
Australian Collectors' Guide

Provides basic information
and commonly used words
for collectors of
stamps, coins, banknotes
and postcards

Revised
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WHY COLLECT?

People collect stamps, coins, banknotes or postcards for various reasons:

- ◆ Items are often colourful and attractive
- ◆ Items can remind them about special events or moments in their lives.
- ◆ Items can be valuable, or become valuable over time.
- ◆ Someone gave them a collection, or items from a collection, which sparked an interest in collecting more.
- ◆ Finding out about the items in a collection can help people to learn about different countries and cultures - including their own country and culture: History, Art, Economics, Politics, Technology and more.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF COLLECTING

STAMPS

Collecting and studying stamps is called Philately [fil-lat-tel-lee]

Stamp collectors are called Philatelists [fil-lat-tel-ists]

COINS & BANKNOTES

Collecting and studying coins or banknotes is called Numismatics

[new-miss-mat-ix]

Coin and banknote collectors are called Numismatists [new-miss-mat-ists]

POSTCARDS

Collecting and studying postcards is called Deltiology [del-tee-ol-oj-ee]

Postcard collectors are called Deltiologists [del-tee-ol-oj-ists]

WHAT TO COLLECT

There is no right or wrong way to collecting – do whatever makes you happy.

Whether you collect stamps, coins, banknotes or postcards, it is not possible to collect everything. The two main things to consider are what things interest you and how much money you have to spend on your collection.

Here are some collecting options and examples:

- ◆ Printer, publisher or artist
- ◆ Country or region — Brazil , South America, Australia, Tasmania ...
- ◆ Denomination/value — one cent, 20 cents, \$2 ...
- ◆ Themes — such as dinosaurs, butterflies, ships and boats ...
- ◆ Particular years – maybe the year that you were born

Tell your family, friends and everyone you know that you collect. Ask them – nicely – if they have any items that they might be willing to give you or sell to you at a good price.

COLLECTORS' CLUBS

Collectors' club meetings are a good way to meet other people whose collecting interests might be similar to your own.

You can learn a lot from talking with people at club meetings. Meetings can also be a good place to buy, sell or swap items with other collectors.

There are many kinds of collectors' clubs in Australia. See the back page of this booklet for further information.

WHERE TO FIND ITEMS FOR YOUR COLLECTION

There are many places where you can find and buy items for your collection, including:

- ◆ Dealers
- ◆ Fairs and exhibitions
- ◆ Garage sales
- ◆ Second hand stores
- ◆ Antiques and collectors' stores
- ◆ Flea markets and Weekend markets
- ◆ Auction houses
- ◆ Newspaper advertisements
- ◆ Online sellers
- ◆ Collector clubs
- ◆ Other collectors
- ◆ For stamps and postcards – in the mail
- ◆ For coins and banknotes – in your wallet, purse or piggy bank

To get an idea of what items are available to buy and how much you can expect to pay for them, do some research. This can be as simple as browsing through websites like eBay, Gumtree or Delcampe; looking through albums and boxes at fairs and dealer stores, or talking with dealers and other collectors.

LOOKING AFTER YOUR COLLECTION

Whether you collect stamps, coins, banknotes, postcards or something else, you need to look after your collection so that it does not get damaged.

Things that can damage your collection include:

- ◆ High temperatures.
- ◆ High humidity.
- ◆ Big swings in temperature or humidity.
- ◆ Dampness and condensation.
- ◆ Air pollution, dust and salt air.
- ◆ Insects and pests such as mice, silverfish, moths and other critters that might like the taste of your collection (or poop on them).
- ◆ Careless handling that can result in an item getting bent, scratched, marked or otherwise damaged.
- ◆ Dirty, sticky, damp or sweaty hands – which can leave permanent marks on items in your collection.

Even clean hands can cause damage, because your skin contains natural oils (to prevent your skin from drying out). It is a good idea to wear clean cotton gloves when working with your collection.

- ◆ Light exposure – which can cause fading over time.
- ◆ Using albums with self-adhesive or 'magnetic pages' to store your collection. It is almost impossible to remove items from the pages afterwards without damaging the items.

Try a light spray of 'Preen' ironing spray for stuck-on items. Let the spray penetrate, then gently remove the item and rinse off the spray.

- ◆ Acid or alkaline content in the paper or plastic of the box or album where your collection is stored. Special "archival quality" plastics and albums are available for collectors, which do not harm your collection.

USEFUL THINGS FOR COLLECTORS

Albums	To store your collection. Many types of albums are available.
Catalogues and Reference Books	To help you identify your items and provide further information about them
Gloves	White cotton gloves are the best.
Magnifying Glass	To help you see the smaller details Sometimes it helps to gently turn or tilt the item in the light to get a better look at the details.
Perforation Gauge	Sometimes called a 'Perf Gauge' A tool to measure the size of the holes along the edge of a stamp
Storage	A safe and suitable place to store your collection. See the section 'LOOKING AFTER YOUR COLLECTION' for further information.
Tongs	Look like tweezers, but have a smooth gripping surface
Tweezers	To pick up the items in your collection. Use flat-end tweezers, not ones with pointy ends. Do not use the tweezers from the first aid kit – those ones might have traces of things on them that could mark or damage your items.

SOME COMMON WORDS / TERMS

Whatever you collect, there are certain words or terms that you are likely to read or hear that describe the things you collect. Some of those words or terms might have more than one meaning, depending on what you collect.

Back	The reverse side of a stamp, coin, banknote or postcard. On a coin, this is also called the 'Tails' side.
Border	Plain edge - where the design ends and the outer margin begins.
Cinderella	Something that is made to look like a stamp, coin or banknote but is not a real one.
Counterfeit	A fake, illegal copy.
Denomination	The face value of an item – its spending value at the shop or as postage.
Grade / Grading	The condition of an item, such as 'Good', 'Mint', 'Poor' and similar words.
Obverse	Another word for the front or face side. On a coin, this is also called the 'Heads' side.
PNC	Postal and Numismatic Cover. A souvenir envelope with a stamp and coin on it.
Press	A machine used to print money, postcards and other paper items.
Printer	A company that uses a press to print documents, stamps, banknotes, postcards and the like.
Printing Plate	A sheet of steel with the design on it, used to print the design on to paper.
Provenance	The ownership background of an item – who owned it before you and perhaps how much they paid for it, who owned it before them and so on.
Reverse	Another word for the back of a stamp, coin, banknote or postcard. On a coin, this is also called the 'Tails' side.
Vignette [vin-yet]	On banknotes - a picture that fades into the background rather than having a solid frame or outline. On stamps - the main picture or design in the centre of the stamp.
Watermark	A design embedded into the paper by varying the paper thickness.

CLEANING OR REPAIRING

It is a general rule to NOT clean or repair any of the items in your collection. Cleaning might remove the mark that was annoying you, but cleaning will almost always leave some kind of mark of its own – even if you use plain water.

Do not use any kind of adhesive tape to repair an item in your collection. Adhesive tape will turn yellow over time, which can affect the mended item.

If you have a stamp, banknote or postcard that is creased or buckled, you could try flattening it out by placing it between two books for several days. Do not try to iron it though. Ironing can leave scorch marks or even melt the design (especially for modern 'plastic' banknotes).

You might be tempted to unfold a bent corner on your stamp, banknote or postcard – DON'T. The folded corner might break off, leaving you with a missing corner, which is worse than a folded corner.



IS AN OLDER ITEM MORE VALUABLE THAN A NEWER ONE?

Older items in a collection are not always more valuable than newer ones. There are three main things that affect value:

1. Condition — items in good condition are usually more valuable than scruffy or damaged items.
2. Demand — if lots of people want to collect the same thing, then it will become more valuable.
3. Scarcity — how many were made and how many are still around to collect now. Scarcer items are usually more valuable than common items (but only if there is enough demand from people to buy them).

Other factors that can affect value include:

- ◆ Printer, publisher or artist
- ◆ Signatures
- ◆ Serial numbers
- ◆ Unusual flaws or faults
- ◆ Dates
- ◆ Postmarks



STAMPS

Mint stamps are new stamps that have never been used

Used stamps have been used to post a letter, postcard or package

TYPES OF STAMPS

Definitive Stamps with a standard letter value for everyday use

Commemorative Stamps that celebrate special events

Thematic Stamps with a common theme, such as animals or space
Also known as 'Topical'

Personalised Stamps that you can make with one of your photographs or other image printed on them

Legend Stamps about famous people, such as Don Bradman

Souvenir Sheet A sheet of stamps, usually ten stamps, to celebrate a special theme or event

COMMON STAMP WORDS / TERMS

Block A group of stamps that are still attached to one another. A minimum of four stamps, two wide and two tall, makes a block.

Cachet A design or artwork on the left side of an envelope. Usually found on First Day Covers.

Cover Another word for an envelope that has a stamp or some other form of payment on it.

First Day Cover A special release envelope with a picture and stamp on the front.

Fiscal Stamp	Also known as a revenue stamp. A stamp used to pay a tax or other government cost.
Foxing	Spots and age marks, usually yellow or yellow-brown.
Hinges	Small pieces of gummed paper used to attach stamps to an album page.
Imperforate	A stamp that does not have little separating holes along its edges.
Mini sheet	Also known as a miniature sheet. A small sheet of stamps, sometimes designed to be part of a larger picture on the sheet.
Overprint	Words or symbols that are printed over the original design. Sometimes used to change the original value.
Pane	The proper name for a sheet of stamps.
Perforate	A stamp that has little holes along its edges to make it easier to separate it from other stamps on the sheet.
Plate Block	A block of four or more stamps that has a code (usually numbers) printed on the page margin.
Postal Stationery	An envelope, card or aerogram with the postage amount pre-printed on it. Sold by the post office.
Postmark	The official mark that the post office puts over a stamp to show from when and where the item was sent.
Revenue Stamp	Also known as a fiscal stamp. A stamp used to pay a tax or other government cost.
Selvedge	The edge or margin of a sheet of stamps (or banknotes); often includes printing markings.
Se-tenant	Two or more attached stamps with different designs.
Tête-bêche	Say 'tet-besh' or 'tate-baysh'. Stamps joined together in head-to-toe format.

SOAKING STAMPS

Soaking a stamp removes it from the envelope or package that it is attached to. There are five easy steps for soaking stamps.

1. Cut the stamp from the envelope or package

Be careful not to cut the stamp.

2. Sort the stamps

Put aside any brightly coloured stamps (such as red or blue) to soak separately – that way the colours will not run and spoil other stamps.

3. Soak the stamps

Place the stamps face down in a shallow dish of lukewarm water. If you are soaking lots of stamps, change the water after two or three batches.

4. Separate the stamps from the backing paper

After a few minutes of soaking the stamps will begin to float free from the paper. Gently remove the stamp from the paper – be gentle and patient or you might tear the stamp.

5. Rinse the stamps

Rinse the back of each stamp in fresh water to remove any remaining glue. Place the stamps in a single layer between two paper towels and put a book on top to prevent the stamps from curling. Leave the stamps to dry overnight.



COINS

Always hold a coin by its edge with your thumb and first finger or use special coin tongs. That way you will not leave any fingerprints or other marks on the main parts of the coin.



CLEANING

It is a general rule to NOT clean a coin because doing so is likely to leave a permanent mark on that coin and take away its natural shine.

However, if you have a coin that is particularly dirty, greasy or otherwise really in need of cleaning, there are several reasonably safe ways to do so:

- ◆ Soak the coin in a weak soap solution. Do not use kitchen detergent or laundry detergent though, because they will damage the coin surface. Also, use distilled water, not tap water.
- ◆ Ultrasound cleaner. This is an electric cleaner often used to clean jewellery. Follow the machine user instructions. Use distilled water.
- ◆ For really encrusted coins, soak for several months in olive oil.

If you have cleaned a coin, make sure to rinse it thoroughly and gently with distilled water. Do not rub it dry; gently pat it dry or let it dry by itself.

CONDITION / GRADING COINS

There are several different methods to grade the condition of coins. The American Sheldon Scale uses the numbers 1 to 70, with 70 being a coin in perfect condition. Learning to grade coins (and other things) takes practice.

The table on the next page compares and describes several grading methods.

MINT STATE or UNCIRCULATED	MS60 to MS70	UNC
	Like brand new, with no marks or signs of wear. All design details are clear.	
ABOUT UNCIRCULATED	AU50 AU53 AU55 AU58	AU aUNC
	Almost like brand new, with almost no marks or signs of wear. All design details are clear, although high points are slightly flat.	
EXTREMELY FINE	XF40 XF45	XF EF
	Only very slight marks or signs of wear. All design details are clear, although high points will appear a little flattened.	
VERY FINE	VF20 VF25 VF30 VF35	VF
	Strong definition in the detail and lettering Light to moderate wear or flattening on the high points of the design	
FINE	F12 F15	F
	Good definition in the detail and lettering Some wear or flattening on the high points of the design	
VERY GOOD	VG8 VG10	VG
	Looking worn Design features are prominent but a bit flat	
GOOD	G4 G6	G
	Worn but lettering is still readable. Rims are complete.	
ABOUT GOOD	AG3	AG aG
	Very worn, but lettering is still readable.	
FAIR	FA2	F
	Worn almost smooth but some of the design can still be identified	
POOR	P1	P
	So worn that it is difficult to identify the coin.	

COMMON COIN & BANKNOTE WORDS / TERMS

Brockage	Same design on both sides, one a mirror image.
Error Coin	A coin or banknote with a mistake or misprint on it.
Face	Front or obverse of a coin or banknote. Called the 'face' side because it usually has someone's face on it (such as the Queen). On a coin, this is also called the 'Heads' side.
Field	The flat background surface of a coin that has no design on it.
Front	The face or obverse side of a coin or banknote. On a coin, this is also called the 'Heads' side.
Legend	The main lettering on a coin; usually the country from where the coin comes.
Lustre	How well the surface reflects light.
Micro-print	Tiny print is too hard to read without a magnifying glass.
Mint Mark	A letter or other symbol on a coin to show where it was made.
Motto	A saying on a coin, sometimes in Latin. American coins have the motto 'E Pluribus Unum', which means 'In God We Trust'. Australian coins do not have mottos.
Patina / Toning	The natural colouring of a coin over time.
Rim	The outer edge of a coin, usually slightly raised.
Security Thread	A strip of metal or plastic embedded in the note to stop counterfeiting. The strip can be seen when a note is held up to the light.
Serial Number	A set of numbers, often also with letters, printed on banknotes.
Strike	The process of stamping a design on to a coin (or medal).

BANKNOTES

CONDITION / GRADING BANKNOTES

UNCIRCULATED	Like brand new, with no folds or flick marks Might have a slight ripple in the area of the watermark or security thread.
ABOUT UNCIRCULATED	Also written as aUNC Like brand new but might have a light flick mark or centrefold
EXTREMELY FINE	Also written as XF or EF Clean and crisp with only a slight amount of folding or creasing. Might have up to three light folds. No staining or fading present.
VERY FINE	Also written as VF A note showing signs of wear, although still fairly crisp and not limp. Might have many light folds or even one or two heavy folds. No heavy staining or fading present.
FINE	Also written as F A note showing signs of wear with much of the colour and brightness gone. Soiling and heavy creasing will be present and a number of small holes.
VERY GOOD	Also written as VG A note that is almost at the end of its useful life. A note that is heavily soiled, creased and faded. Likely to have a number of holes and missing corners. Kept because it is rare, completes a set, has sentimental value or for some other reason.

THINGS TO CHECK WITH BANKNOTES

In addition to the condition or grade, there are other things to check for on banknotes, especially:

SERIAL NUMBERS First and last issue banknotes are usually more valuable than other banknotes of the same issue. First issue banknotes often start with the letters AA, but not always. For last issue banknotes, check in a catalogue to find out what are the starting letters.

YEAR OF ISSUE Banknotes issued in some years are more valuable than other years. Not all banknotes have the year printed on them, so you might need to check a catalogue to work out the year of issue.

SIGNATURES Banknotes are usually signed by the Governor of the Reserve Bank of the country of issue, sometimes by the Treasurer. Some signatures and signature combinations are rarer and more valuable than other signatures and combinations.

WHEN WAS PAPER MONEY FIRST ISSUED?

Paper was invented by the Chinese people about AD105 — almost two thousand years ago. But it was more than five hundred years later before the Chinese issued paper money. That was in AD650 — about one thousand four hundred years ago.



POSTCARDS

POSTCARDS and POSTAL CARDS

A postal card is issued by a post office or other government agency. It always has the postage prepaid on it, usually as a stamp.

A postcard is not usually issued by the post office and does not include a stamp. The cards that you buy from a store when you go on holiday somewhere are postcards.

GENERAL POSTCARD ERAS

1898 – 1919	Known as the Golden Age of postcards, when picture postcards were very popular
1901 – 1906	Undivided backs on picture postcards
1907 – 1915	Divided backs on picture postcards
1915 – 1930	White border postcards were common
1930 – 1950	Linen collectable postcards

COMMON POSTCARD TERMS

Old	Printed before the 1960s. Usually measure 140 mm x 89 mm.
Modern	Printed from the 1960s or later. Usually measure 150 mm x 100 mm.
Divided Back	With a dividing line down the middle of the back of the card. The sender's message was written on the left side and the delivery address was written on the right side.
Undivided Back	Without a dividing line down the middle of the back of the card. The only thing written on the back of the card was the delivery address – no sender's message.

CONDITION / GRADING POSTCARDS

MINT	Like brand new. Without any writing, creases or postage marks.
NEAR MINT	Almost like brand new. Without any writing, creases or postage marks. Might have a little yellowing at the edges.
EXCELLENT	No tears, creases or wear marks. Can have postmarks or writing on it.
VERY GOOD	No tears or creases, but might have some wear marks. Can have postmarks or writing on it.
GOOD	Might have bent corners, a fold, creases or faded colours. Can have postmarks or writing on it. Unlikely to be worth very much, unless it is very unusual, rare or sent by or to someone famous.
FAIR TO POOR	Might be bent, crushed, creased, folded or faded. Can have postmarks or writing on it. Unlikely to be worth very much, unless it is very unusual, rare or sent by or to someone famous. Kept because it is rare, completes a set, has sentimental value or for some other reason.



COLLECTORS' CLUBS IN AUSTRALIA

Although many collectors' clubs in Australia do not have their own websites, most of them are listed on the following sites:

STAMPS

Australian Philatelic Federation

<http://apf.org.au>

POSTCARDS

Australian Postcard Society

<http://www.australian-postcard-society.com>

COINS & BANKNOTES

Numismatic Association of Australia

<http://www.numismatics.org.au>
