

# How to Spot Marked Cards

No player should have any information about the ordering of a library other than information they have gained through legitimate gameplay means, like scrying. When cards become marked, either by accident or through malice, players can gain information they aren't otherwise entitled to. Spotting and fixing marked cards tends to be more relevant at Competitive and Professional REL, but the techniques in this document apply to Regular REL as well.

In this guide, we will discuss what constitutes a marked card, how to spot them, and the penalties and fixes associated with any problems you might find. We will also briefly discuss spotting deliberate cheating with marked cards.

## Physical Signs

The MTR (3.11) states that it is the responsibility of players to ensure their cards/sleeves are not marked. The physical reality of Magic is that sleeves and cards get marked during the course of play - cards are shuffled, tapped, and generally picked up and moved during Magic games all the time.

At Competitive and Professional REL, the IPG (3.8) specifically says that, to be an infraction, a card/sleeve must not only have a marking on it, but the marking *could* allow the card to be differentiated from other cards in the library.

The obvious examples are physical differences in sleeves, for instance:

- Fingernail marks or bumps on the back of the sleeve.
- Edges of sleeves being bent.
- Discolouration, including on the sides of the sleeve.
- Factory defects, such as sleeves of differing lengths or shade.



A few examples of marked cards:

Left card: bend top left, bumps middle-right.

Middle card: bumps, line on right-hand side.

Right card: Bent left corner, bumps.

But it's important to note there are other properties of cards or sleeves that might be differentiable:

- There are double-faced cards in sleeves that are not completely opaque.
- There are cards in the deck facing a different way.
- Only certain cards in a deck are double sleeved.
- There are foils which are noticeably curled, to the touch or to the eye.



Left: A deck shuffled with cards facing a different way.

Below: Some cards more out of their sleeves than others.



Not all foils are marked or bent, but some are. A common test for foil curling is to attempt to cut to a particular card in the deck - if you can consistently do so, the card is marked. If a marked foil is only available in foil (for example, a Buy a Box promo card), the Head Judge of the tournament is allowed to issue a proxy (MTR 3.4.)

Whether you consider a card marked enough to take action is a judgement call, and is partially influenced by the REL, as discussed later. If the markings are visible, consider the extent to which its visible from the player's position. If it's more about thickness or curling, try attempting to cut to the card or cards in question - if you can do it consistently, the card is marked.

## Patterns

At Competitive/Professional REL, the IPG (3.8) has us look for patterns of marked cards that would allow the player to gain a "substantial advantage" if it were noticed. Even at Regular REL, where more leniency is due, we should be aware of patterns of marked cards as a possible avenue for cheating. Remedies and penalties are discussed more towards the end of this guide.

The philosophy behind these rules is that cards should only be identifiable from their front face and their front face alone. A card being identifiable from its markings does not include just being able to work out its exact card name - being able to tell that the card on top of the library is either a Lightning Bolt or a Goblin Guide is equally a problem.

There are a few common patterns that might arise that one could gain an advantage from:

- All copies of a particular card in a deck (double-faced cards in see-through sleeves fit here).
- The sideboard versus the main deck.
- All combo pieces in a deck.
- All of the lands.
- A particular kind of spell (counterspell, burn spell, large creature, etc.)

It is important to note that these patterns needn't be *perfect* to be considered a pattern. 9 out of 10 of the marked cards being a burn spell is sufficient reason to believe there is a pattern. A pattern automatically upgrades the IPG penalty and is usually grounds to begin an investigation.

## Investigating

If cards are marked in a pattern, the most important question is to ask whether the markings could have happened by chance. For example:

- Are the marked cards handled more or less often than other cards in the deck?
- Would the marked cards likely have been sorted together, if the deck was sleeved while sorted?
- Are the marked cards likely to be transferred between multiple decks?
- Are the cards marked in places where a player's fingers and nails are likely to land naturally?

If you believe there is probably an accidental explanation for the marking, ask a few basic questions to confirm your understanding is correct. If you suspect that the markings are unnatural, or the player cannot answer your questions to your satisfaction, then you will need to investigate further.

Look for certain behaviors that could indicate a player is gaining advantage from markings, such as:

- Players looking at their deck a lot.
- Players placing their deck such that the suspect markings face themselves
- Players feeling the top card or adjusting the position of their library.
- Players shuffling in an odd manner.

None of these behaviours are automatic proof of cheating, but they raise suspicion. Combined with the markings and the player's answers, they may be grounds for a disqualification.

## Remedies and Penalties

At Competitive and Professional REL, the penalty for TE - Marked Cards (IPG 3.8) is a Warning. There are two upgrade paths available, both of which will require you to consult with the Head Judge of your event:

- A pattern in the cards that are marked which *could* give the player an advantage - Game Loss.
- Cards (usually foils) is marked in a way that can't be fixed by resleeving, and the player cannot find a replacement card - Game Loss, and replace those cards with basic lands of their choice.

Players must replace any marked cards or sleeves with unmarked ones, at the head judge's discretion that can either be done immediately or after the current match. If you choose to make them do it immediately, a player has 10 minutes to do this before they should be issued with a TE - Tardiness (IPG 3.1) penalty. If cards have been accidentally marked or damaged *during* the tournament, the Head Judge of the event can choose to issue proxy cards (MTR 3.4).

It's important to explain to a player *why* they're receiving a penalty - and that it is their responsibility to ensure that their deck is unmarked - and recommend to them that they check in future. The issuing of the penalty can and should be an educational experience for the player. The one exception to this rule is if you are requesting a player resleeve after this match, in which case you should avoid enumerating the markings, to ensure neither player gains advantage from them.

At Regular REL, more lenience is expected and players change their sleeves considerably less often. Assuming that there is no pattern to the markings and it is not a severe problem, consider taking no action. In serious cases - with badly damaged sleeves or patterns in the markings - you can ask the player to resleeve.

At all RELs, however, cheating is cheating. If you have reason to expect a player's marked cards are part of a deliberate attempt to cheat, it is time to investigate. If your investigation leads you (and your Head Judge) to believe that they *are* cheating, it's a Serious Problem at Regular REL and a USC - Cheating (IPG 4.8) at Competitive/Professional. Either way, the penalty is a disqualification.