

## How are Coloured Gemstones Graded?

If you intend to purchase coloured gemstones, it is important to be sure that the gems in question are of the grade you are expecting. Although it is somewhat more difficult to evaluate the grading of coloured gems, the techniques involved are similar to those used in grading diamonds.

The grading of coloured gemstones follows the techniques used for grading diamonds by evaluating colour, clarity, cut and carat weight, although this is pretty much where the similarities in the grading standards end. Unlike diamonds, when evaluating a coloured gemstone, the most weight is given to the actual colour. Where a minor clarity flaw would see a diamond evaluated at a lower value, this is seldom the case with a coloured gemstone.

Colour is introduced to a gemstone as it forms in the earth, as trace elements are inducted into the gem as it forms. Some of these elements are vital to the composition of the gem, others are superfluous to the make-up of the gemstone, yet will affect the resulting colour. As a rule of thumb, the more intense and pure the colour the more valuable the stone, a good colour is more important than clarity for a coloured stone.

Clarity describes the internal purity of the gemstone, and is seen as a secondary measure of value when evaluating a coloured gemstone. Imperfections in clarity are often seen as an enhancing feature of a coloured stone, these types of imperfections are termed “phenomena”, a classic example of this kind of valuable imperfection would be the star that can often be found within sapphires, which is caused by a series of intersecting needles of imperfection being present within the gem. Also the cat’s eye, found within tiger-eye quartz is another easily recognised example of a valued imperfection.

Coloured gems are cut into a much wider range of shapes than a diamond might be. The cut of a particular stone is decided by judging which shape would display the colour most effectively, whilst maintain the carat weight of the original. Some shapes seem to be better suited to displaying the charms of a coloured stone more effectively, such as tablet, trapezoid, mixed-cut, cabochon, emerald cut, marquise, pear, cushion and oval. Additionally, certain types of stones are usually cut into a certain shape. Most emeralds will be cut into the traditional emerald shape, sapphires and rubies are most often cut into a cushion or oval, and opals are always cut into a cabochon shape.

Carat weight is a numerical expression of the overall weight of the gemstone, a single carat is made up of 100 points, and in metric it would be equal to 0.200 grams.

The grading of coloured gemstones is a far more complex problem than grading a diamond; judgements have to be made between colour and clarity, before the gem can be valued correctly. Collecting coloured gems can be a fascinating hobby, the evaluation of them as individual gems is an interesting facet of such a pastime.