moderate Scuffing
- Moderate Indent
- Minor Surface Wear
- Minor Bends
- Minor Grime
- Minor Fault
- Minor Defect

Not Allowed: Damage

Heavily Played (HP)

Heavily Played shows significant wear and imperfections.

Up to **24 points** of imperfections are allowed of the following types:

- Major Edgewear
- Major Scratches
- Major Scuffing
- Moderate Surface Wear
- Moderate Indentations
- Major Grime
- Moderate Bends
- Minor Fault
- Moderate Defect

Not Allowed: Damage

Damaged (DMG)

Damaged cards show wear or imperfections beyond the standards for other conditions.

Things to look for that make a card Damaged:

- Foreign substances & non-manufacturing ink
- Significant shifting/miscuts
- Tears, punctures, splitting, folding
- Missing/illegible card information
- Missing/illegible authentication gems
- Moderate/Major Faults (including liquid exposure)

Magic: The Gathering and Pokémon Cards		
Unit	**Metric**	**Imperial**
Length	88 mm	3 7⁄16 in
Width	63 mm	2 15⁄32 in
Area	5,544 mm^2	~8 ½ in^2
Total Border Length	302 mm	11 27⁄32 in
Additional Details		
• Area does not account for the removal of material when corners are cut. • ALL references to % of a card length, width, or area reference the above measurements for Magic and Pokémon cards.		

Yu-Gi-Oh! Cards		
Unit	**Metric**	**Imperial**
Length	86 mm	3 5⁄16 in
Width	59 mm	2 5⁄16 in
Area	5,074 mm^2	~7 ½ in^2
Total Border Length	286 mm	11 ¼ in

Card Conditioning Standards

Bend		
Condition	**Max Allowable Length**	**% of Card Length**
Near Mint	NONE	
Lightly Played	Minor	
	10mm	11.4%%
Moderately Played	Moderate	
	20mm	22.7%
Heavily Played	Major	
	>20mm	>22.7%
Damaged	ANY	
Additional Details		

Curling	
Condition	**Max Allowable Lift***
Near Mint	Slight
	5mm
Lightly Played	Slight
	5mm
Moderately Played	Slight
	5mm
Heavily Played	Slight
	5mm
Damaged	Major
	>5mm
Additional Details	
*Distance the card lifts from a flat surface when laid flat.	

Damage		
Condition	**Max Allowable Area**	**% of Card Area**
Near Mint	NONE	
Lightly Played		
Moderately Played		
Heavily Played		
Damaged	ANY	
Additional Details		

Defect		
Condition	**Max Allowable Area**	**% of Card Area**
Near Mint	Slight	
	2.5mm^2	0.05%
Lightly Played	Minor	
	5mm^2	0.1%
Moderately Played	Minor	
	5mm^2	0.1%
Heavily Played	Moderate	
	10mm^2	0.2%
Damaged	Major	
	>10mm^2	>0.2%
Additional Details		

Edgewear		
Condition	**Max Allowable Length**	**% of Card Edge**
Near Mint	Slight	
	20mm	6.6%
Lightly Played	Minor	
	80mm	26.5%
Moderately Played	Minor	
	160mm	53.0%
Heavily Played	Moderate	
	>160mm	>53.0%
Damaged	ANY	
Additional Details		

Fault		
Condition	**Max Allowable Area**	**% of Card Area**
Near Mint	NONE	
Lightly Played		
Moderately Played	Slight	
	2.5mm^2	0.05%
Heavily Played	Minor	
	10mm^2	0.2%
Damaged	Moderate	
	40mm^2	0.7%
Additional Details		

Card Conditioning Standards

Grime		
Condition	**Max Allowable Area**	**% of Card Area**
Near Mint	NONE	
Lightly Played	Slight	
	2.5mm²	0.05%
Moderately Played	Moderate	
	27.5mm²	5%
Heavily Played	ANY	
Damaged	ANY	
Additional Details		

Indentation		
Condition	**Max Allowable Area**	**% of Card Area**
Near Mint	Slight*	
	1 pinpoint	0.001%
Lightly Played	Minor*	
	4mm²	0.07%
Moderately Played	Moderate	
	25mm²	0.5%
Heavily Played	Major	
	>25mm²	>0.5%
Damaged	ANY	
Additional Details		

- *Cannot show through to the other side of the card.

Scratch		
Condition	**Max Allowable Length**	**% of Card Length**
Near Mint	Minor	
	40mm	45.5%
Lightly Played	Minor	
	40mm	45.5%
Moderately Played	Moderate	
	>40mm	>45.5%
Heavily Played	ANY	
Damaged	ANY	
Additional Details		

Scuffing		
Condition	**Max Allowable Area**	**% of Card Area**
Near Mint	Slight	
	315mm²	6%
Lightly Played	Minor	
	2,772²	50%
Moderately Played	Moderate*	
	5,544mm²	100%
Heavily Played	Major* **	
	11,088mm²	200%
Damaged	ANY	
Additional Details		

*Imperfection covers Total area - no more than a 5mm square area can be without scuffing. If there is not Total scuffing, measure using 2 instances of Minor scuffing
**Total surface area of both front and back of a card

Surface Wear		
Condition	**Max Allowable Area**	**% of Card Area**
Near Mint	NONE	
Lightly Played	Slight	
	2.5mm²	0.05%
Moderately Played	Minor	
	10mm²	0.2%
Heavily Played	Moderate	
	40mm²	0.7%
Damaged	Major	
	>40mm²	>0.7%
Additional Details		

Value of Imperfection Severity	
Severity	Points Value (per instance)
Slight	1
Minor	2
Moderate	4
Major	8
Damage	N/A

Allowable Points in Each Condition	
Condition	Total Points
Near Mint	3
Lightly Played	6
Moderately Played	12
Heavily Played	24
Damaged	>24

Conversion for Measuring Area

Imperfection	Area		Length of Each Side of a Square Area
Defect	2.5 mm	→	1.58 mm
	5 mm	→	2.24 mm
	10 mm	→	3.16 mm
Grime	25 mm	→	5.00 mm
	137.5 mm	→	11.73 mm
	275 mm	→	16.58 mm
Indentation	40 mm	→	6.32 mm
	250 mm	→	15.81 mm
Scuffing	20 mm	→	4.47 mm
	277.2 mm	→	16.65 mm
	554.4 mm	→	23.55 mm
Surface Wear & Fault	2.5 mm	→	1.58 mm
	10 mm	→	3.16 mm
	40 mm	→	6.32 mm
	160 mm	→	12.65 mm