

# Visual Guide to Poster Grading



by Michael Erlewine

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## INTRODUCTION

This is not intended to be a finely produced book, but rather a readable document for those who are interested in in this series on concert poster artists and graphic design. Some of these articles still need work.

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Here are some other links to more books, articles, and videos on these topics:

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## **Visual Guide to Poster Grading**

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The best way to learn how to grade the condition of posters is by looking at a lot of examples of what can happen to a poster. Luckily for you, and not so for me, my collection happens to have a lot of fine examples of poster degradation, so I have put together a little archive of what you don't want to have too much of in your collection.

To start with, be sure to read the Rosetta Stone for estimating condition, as written by Jacaeber Kastor of Psychedelic Solution, considered by many, including myself, to be the expert's expert when it comes to the fine art of postering. You can read it here [!A CP000037 "Poster Grading Chart"](#).

WARNING!!!! Some of these images are large, so that you can see the poster defects, so be forewarned if you have a slow connection. Also, there are a lot of them, so have fun.

PERFECT: A/A. Here is the corner of a poster fresh for the printers box. It does not get any more perfect than this, but even here you can see some ink imperfections, so a rule to consider is: If life is imperfect, posters are too. They are, not by design, but by nature, imperfect. The perfection may affect the price, but seldom need to affect the enjoyment of the poster. In fact, many a funky poster has made for great enjoyment. Sometimes I like the odd raggedy poster, because I am not afraid to touch and enjoy it.



**A/A Perfect, Fresh From the Box**

WRECKED: If you want to see a poster that is beyond salvaging, except for an illustration like this, check you this copy of FD-26, perhaps the most immediately recognizable poster in the FD-series. Our thanks to Jacaeber Kastor for contributing this (our worst nightmare) poster.



### **Beyond Help**

The next sections will take you through a brief tour of condition.

### **Corner Defects**

**CORNERS:** The corners are the first to go, because they stick out in the world and are the most vulnerable. Almost any poster that has been handled much has some corner wear, and this is to be expected, and not considered a harsh defect, as long as it is slight. When it gets seriously blunted, that is a different matter, and when torn off, well.....



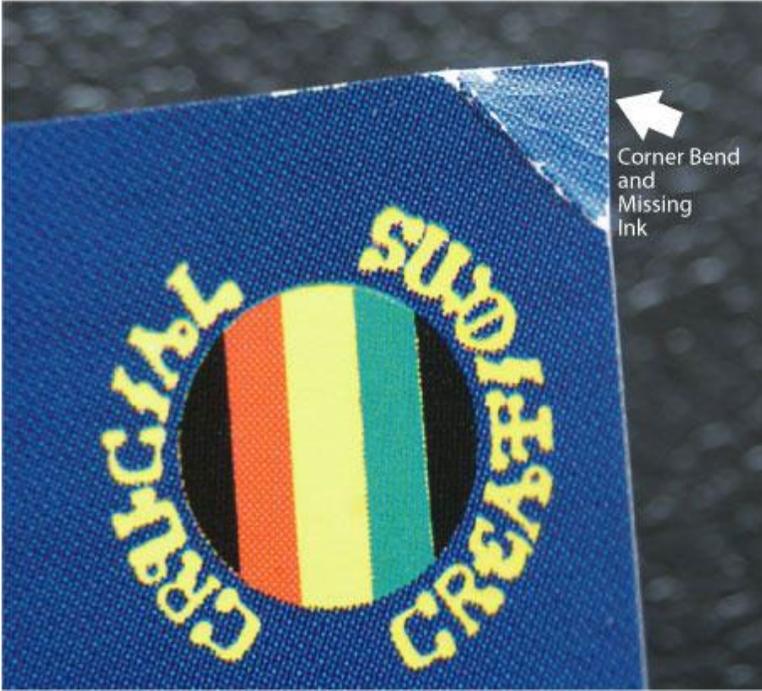
**Corner Damage Inconsequential**



**Soft Corner**



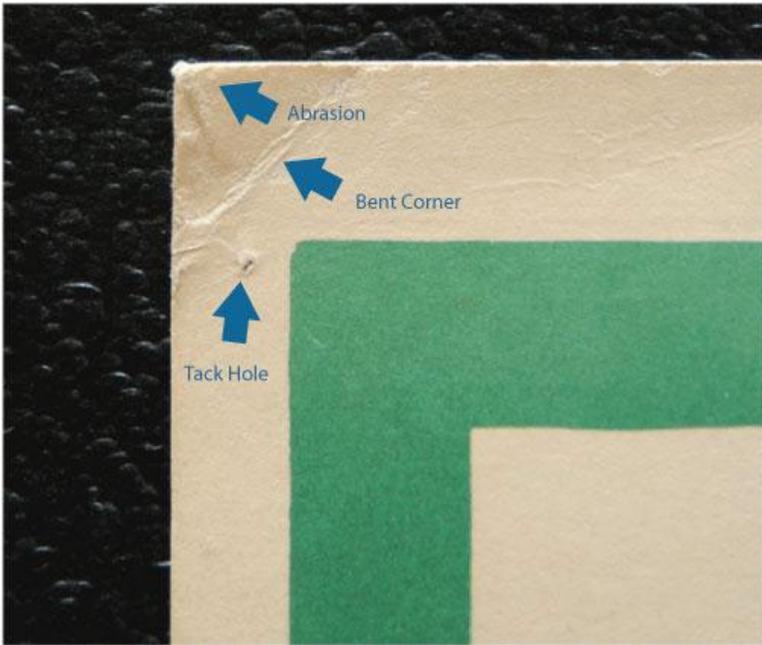
**Softer Corner**



Corner Bend, Missing Ink



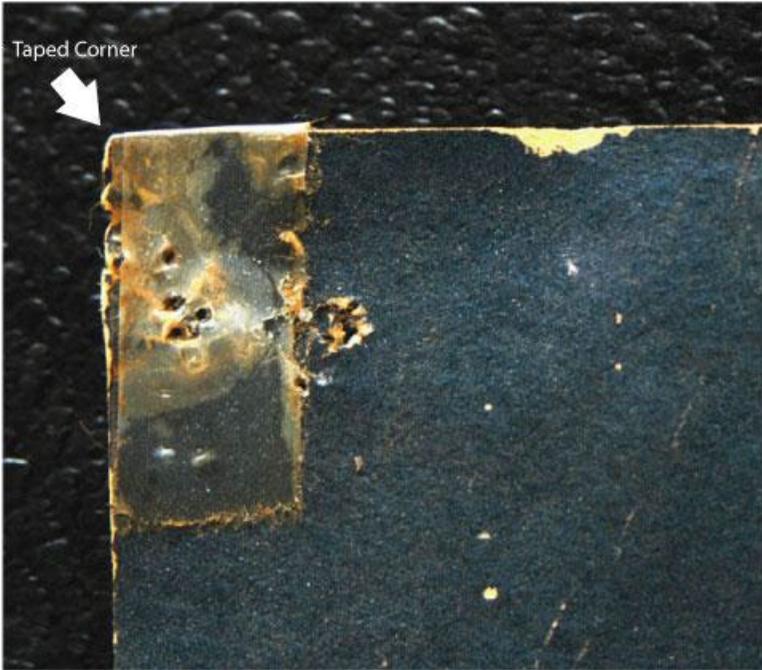
**Corner Missing**



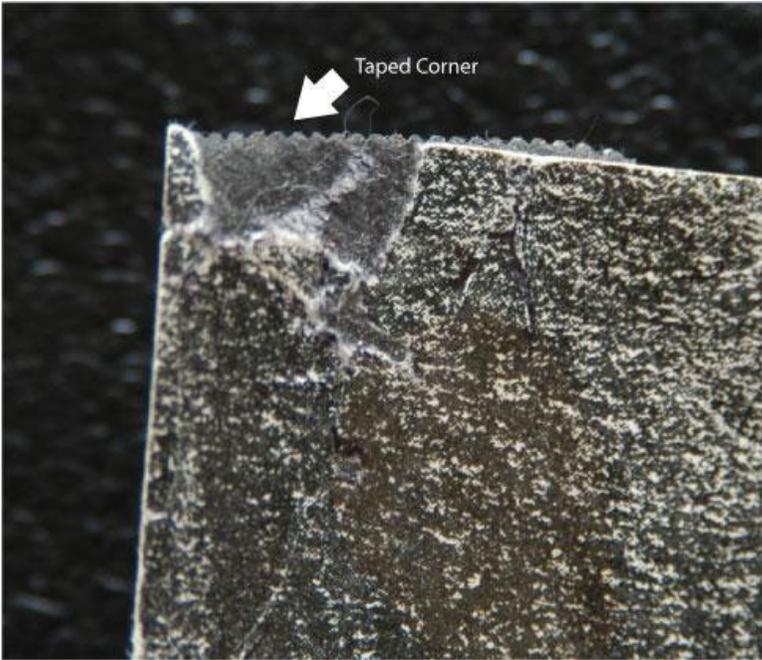
**Corner Bend, Tack Hole**



**Corner Bent, Slight Buckle**



**Corner Taped**



**Corner Taped Fill**



**Corner Tape over Tack Hole**



**Corner, Torn Tip**



**Corner Soft, with Fold**

**Tack and Pin Holes**

**TACK AND PIN HOLES:** Posters were designed to be tacked (or glued!) to the wall, so it makes no sense to go crazy about their being tack holes in a poster. In fact a nice set of pinholes adds a touch of world elegance to a poster, much like the odd gold earring sends an "out of the box" message. A set of holes means this poster actually was used for the event or to grace someone's quarters. Not a bad thing.

Pinholes are generally very acceptable and a nice set of tack holes, even with the circular impression of the thumbtack head is not to be overly frowned on. Tack hole tears are another matter. They are to be discouraged and generally affect the price of the poster. And harsh tears, where the poster was ripped down with the tacks in place, leaving long tears are not welcome. The same goes for a set of staple marks, which are like multiple pinholes, at their best. Staple holes are cool, unless they are some big whopper that tears up the poster. Multiple holes are uncool.



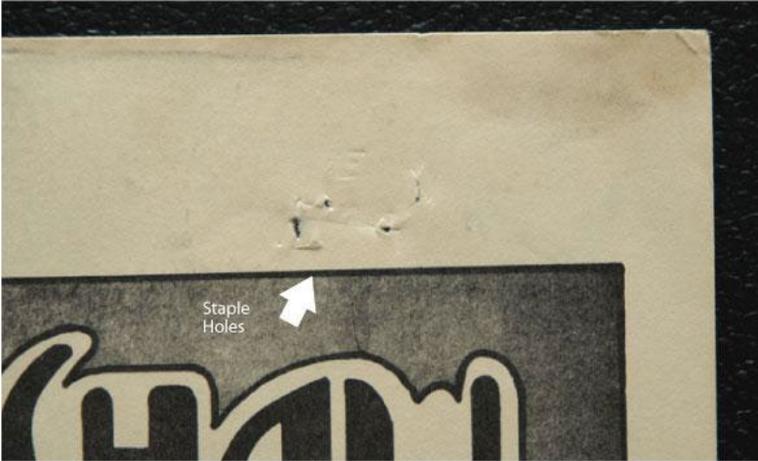
Pin Hole



Tack Hole



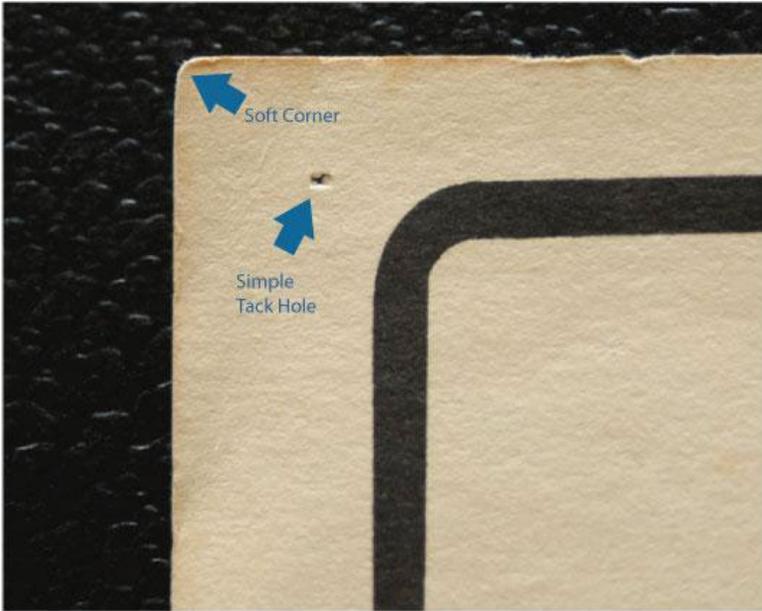
Tack Hole Tear



**Staple Holes**



**Multiple Tack Holes**



**Single Tack Hole**

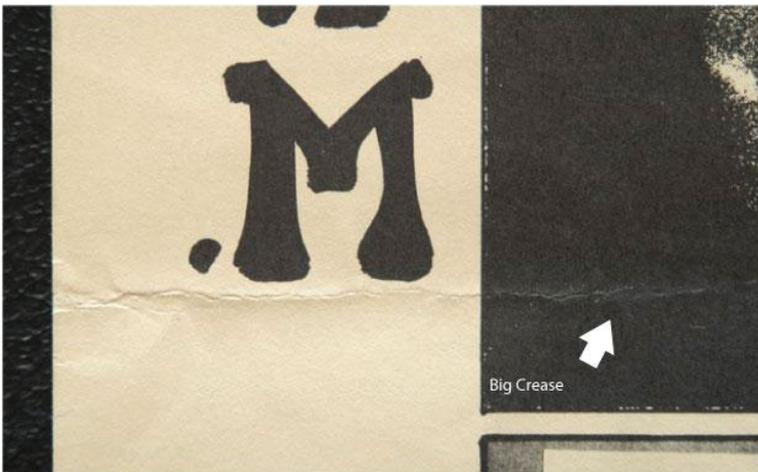


**Tack Tear**

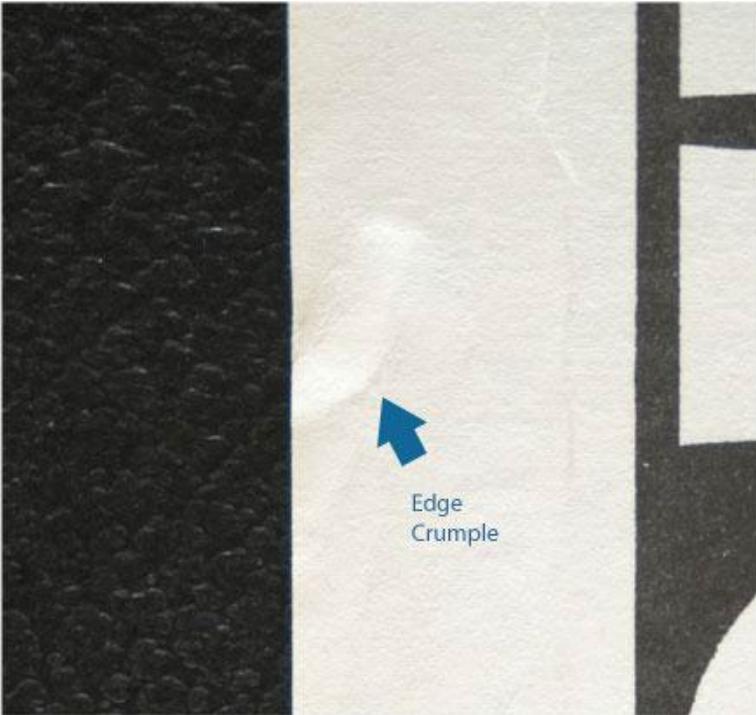
**Edge Wear: The Crease and the Crumple**

**EDGE WEAR: THE CREASE AND THE CRUMPLE:** Posters get edge wear, in particular with glossy slick posters, edge wear is almost to be expected. Large glossy posters seem to defy handling and almost always show edge wear. While edge wear is never welcome, it usually does not affect the central image and vanishes the moment the poster is framed. And there is all kinds of edge wear, as looking at the shots below will illustrate. These range from tiny abrasions that just flare the lip of the edge to gaping sections gone, showing air.

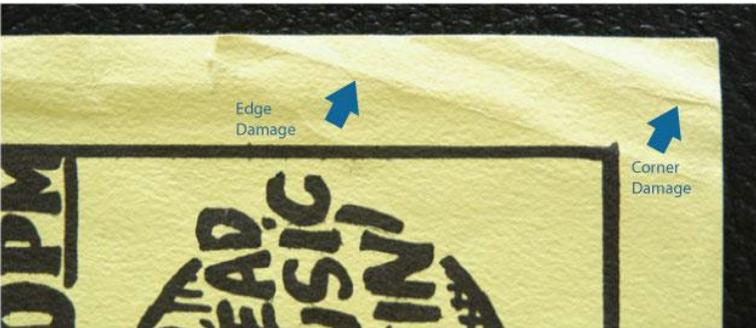
And there is the crease and the crumple. Creases can be at the corners, but they can also affect large sections of the poster. Same with the crumple. These are never cool and while they may be insignificant, they often extend into the poster image. Some posters of handbills have been folded in half, and that's that.



**Big Crease**



**Edge Crumple**



**Edge and Corner Crumple**



Edge Damage



Edge Damage, Serious



Edge Damage and Crumple



### **Taped Edges**

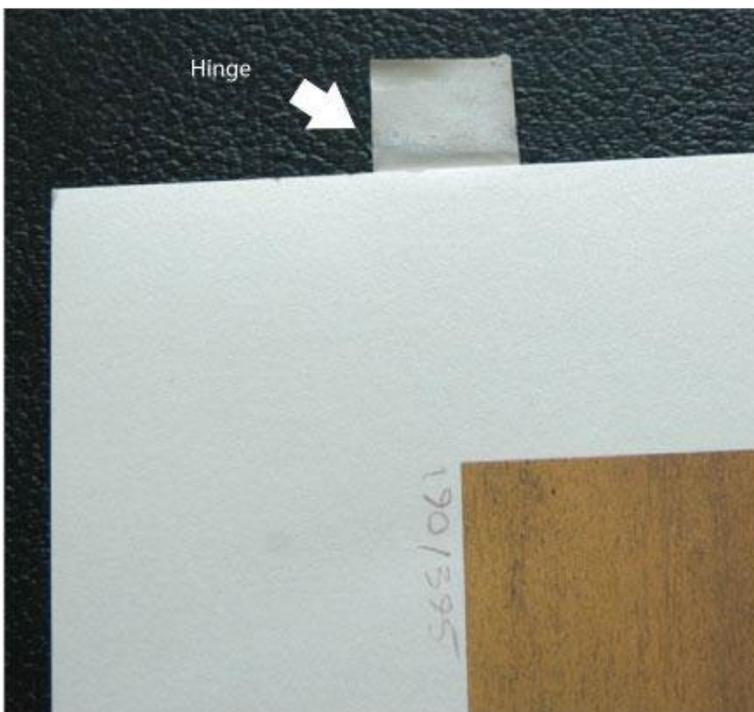
### **Fingerprints and Back Hinges**

FINGERPRINTS AND GLOSSY STOCK: Watch out for these, because you can easily create them, in particular on glossy thin stock. A technique for handling these, taught to me by Brad Kelly, is to use a poster-it note to pick them up and raise them so that you can get your hands under them. Fingerprints can be removed, but I will have to get one of the experts to write a short description of how to do it.



## Fingerprints

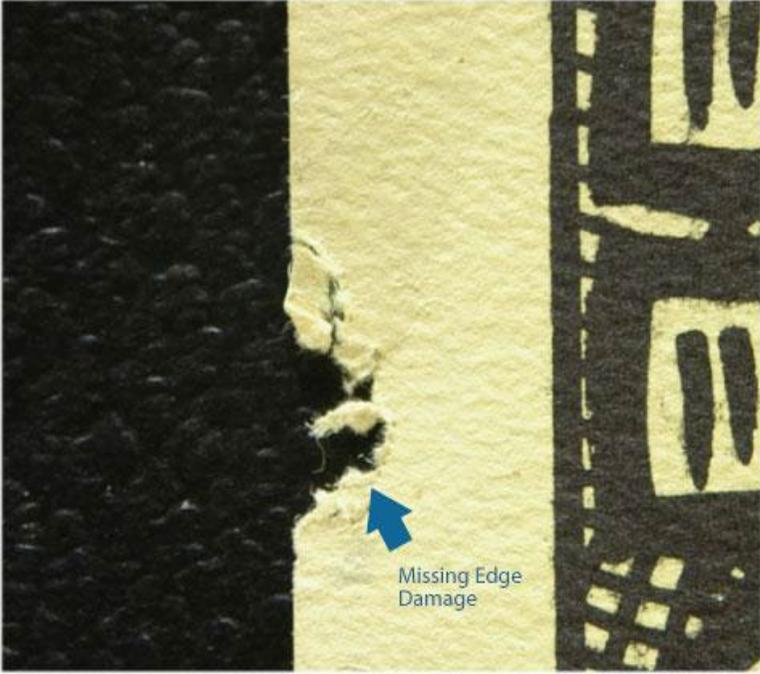
**BACK HINGES:** There are dozens of ways to attempt to mount posters for matting and framing, and most of them involve sticking some form of archival-safe glue-hinge to your poster. I don't do it. Period. What most collectors I know do is to mount the poster to the backboard using transparent plastic corners that are self-adhesive. Place these corners on the poster, carefully place the poster on the backboard, align (and that is the hard part) and press down. This is a safe way to mount your posters. However, watch out for the self-adhesive corner that folds in half or in any way turns its sticky side up and grabs your poster. It happens.



### **Back Hinges**

### **Missing Pieces and Smudges**

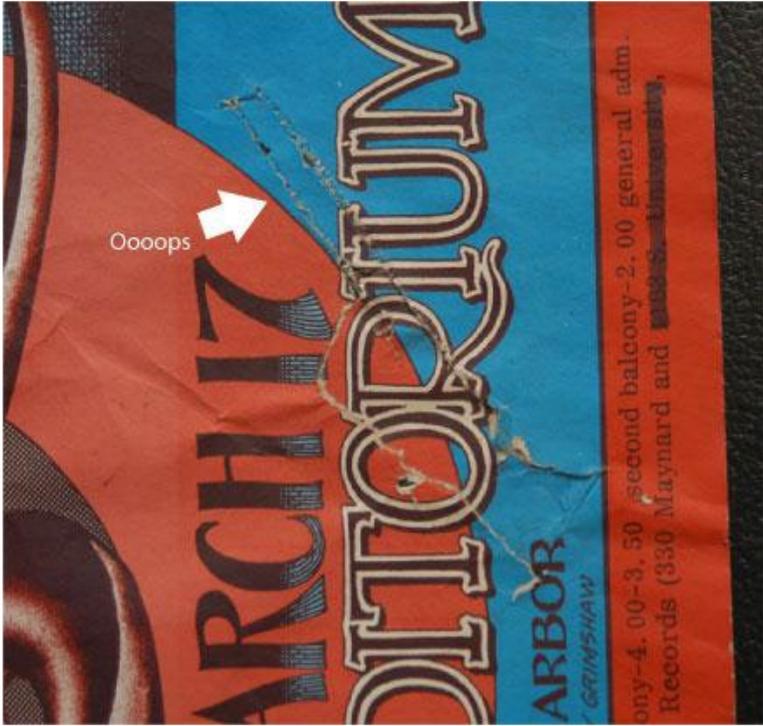
MISSING PIECES: Hey, there are no good missing pieces, so I can't help explain that away. If it is gone, it is gone. There is a article on this site on restoration and some poster collectors restore their posters to raise their value. While I understand why they do this, I have never done it and don't even like to see the signs of restoration, but that's just me.



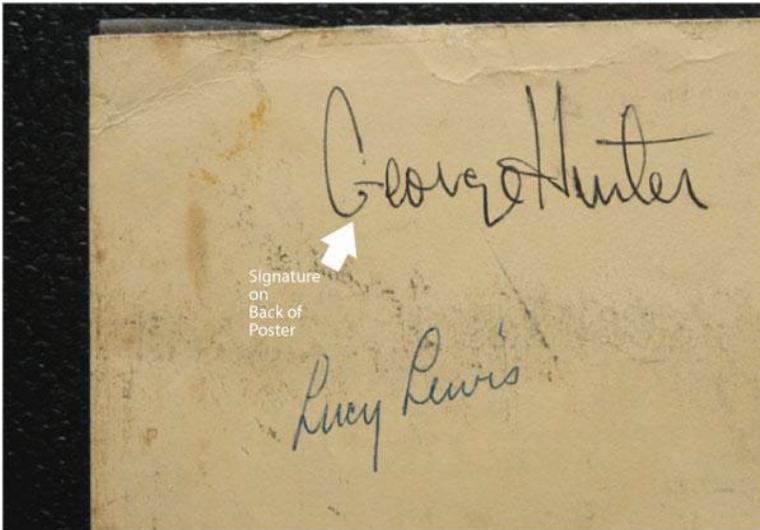
**Missing Piece**



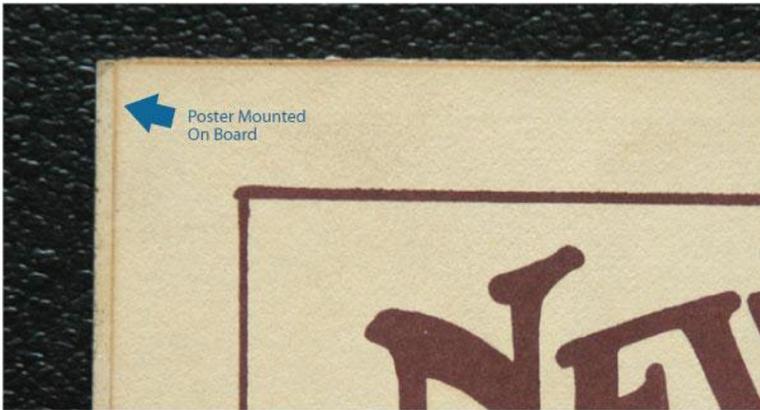
**Missing Piece and Tape**



Damage Serious



**Signature on Back**



**Poster Mounted on Board**

SMUDGES: Smudges are easy to come by and hard to see coming and to get off. There are ways to do this, but I don't know them well enough to be your instructor on this. They are not cool.



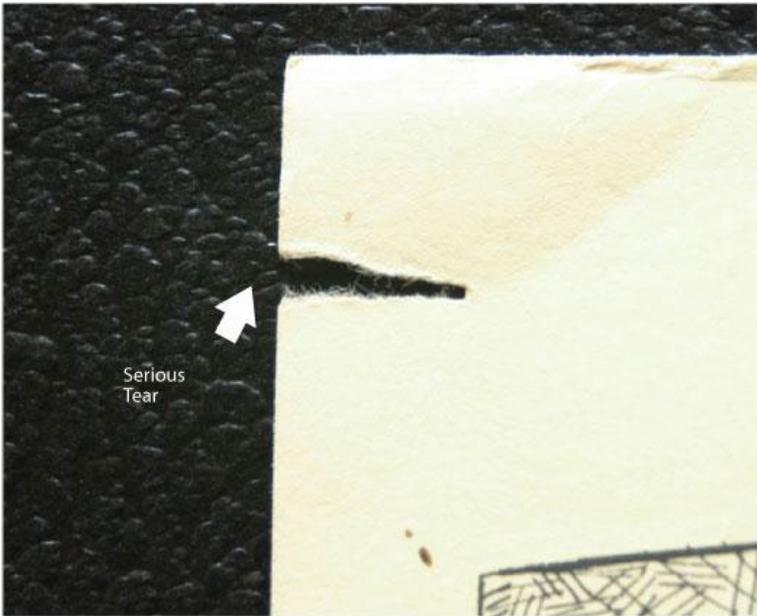
**Corner Soft, Smudge**



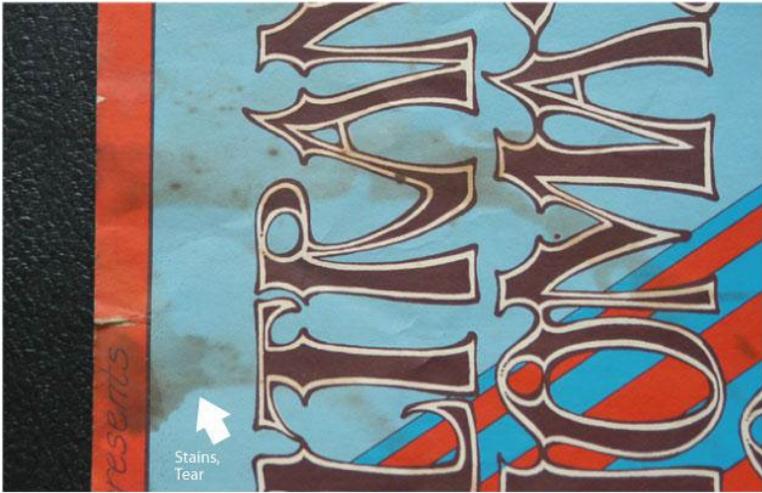
**Smudge**

**Tears**

TEARS: Tears of all kinds can happen, in particular as the poster gets old and brittle. Some of them are just along the edges and at the corners, but they can occur right in the middle of the image and do. Taping them is not good. You will find a lot of old posters taped to beat hell. Check out some of the examples below.



**Tear with Piece Missing**



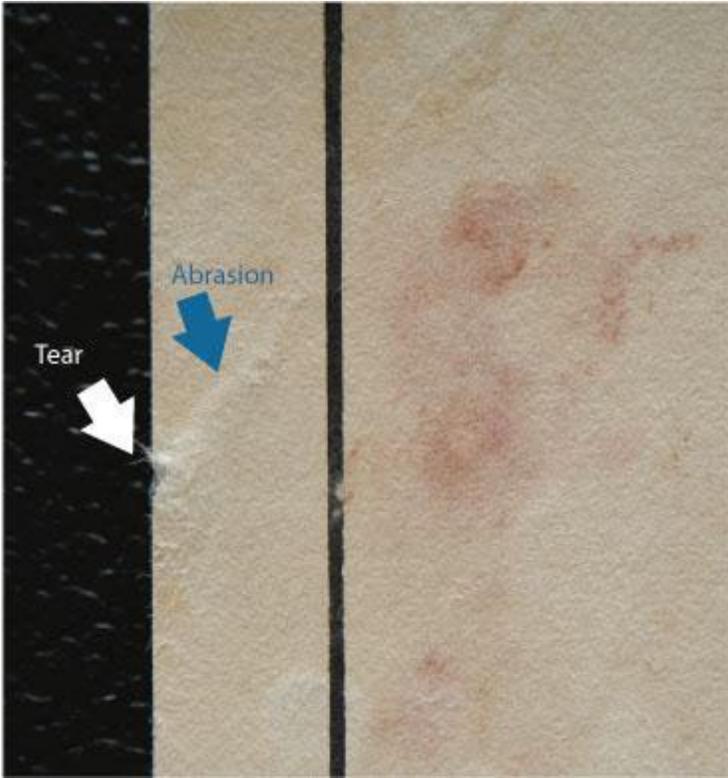
**Tear, Stains**



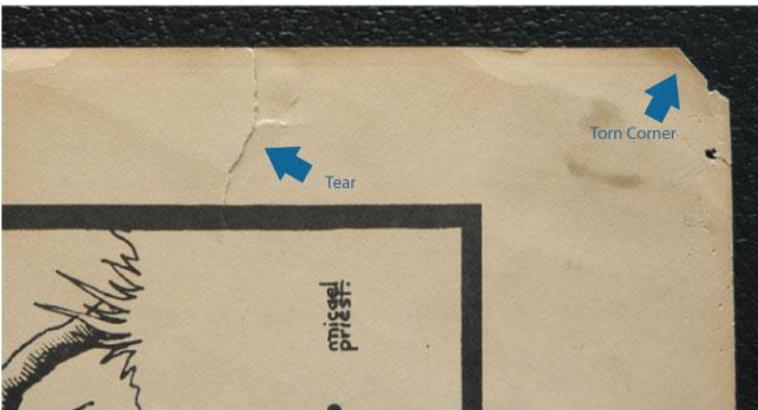
**Tear, Taped**



**Tear**



Tear, Abrasion



Tear



### **Tear and Hole**

### **Stains**

STAINS: Stains, especially big greasy or oil stains are bad. They really affect the value of the poster. Most any other damage does not matter too much if you want to frame the posters, but stains are visible and alter the way the poster works, in particular if they are large and in the image area.

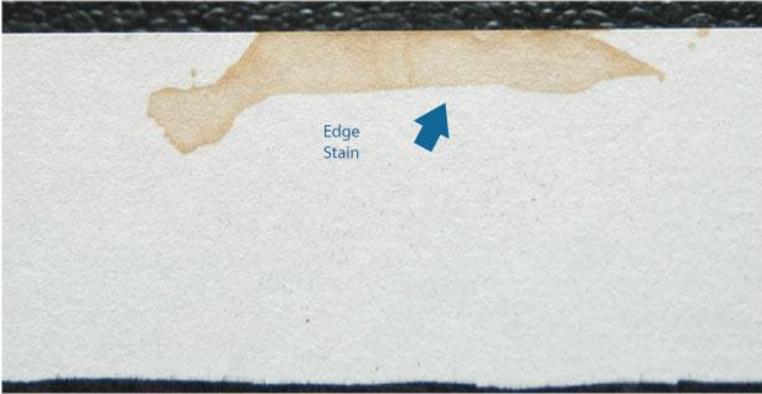


Stain in Center of Poster

**Stain in Poster Center**



Stains, Bad, Acceptable Pin Hole



**Stain, Edge**



**Stain Severe**



### **Grease Spots**

So, there you have it, at least some introduction to what can go wrong to our posters and what to look for in buy or selling a poster. Combine looking at these images with Jaceber Kastor's article on grading, mentioned above, and you are on your way to learning the fine art of poster grading.

This article was done about 18 years ago. I am sure I got help and support from Jaceber Kastor in learning this.