

The 4Cs cheat sheet

What each grade means and where to aim.

Cut.

How well the diamond returns light. GIA round cut grades: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, Poor. Aim: Excellent for round. Fancy shapes: judge by photos, video, proportions.

Color.

D to Z. D, E, F colorless. G, H, I, J near colorless. K, L, M faint. N to R very light. S to Z light. Aim: near colorless often looks white once set. Yellow and rose gold forgive warmer grades.

Clarity.

FL, IF, VVS1, VVS2, VS1, VS2, SI1, SI2, I1, I2, I3. Aim: eye-clean. VS1 and VS2 usually are; many SI1 are; check each stone. Emerald and asscher cuts show more.

Carat.

Weight, not size. 1 carat = 0.2 g = 100 points. Compare millimeter measurements. Stones just under 0.50, 0.75, 1.00, 1.50 ct can look nearly the same.

Priority strip:

1. Cut first.
2. Color and clarity that look clean to you.
3. Carat with what is left.

Bottom line: Ask for a grading report from an independent lab such as GIA or IGI.