The [American Numismatic Association](https://www.money.org/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) (ANA) publishes a program for every show it organizes, and included in that show program is a list of bourse etiquette. This list includes the following suggestions:

* Don’t interrupt a dealer and customer who are talking or in the middle of a transaction.
* Don’t ask to see the coins being discussed or inquire about their prices.
* Do return to the dealer’s table when he or she has concluded the transaction.
* Don’t block customer access to a dealer’s table.
* Do spend some time learning before you buy.
* Don’t search a dealer’s entire inventory for the best pieces, then expect him to sell you the coins at wholesale prices.
* Do allow the dealer to make a reasonable profit.
* Don’t try to negotiate when the price is fair. Ask for a discount only if you truly believe a piece is overpriced.
* Do ask permission to show a coin to another collector or dealer for a second opinion.
* Don’t buy a coin on the first day of the show, then try to return it on the last day because you found something else.

As someone who spends time on both sides at the table I have dealt with people who try to adhere to these guidelines, but also with people who don’t seem to know or want to practice proper bourse etiquette. In light of this, I’ll mention a few things that I think are important when visiting a coin show in addition to the points listed by the ANA.

Politeness is important. If an attendee would like to see a coin in a case, he or she should ask. and it’s best not to request more than a few coins at the time. If a dealer is only willing to show one coin at the time, potential buyers need to respect his or her wishes. A lot of the standards we observe in these situations result from security concerns; a coin show is a place where a lot of money is packed into a single room, and many dealers’ livelihoods depend on their inventory. Security plays a big part in protecting this livelihood.

When a dealer hands you a coin, or when you go through boxes of coins (such as raw foreign coins, which are often on display in storage boxes due to space constraints), it is important to keep a few things in mind:

First of all, *always* keep the item in sight. If you try to look at it in your lap, the table you are sitting at will most likely block the dealer’s view, which will make them uncomfortable. If you are with someone it is usually okay to show the item to the other person, but it never hurts to ask.

Also, when going through inventory, it’s always a good idea to keep an eye on time. If a customer spends an hour going through a dealer’s inventory, asking prices and discussing coins, it’s best if they try to purchase at least something. This is what I call a courtesy purchase, and it tells the dealer that you are serious and not wasting his time.

I do this as well when going through another dealer’s inventory, even when I don’t really see anything of interest. A small purchase may help a dealer remember me when they have a fresh collection, perhaps giving me the opportunity to purchase items that I do want in the future.

Pricing is always a touchy subject, or course, as a deal can easily come together or fall apart based on this discussion. Most dealers will price coins in plain sight, giving you a good indication of what they are looking to get for the item in question. If the price is fair, and you are willing to pay it, just say that you want to purchase the coin. Some dealers will gladly offer you a small discount, but don’t count on it. If the price is close to what you are willing to pay, you can always ask if the dealer has some room to move on the price.

Personally I think a little haggling is to be expected, and if you want to offer slightly less and come with arguments such as auction results, feel free to make your best offer. However, if a coin is priced at $1000 and the dealer offers you the coin for $900, don’t offer $500, as it is extremely unlikely to be accepted, and you might upset the dealer by such a lowball offer. It’s better to just thank them and move on.

Some of this may seem obvious, but I can tell you from first-hand experience that there are people who forget common manners at coin shows. A few years ago at a small show in California, when I was still working for another dealer, we had a customer — let’s call him John — who wanted to see the raw coins in our boxes, which was perfectly fine. Over the next two hours, John meticulously went through every coin in stock, never going as far as to ask a price; by the time the show came to a close that day, he had not purchased anything.

The next morning he came back as we were preparing an invoice for another customer. Without asking, he grabbed several coins from a box we were placing them in, almost yelling that he thought the coins were for sale and that he would buy them if we would quote him prices.

After explaining that a) we were busy with another customer and b) the coins were already sold, he continued to grab coins from the box and look at them, all the while loudly declaring that he wanted some of the coins. At this point, we made it clear that we were no longer interested in doing business with him. We asked him to please put the coins back and vacate the table or we would call security.

This calmed him down enough for him to leave, and several dealers in the vicinity who had seen the ordeal refused to do business with him that day. John broke just about all the rules of etiquette for a coin show, and as a result had a very difficult time purchasing anything from anybody that show.

This is just one unfortunate example, but it does highlight the importance of good manners. The numismatic business is small enough that if you upset somebody it doesn’t take long for other people to find out, so it’s better to use common sense when dealing with people, show respect, and — when in doubt — ask questions.

Coin shows often provide fun and rewarding experiences. It’s a place to see many items offered for sale at once, to educate yourself, and to add exciting new pieces to your collection. Coin show etiquette helps dealers and collectors meet in the middle, fostering positive interactions that make people want to come back for more.