

# Grading Mother Nature



TCStyle  
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Spring has arrived, and if you are anything like me, this is the time of year when you start to appreciate the unique beauty Mother Nature has to offer. Her hand can be seen from the tulips blooming to the rabbits sneaking into the garden. So few rarely the same.

Well, her ability to create an original work of art is not limited to the living. Diamonds are as individual and unique as snowflakes. No two have ever been alike. Many of you are familiar with the quick reference guide we use to determine value: Cut, Color, Clarity, and Carat Weight. It is precisely these combined characteristics that tell us just how rare each diamond is, and how it should be valued.

While the 4 Cs can be a valuable guide in your diamond buying search, it is essential to determine which of these characteristics is most important to you. In order to do that, you must first learn the difference between Cut, Color, Clarity, and Carat Weight.

The easiest to grasp (although often incorrectly) is CARAT WEIGHT. One source of confusion here is that consumers often assume that a 1.00 carat diamond will

ALWAYS look the same size as another 1.00 carat. The important thing to remember is that carat is a weight and not a size. Because of the way a diamond is cut, it is not at all uncommon for one diamond to “face up” much larger than another. Because of this, Carat Weight is closely linked to our next characteristic: Cut.

I see many clients come into my store assuming that Cut means nothing more than the shape of the diamond. This doesn't even scratch the surface. Most gemologists would agree that Cut is by far the most important in determining a diamond's beauty. Interestingly, it is the only characteristic that is 100 percent determined by man. The reason two diamonds that are identical in weight may appear to be entirely different sizes is because one may be cut too deep and one may be too shallow. When viewing a diamond from above, the deep stone will look significantly smaller because the weight is hidden in the depth of the stone. Conversely, a shallow cut diamond may look as much as 25 percent heavier than it actually may be.

When speaking about the importance of Cut, I often tell my clients to think of it this way: What is it that we like best about diamonds? It's how much they sparkle and beautiful they are, right? Well most people are surprised to learn that this beauty has very little to do with the most commonly known of the Cs; Color and Clarity.

Cut literally encompasses dozens of important details. From how sharply the facets come together (facets are the individual flat surfaces on a diamond) to how brightly the diamond is polished. Each of these details can dramatically affect the way the diamond reflects and refracts light. In other words: How it sparkles. The difference between a diamond that is well cut versus one that is not is this: The well cut diamond (sometimes referred to as ideal) will sparkle from across a dimly lit room whereas the poorly cut stone can look dead right under your nose.

When I refer to a diamond's Color, I usually mean either the absence or presence of yellow (sometimes brown or gray). By yellow, I am referring to the OVERALL BODY COLOR of the diamond, not just slight flashes of yellow as you turn the diamond. The LESS body color a diamond has the rarer it is (there are exceptions to this that I will cover in a future article) therefore the more valuable it will be. This yellow color is almost always caused by varying amounts of nitrogen trapped inside the diamond's crystal structure. The more nitrogen present the more yellow the diamond.

Clarity is a characteristic that many of you are familiar with although you may have traditionally referred to it as something different: flaws. Our industry avoids using this term, not because it is ugly (although it is), but because “Flaw” implies that there is something wrong with the diamond. For starters, almost every

diamond has inclusions of some sort. You may even remember from my previous article that most diamonds have inclusions that you can see with your naked eye. Therefore, the presence of these inclusions is not at all abnormal. It is a natural part of the diamond formation process. In fact, most inclusions have been there inside that diamond millions, if not up to three billion, years! The real issue for most clients is that they want to avoid obvious inclusions that can easily be seen without the assistance of magnification.

In order to assign a Clarity grade to a diamond we must assess its inclusions (any Clarity characteristic totally enclosed or extending to the surface) and its blemishes (any Clarity characteristic completely confined to the surface). We look not only at the numbers of these characteristics but also their position inside the diamond, size, and color. Basically we want to know how much do they detract from the beauty of the stone.

Searching for your diamond can be a grueling process. In order to be an educated consumer, there are a lot of foreign terms to learn and most of you do not have the time to do ALL of the necessary research. The purpose of these articles is to help you along the way. Together we will take this one step at a time. I have introduced you to the concept of the four Cs and in the articles to come we will explore each of them in detail. You will learn the ins and outs of each as well as the importance of cultivating a personal relationship with your jeweler. When you combine this basic knowledge of diamond characteristics with the guidance of someone that you can trust, you are almost always assured to make the right purchase!

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## ***The four Cs***

**Cut** ... the shape and appearance of the diamond.

**Color** ... the overall body color of the diamond, determined by the absence or presence of yellow.

**Clarity** ... the grade of the diamond based on inclusions and blemishes.

**Carat Weight** ... the weight, not necessarily the size, of the diamond.