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PROOF FIRST · PRICE SECOND



The 2026 Pocket Change Diagnostic Guide

10 coins worth a second look: what to check, what it is not, and how much to trust a quick test.

FREE REFERENCE GUIDE

IN ERRORS WE TRUST

An educational identification aid — not an appraisal or grading opinion.
Every diagnostic in this guide was verified against published references before printing. Sources are listed at the back.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Check first. Claim second.

Most coins that look like errors are post-mint damage, wear, or common machine doubling. This guide gives you the real diagnostic for ten coins — and the look-alikes that fool people.

Each case is built the same way: **LOOK FOR** names the exact feature to check. **NOT THIS** names the look-alike to rule out before you get excited. **NOTE** carries the caution that keeps you honest.

Premiums are shown as tiers, not dollar amounts, because prices move and grade drives value. A tier tells you how much a find matters *if* it is authentic and correctly attributed — it is never a price quote.

The premium tiers

HIGH	Meaningful premium even in low grades, when authentic.
MODEST	A collectible find — usually modest value in circulated grades.
VARIES	Depends heavily on the specific variety and grade.
EDUCATIONAL	A check that teaches a habit — not a rarity claim.

The bench kit

› A 5x to 10x loupe · › Bright, angled light · › A scale accurate to 0.01 g

› A caliper · › A notebook — write down what you actually see

And one habit that matters more than any tool: **always compare against a known-normal coin of the same date.**

MODERN POCKET CHANGE

The Lincoln Cents

1 1984 Lincoln Cent — Doubled Die Obverse, “Doubled Ear”

HIGH

FS-101 · Wexler WDDO-001 · CONECA DDO-001 · Class IV offset hub doubling

LOOK FOR

A distinct, rounded **second earlobe directly south of Lincoln’s main ear** — bold enough to see without magnification. The widest doubling is actually on the **bow tie**, with supporting doubling on the beard, the back of the head, and the collar. Confirm against the published die markers for WDDO-001.

NOT THIS

Flat, shelf-like machine doubling that cuts into the design. A contact mark or dent on the ear — no separation, no rounded second lobe, and no matching bow-tie doubling. Plating blisters on the copper-plated zinc planchet are raised bumps, not a clean doubled outline.

NOTE

Philadelphia only — no mint mark. The 1984-D has its own, different doubled die (doubling on LIBERTY and the motto). A mintmarked coin is not the Doubled Ear.

2 1995 Lincoln Cent — Doubled Die Obverse

MODEST

FS-101 · CONECA DDO-001 · Philadelphia, no mint mark

LOOK FOR

Doubling strongest on **LIBERTY** — on a genuine example it is bold enough to see with the **naked eye**, raised and clearly separated. IN GOD WE TRUST also doubles, shifted up and to the left. Check LIBERTY first, the motto second.

NOT THIS

Machine doubling on LIBERTY or the motto — flat and shelf-like, it *reduces* the letter’s total width instead of adding a second raised image.

NOTE

Don’t judge this one by the date. The date sits near the hubbing pivot point, so it shows little to no doubling on the real FS-101 — a “1995 doubled die” whose main show is the date is probably something else. And mind the mint mark: the 1995-D has a separate doubled die (FS-103) that doubles TRUST and the date.

3 1982 Lincoln Cent — The Composition Check

EDUCATIONAL

The transition year · Large Date & Small Date, both mints

LOOK FOR

Your scale. Copper-alloy 1982 cents (95% copper) weigh **3.11 g**; copper-plated zinc cents (97.5% zinc core) weigh **2.50 g**. The change happened mid-year at both Philadelphia and Denver. Weigh on a scale that reads to 0.01 g — color alone is not a reliable composition test.

NOT THIS

A worn, corroded, or plated normal coin that weighs slightly off. Small deviations are wear and damage, not a discovery. Only a full-weight mismatch means anything.

NOTE

This is a habit-builder, not a rarity claim — but the habit pays. The one combination never supposed to exist, a **1982-D Small Date struck on a copper planchet**, is a genuine transitional error with certified examples. A 1982-D Small Date that weighs 3.11 g gets set aside for expert review, not spent.

MODERN POCKET CHANGE

Quarters & Dollars

4 2004-D Wisconsin Quarter — Extra Leaf, High & Low

MODEST

Extra Leaf High FS-901 · Extra Leaf Low FS-902 · Denver only

LOOK FOR

The left side of the ear of corn, below the cheese wheel. **Extra Leaf High:** an extra raised leaf arcs *upward* from the husk, its tip pointing up toward roughly the 10 o'clock position. **Extra Leaf Low:** the extra leaf arcs *downward*, drooping across the lower husk toward the cheese. The feature is in the die, so it is raised, smooth, and in exactly the same place on every coin from that die.

NOT THIS

Scratches, nicks, or damage in the husk area — those are cut in, irregular, and unique to that one coin.

NOTE

Denver mint only — a 2004-P Wisconsin quarter cannot be either variety. Most references attribute the extra leaves to die gouging, though collectors still debate the cause; "widely attributed" is the honest description.

5 2005 Minnesota Quarter — Doubled Die Reverse, “Extra Tree”

MODEST

Major variety FS-801 · CONECA 1-R-VI · Wexler WDDR-001

LOOK FOR

Not doubled outlines — a **partial extra tree**: a raised, free-standing segment of an additional evergreen floating in the field beside a real tree. On the major variety (FS-801), the extra tree portion sits **immediately to the right of the fourth tree** to the right of the Minnesota state outline.

NOT THIS

A faint thickening or shadow around a tree outline. That is one of the many minor catalogued doubled dies, machine doubling, or die deterioration — not the headline variety.

NOTE

Over 100 distinct Minnesota doubled die reverses have been catalogued, and most are minor with little or no premium. Only the handful PCGS designates “Extra Tree” (FS-801, FS-802, FS-803, FS-804…) carry the premium. Match your coin to a sourced reference photo before claiming it.

6 2007 Presidential Dollar — Missing Edge Lettering

VARIES

Washington issue · PCGS “Missing Edge Lettering” · Plain-edge error

LOOK FOR

A **completely smooth, featureless edge**. Presidential dollars were struck with plain edges, then lettered in a separate step — date, mint mark, E PLURIBUS UNUM, IN GOD WE TRUST. A coin that skipped that step has no text, no partial impressions, no faint shadows — and **no date or mint mark anywhere on the coin**. Sanity-check the coin itself: a genuine 2007 Washington dollar is 8.1 g and 26.5 mm.

NOT THIS

Weak or partial edge lettering — a separate, much lesser error; any visible trace of lettering means it is not “missing.” Also beware altered coins with the lettering filed or ground off: look for a disturbed edge surface, wrong weight, or lettering ghosts.

NOTE

The Washington issue is by far the best known; the same error exists on later 2007 issues (Adams, Jefferson, Madison). Ordinary circulation wear never removes edge lettering evenly and completely.

The Morgan Dollars

7 1878 Morgan Dollar — Tail Feather Varieties

VARIES

8 TF · 7/8 TF · 7 TF Reverse of 1878 · 7 TF Reverse of 1879 · Philadelphia

LOOK FOR

Count the tail feathers first. **8 TF:** eight tail feathers, flat breast, parallel top arrow feather — the original reverse, struck for roughly the first two weeks. **7/8 TF:** a 7-feather hub pressed over the 8-feather die — look for the **tips of the original eight feathers protruding beneath the seven**; specialists want several clear tips visible. A plain **7 TF** splits two ways: the **Reverse of 1878** has a **flat/concave** eagle's breast and the top arrow feather **parallel** to the one below it; the **Reverse of 1879** has a **convex, rounded** breast and the top arrow feather **slanted**, widening toward the olive branch.

NOT THIS

A worn or weakly struck tail where the feather separations merge. If you cannot count cleanly, the honest call is "7 TF, reverse type undetermined" — not a guess.

NOTE

All four are Philadelphia reverses; the 1878-S and 1878-CC are separate issues outside this set. And remember: "parallel vs. slanted" describes the top *arrow* feather — not the tail feathers.

8 1887/6 Morgan Dollar — The Overdate

VARIES

Philadelphia = VAM-2 · New Orleans = VAM-3 · Both Top 100 VAMs

LOOK FOR

A faint trace at the **base of the 7**: the **bottom curve of an underlying 6 protruding below and to the right of the 7's stem**. The overdate comes from lightly resurfaced leftover 1886 dies re-punched with the 1887 date, and it shows clearest on early die states. Two mints exist — Philadelphia (VAM-2) and New Orleans (VAM-3); the O-mint coin is the scarcer of the two.

NOT THIS

Die scratches or contact damage in the date area — and not the unrelated 1887 VAM-5 doubled date, which is a different variety. A bold, obvious "6 inside the 7" is a red flag for an altered or misread coin, not a find.

NOTE

Use a loupe and compare against a verified overdate image. On late die states and worn coins, the trace may take real magnification to confirm.

9 1900-O/CC Morgan Dollar — The Overmintmark

VARIES

O/CC VAMs 7, 7A, 8, 8A, 9, 10, 10A, 11, 12 · New Orleans over Carson City dies

LOOK FOR

Remnants of a CC punch **beside and around the O** mint mark — raised, curved C segments in a catalogued position. Leftover Carson City reverse dies had the CC partially polished away and an O punched over it for 1900 New Orleans production. VAM-12 shows the strongest remnants; VAM-9 is the rarest of the group. On the common VAM-7 family, the CC sits low and right in the O, with the **lower-right remnant of the second C** the most prominent feature.

NOT THIS

Die scratches, polish lines, or damage around the mint mark — the usual false positives. And watch for the 1900-O “Micro O”: a small, oddly shaped O that belongs to a family of contemporary counterfeits. A tiny O is a warning sign, not a discovery.

NOTE

This one is frequently over-claimed. Match the remnant position to a specific catalogued VAM — third-party attribution is the safe path.

CLASSIC SILVER DOLLARS

Trust, But Verify

10 Morgan & Peace Dollars — Authenticity Basics

EDUCATIONAL

Screening specs · Morgan 1878–1904 & 1921 · Peace 1921–1935

LOOK FOR

The numbers first. Original-issue Morgan and Peace dollars share identical specs: **26.73 g, 38.1 mm diameter, 90% silver / 10% copper**, reeded edge. Check weight and diameter, then magnet and ping, then die and surface tells. Mint weight tolerance was about ±0.097 g and honest wear takes a little more — a circulated coin a few tenths under is normal.

NOT THIS

A coin a full gram or more light is not a worn genuine coin — it is a copy. Cast counterfeits usually show soft details, seams, or pimpled surfaces. And no test saves a coin with a date/mintmark combination that never existed — any Morgan dated 1905–1920, an 1887-CC, a 1922 Morgan.

NOTE

These tests **narrow suspects — they do not authenticate**. Correct-weight counterfeits struck from transfer dies can pass every home test; certification is the only settle for a valuable coin. One more wrinkle: the modern U.S. Mint reissues (2021 onward) weigh the same 26.73 g but are 99.9% silver, so composition-sensitive tests read differently on them.

Ten coins, one habit: the feature is either there, in the right place, in the right form — or the coin goes back in the jar. The next page is the standard every claim in this guide was held to, and the standard to hold your own finds to.

BEFORE YOU CLAIM ANYTHING

Rules We Hold Ourselves To

1 Source every claim

If a variety cannot be tied to a reference such as PCGS CoinFacts, CONECA, the Cherrypickers' Guide, or VAMWorld, it does not get published — and it should not get claimed.

2 Rule out damage first

Post-mint damage, machine doubling, and wear explain most "errors." The mint error is the last explanation standing, never the first one reached for.

3 Quick tests are not authentication

Weight, diameter, magnet, and ping tests only narrow the field. They can condemn a coin; they cannot crown one.

4 Grade drives value

A variety in poor condition can be worth far less than the same variety in a high grade. The tier is the ceiling of the story, not the price of your coin.

5 Get a second opinion

Before buying or selling a suspected variety, have it confirmed by a reputable grading service. A guide — including this one — is a starting point, not a verdict.

Sources consulted for this guide

PCGS CoinFacts — variety listings, designations, and specifications.

Wexler's Doubled Die Files (doubleddie.com) — doubled die listings and die markers.

CONECA — variety cross-references and attribution listings.

VAMWorld — Morgan dollar VAM attributions, including the Top 100 list.

CopperCoins — Lincoln cent variety listings and guides.

Coin World — issue history and variety reporting.

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