

# Buyer Training Manual

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# Introduction

At Clothes Mentor, our buying process is the key to our success. Our goal is to make the buying process strict and efficient while removing any subjectivity on the buyer’s behalf. The more objective the process becomes the better the store will perform, so the goal of this training manual is to provide instructions for buyers to use every day while they are learning how to buy or while they are performing buys. Through the use of the information in this manual you will become a Certified Buyer after taking the Certified Buyer exam and by doing hands-on training with an approved trainer or manager.

All of the employees at Clothes Mentor are expected to become Certified Buyers. To become a Certified Buyer you will have to pass both the Certified Buyer written and practical exams. Once you have passed both exams you will receive the Certified Buyer title, and receive an instant $1.00 per hour raise as incentive to pass the exams.

We take our buy process seriously, so this manual should be studied before your exam and referred to even after you become a Certified Buyer. The practical exam will consist of working with an approved trainer who will observe you as you evaluate buys, enter into the POS systems, and interact with customers. If you do not pass either part of the exam you are encouraged to go through the training process again with an emphasis on what you missed.

# Buyer Qualification Process

Since buying is the most important aspect of Clothes Mentor, it receives the most attention and respect. As a new employee, you will train for around 4 to 8 weeks before becoming qualified as a buyer. The buy exam is designed to give management and the owners a true representation of how extensively you know the buying process. It is designed to test your knowledge and refine your training. The majority of the exam will be the tester and the trainee discussing the various questions and items that are included as part of the exam to initiate discussion.

The exam consists of a written/multiple-choice section to gauge your knowledge of the Buying Guide, and a practical section to measure your inspection and pricing abilities. The written exam should be completed by using the Buying Guide and the assistance of trainers or managers to answer questions for you. The goal is for you to get the knowledge necessary, and asking for help is not considered cheating, but is encouraged. Any employee may at any time have their buy qualification revoked by management if their performance shows that they are not staying knowledgeable about current styles and trends, or are not adhering to the policies of this guide. Requalification can be accomplished by passing the written and practical exam again.

# THE BUYING PROCESS

The following buying process must always be followed without exception or variation. With every employee following this precise procedure, we are able to operate most efficiently and effectively even during the busiest times.

## 1. Customer Check-In:

When a customer enters the store they should be greeted immediately. If they are carrying in items they should be directed to the buy counter and you should offer to assist with their items. At this point you should ask them if they have ever sold items to us before. If they have sold to us before, ask them to set their items on the buy counter and begin filling out all of the information requested on the laptop. For the first time customer, they should be told, regardless of how they brought the buy in, that we always ask them to bring things in “freshly laundered and in a bag, basket or box, just not on hangers please”. This is very important so that in future they do not think they are helping us by bringing things in on hangers. If they have sold to us before, ask them to enter their phone number, their first and last name, as well as the number of containers into the laptop.

## 2. Sign-In:

On the buy sign-in sheet behind the laptop, fill in the customer’s first name, check yes if they are a returning customer, count the number of containers the customer brought in, write down the time they are checking in, and write your initials. If the customer tells you whether they are leaving or not, you can write that in the “Staying?” column. The “NB” column can be used if we are not buying anything from the customer.

## 3. Explain Our Process:

When the customer has filled out their information on the laptop, begin by explaining our process to them. Memorize these talking points, but do not recite them word for word to avoid it sounding memorized.

**a.** We will be looking through each of your items, and assessing them based on the Brand, Condition, and Style.

**b.** We are looking for items that are current styles within the last two years.

**c.** We buy all seasons at all times; however; our buying decisions are based on whether or not we feel we can sell the item, our current inventory levels of similar items and how well similar items have sold for us in the past.

**d.** We will check the item for any spots, stains, or wear and tear.

**e.** We price things in our store around 70% off of their retail price, and we offer our customers about one-third of what we are pricing each item at in the store. Give the example: “For a top that sells for $30 in a retail store, we will price it at around $10, and we will give you around $3.00 for the item.” This will shift up or down depending on the brand quality.

**f.** For any higher-end designer items we will offer up to half of what we price the item in our store at.

**g.** Ask the customer if they have any questions about our buy process or pricing.

## 4. Give them a time estimate:

Estimate the time it will take to get through their items. Base this on the number of items they brought in and the number of buys we have in front of them. Estimate about 20 minutes for a normal sized basket, 30 minutes for a large trash bag. Use your own judgment or ask another buyer. Always overestimate the time just in case we get behind.

## 5. Thank them:

Always thank the customer for bringing in their items and invite them to shop in our store. If the customer does leave, tell them that we do need them to come pick their items up that day at least two hours before we close. If they plan to shop in the store, tell them “we will announce your name when we are done”. Do not use the phrase “we will call you when we are done” since they may interpret this as meaning that you will call them on the telephone when we are finished processing the buy.

## 6. Label their Baskets:

Once they have logged in on the computer and it has printed the receipts, ask the customer to sign our copy, hand them the receipt and label each bag, basket, or box with one small labels printed by the buy check-in computer. If the buy comes in loose, you can take one of the extra bags located under the check in counter, and put their items into it. You may also use an empty basket if there are no bags or they have a large number of items. Once properly labeled, the buy is placed on the floor in order. The first buys checked in should be located closest to the tagging counter. You should move the buys toward the rear of the store as space becomes available. Make sure you label every container the customer brought in.

## 7. Starting a buy:

Select the next buy on the buy sign-in sheet behind the laptop. Buys must be processed on a first come first served basis to help ensure we meet the time estimates we committed to our customers. Check the baskets/labels to ensure that you have the entire buy. Take the entire buy with you to where you are going to inspect it. Get an empty basket for your ‘yes’ pile and use an empty, clean counter to begin the sorting process on.

## 8. Pre-sorting the buy:

The pre-sorting process is where extensive training is needed in order to judge brand, condition, style, and demand. These steps are explained more completely later in this guide.

## 9. Inspection and Entry:

The inspection process is where we stress repetition and consistency and the five steps to being a great buyer really come into play. Because of its importance, the inspection process is explained more completely in its own section later in this guide.

## 10. Presenting our offer to the customer:

**a.** Once the buy is entered into the computer, let the customer know that you have finished if they are in the store.

**b.** Place the basket with the “yes” items on the counter and the pass items on the counter next to it (if there are a number of bins, place them behind the counter on the floor).

**c.** Start by pointing to the basket of the “yes” items and say “these are the items that we would like to buy from you today.

**d.** Then point to the items that we are passing on and say “These are the items we were un- able to purchase today due to some wear, some items that being outside of our two year window and some juniors items” This is an example and you should explain the reasons were are passing that the buyer wrote on the buy slip.

**e.** You can then point back to the basket of yes items and say “for the items that we are able to purchase today we can offer you (tell them the amount). Is that acceptable?”

**f.** If the customer says that is accepts the offer, proceed to pay the customer.

**h.** If the customer is hesitant about the offer, be sure to offer a further explanation of why we passed on items or how the prices were derived. Be sure the customer knows they do not have to sell the items to us. You can say “Just so you know you do not have to sell any of your items, if you are not sure and would like to think about it please do. If you change your mind you can always bring them back.

## 11. If you had to pass on all items:

If you had to pass on all of their items, be sure to offer them $5 in Mentor cash and invite them to return. This will help them feel better about leaving and make them more likely to try us again.

# Brands, Grades and Pricing:

Brands at Clothes Mentor are grouped by the computer into different grades. Although you will never be required to know what grade a brand is, you should be able to generally recognize the most common brands and have a general idea if they are low grade, medium grade or high grade. You will need to know this so that you can take it into consideration when inspecting an item. A brand is assigned a grade based on several factors including its image, retail cost and quality. The following is a brief description of the grades and various brands that fall into them. You will not see the grading system since it is operating behind the scenes, but you should be aware of how it works since it will impact your buying decisions.

## Grade A:

Grade A are the higher end brand names that you will find at higher end department stores such as Nordstrom’s. These brands are an A in your inventory. Examples of Grade A brands include: Coach, Gucci, 7 for All Mankind, Chanel, Marc Jacobs, etc.

## Grade B:

Grade B brands are one step down from the grade A items and are typically sold at mall department stores or second tier specialty stores such as Coldwater Creek, Chico’s, Ann Taylor, etc. Some of the brands in grade B include, DKNY, BCBG, A Pea in the Pod, Talbots, etc…

## Grade C:

Grade C brands are one step down from Grade B and will likely make up most of the brands that you see in your store. The retail price of these brands is typically in the mid-range price point. Brands in Grade C include the following, Loft, Charter Club, Express, Gap, Style & Co, Lane Bryant, etc…

## Grade D:

Grade D brands are one step down from the grade C items. These price points are found in stores such as New York & Co, Simply Vera, Apt 9, etc. When shopping the malls you will find a small difference in the retail price points of grade D items versus the stores that sell grade C items. You will see many grade D items coming in the door. These brands must be in very good condition and very good style in order to buy. Like grade C brands, it is very important that your buyers become extremely familiar with these brands.

## Grade E:

Grade E brands are your value brands. Many of these brands are sold at Kohl’s, JCPenney’s and some department stores. Grade E brands include the following, Old Navy, St John’s Bay, Merona, Covington, Sonoma, Worthington, etc. Be selective with these brands as the resale value is not as high.

## Grade F:

Grade F brands are high value brands that are typically sold at discount stores such as Wal-Mart and K-Mart. Only buy these items when you’ve been told we are accepting them. When inventory levels are low we allow Grade F brands to be bought, but when inventory levels are not low we typically do not buy these brands. These brands must be in perfect condition and very good to excellent style in order to buy. They must be very current, meaning they are not older than a year. Brands in this grade include the following, Faded Glory, Crazy Horse, Fashion Bug, Kathy Lee, Basic Editions, LA Blues, Studio Y, To Be Announced, etc.

## Pricing:

Once you enter the item, you MUST review the assigned price. This is the recommended price for the item determined by the computer based upon the information that you have entered. You can adjust the price up or down if you feel that there is justification. This is called ‘bumping’. You should regularly bump the price of a new item with tags up by selecting excellent. You can also bump down a price if you feel it is an item that we should have in inventory but one that a minor flaw is very plain, or just should be priced lower than the recommended price. For example if it is a Tahari suit but has a tiny snag on the side of the pants, but otherwise looks good, you probably should purchase it, but reduce the price slightly. To adjust the payout, you can choose one of the buttons other than “better”, which is the normal option. The “good” button will reduce the payout, while the “Excellent” and “outstanding” buttons will increase the payout. Bumping is often necessary, but should be done only by experienced buyers because it affects the profitability of the store. You should get manager or shift lead approval when adjusting any prices or payouts.

# Dealing With Special Cases:

## Recognizing a potentially difficult customer:

There are two steps to dealing with a potentially difficult situation. If you are sure it is going to be a confrontational buy, you must immediately and discreetly ask the manager or shift lead if they would complete the buy for you. The manager will understand you, recognize the situation and complete the buy. If you must process the potentially confrontational buy and the customer is hovering, you should engage them in the process by conversing with them. You should explain our process as you go through their things and physically show them what it is that causes you to pass on each item. This both educates the customer on what we want and reduces the building tension between them and the buyer. Do not remain silent and make sympathy buys or pressure buys.

## Teen Styles or Brands:

Occasionally a customer will bring in teen clothing that are younger styles or brands that we do not accept. You should politely explain to them that we target women ages 20 to 55 and they should consider bring their items to Plato’s Closet. Be careful when purchasing brands that cross-over between both concepts. All odd sized clothes are teen sizes and should go to Plato’s Closet. Clothes Mentor only buys even numbered sizes. See the section on Cross Over and Do Not Buy Brands.

## Dealing with a Bartering Customer:

The prices that are in the computer are the fixed prices for an item. If a customer is offered 18.20 for their buy and says “How about an even $20”, the answer is “I am sorry, the prices are determined by the computer and I am not able to change the quote.”

## Donations:

We are not a donation drop off spot! This is due to the limited space that we have to store donations. The only way we donate items is if a customer dropped off items and never returned to pick them up. All items that were not picked up at the end of the business day are able to be donated. At the end of the day gather all items that were not picked up and place them in the designated area in the back room.

## Fake Labels or Knockoffs:

You should be able to recognize fake garments and accessories. Reference the designer label guides and ask for help if you are unsure. We do not buy any fake items – it is illegal in the state of Texas. In the rare occasion that there are clothing items that are fakes, get a manager involved. These types of garments are typically logo shirts for high grade clothing such as D & G, Chanel, Burberry, etc.

# Buying Rules

## Certified Buyer / Trainee:

Buyers in training are not to complete any buy until a manager or shift lead reviews your buy. You may sort a buy and enter a buy as you become trained in each process, but the buys and passes must be reviewed before making the offer. Only Certified Designer Accessories Buyers may authenticate designer merchandise and price them. Certified Buyers should be involved in the authentication to improve their knowledge and to provide input on pricing.

## **No negative discussion of a buy on the sales floor:**

Every item that is brought into the store was bought by someone at one time because they liked it enough to pay good money for it. You risk offending the person and losing them and their friends as potential customers. Many less fortunate people may bring their items in hoping that they will receive some money. These people may not have any items that meet our buying criteria and we may never buy from them, but they may be excellent customers once they see the prices in our store. Even if the customer has left, do not say negative things since other customers will perceive this as the way everyone is handled. Treat every customer with respect, as you would expect to be treated. This rule is a condition of your job and violating it may result in disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination.

## Conducting Buys for Friends or Family:

You are not allowed to sort or complete a buy for a friend or family member. If a friend or family member brings in a buy, you should notify the manager or shift lead and simply skip over that buy if you are buying and it is next in line. Notify the other buyers that someone else should start it next. This rule protects Clothes Mentor from an employee purchasing items from a friend that would not have normally been purchased. More importantly, it protects the employee from having the friend or family member get upset because not all of the items they expected to be purchased were purchased. This relieves the employee from any interaction or responsibility for making decisions regarding the person’s buy. Employees may bring in their own items to sell, but are never authorized to inspect or enter a buy of their own. Employee buys can only be conducted by a manager.

## White Check:

If you want to buy any item that is white or has a significant area of white or beige, you must have another qualified buyer look at the item and concur that it should be purchased. This is important because another person may see staining or discoloration when they inspect it at a different location on the counter due to slight variations in lighting. The most common problems with white items include underarm staining and makeup stains. If you think that there may be staining on a white item you should pass.

## Cross Over and Do Not Buy Brands:

There are several brands that cross over between Clothes Mentor and Plato’s Closet including:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Express | New York and Company | BCBG | Limited |
| Gap | Ann Taylor Loft | J. Crew | Banana Republic |

Several brands are only purchased at Plato’s Closet and will never be purchased at Clothes Mentor, they include:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Abercrombie and Fitch | Hollister | Wet Seal | American Eagle |
|  | Forever 21 | Aeropostale |  |

## Tapered leg, cuffed, or pleated pants or jeans:

Be careful when buying any women’s pants or shorts that have pleats on the front. Pleats should be of current style and not too wide. We also do not buy pants with tapered legs. To check for this you should fold up the bottom 2 inches of the leg and align one side of the fabric. If the bottom is narrower than the top then it is tapered and should be passed on. Some brands, such as Levi, write “Tapered Leg” on the label for your convenience. Classic Cut or Reverse Fit are also tapered leg.

## Older labels:

In your training you will be introduced to all of the older labels. These should not be bought since they generally will be out of style and are dated as old by the style or color of the label.

## Athletic Wear, Sports Team Apparel and Maternity:

We do not buy any athletic wear or maternity in our stores anymore. Explain politely that the items did not sell well for us and we discontinued buying and selling these items.

## Advertisements, Event, or Locations:

Do not buy any shirts that advertise companies including golf courses, restaurants (i.e. Hard Rock Café), events (i.e. UK vs. Michigan State t-shirt), locations (Daytona Beach) etc..

## Anything with Characters:

Do not buy Disney clothes or any items with characters on them.

## Cut off shorts or pants:

If the bottom of the pants has been cut off or turned into shorts, they are not acceptable. Be aware that some of the manufacturers will make shorts or pants like that but there will be a stitch around the leg which prevents the fraying from going any higher. These are acceptable if they are in good condition.

## Altered apparel:

Do not buy any items that have been hemmed or altered. Be aware that pants can also be hemmed in the back of the pant. Look for signs of the original label being moved or extra fabric in the inside back of the pant along the seat seam.

## Underwear:

Don’t buy any undergarments, even if they are brand new.

## Shoulder Pads:

Do not buy any women’s shirts or sweaters that have large shoulder pads. They are out of style and should be avoided. The very small pads in some light outerwear or blazers are acceptable particularly if they can be removed.

## Skorts:

Do not buy skorts. These are women’s skirts/shorts that appear as a skirt in the front and shorts in the back. They are out of style and should never be bought.

## Missing Labels:

Don’t buy garments with tags cut out unless you can positively identify the brand through another label on the garment or the name/emblem on the front of the garment.

## Elastic Waist Band Pants:

This applies to labels and styles that are for an older age group than we target. The waistbands will be elastic and gathered all the way around. Do not buy these items. A partial elastic waistband on larger plus size pants is occasionally acceptable with other buyer approval.

## Large Quantities of Similar Items:

If a customer has a large number of the same item, this should be referred to a manager. We must be very careful buying these items since the customer usually gets them as closeouts from retailers. The owners/managers will make the decisions on whether we should buy any of them. This is one situation that a customer may have to set an appointment with the owners/manager to have the buy done.

## Overalls or Shortalls:

Do not buy.

## Wedding Dresses / Brides Maid Dresses / Formals:

Do not buy. Some rare exceptions for Formals (not wedding or brides maids) may be done with the approval of a manager. Some cocktail dresses are fine, but get opinions from the other buyers.

## Sports Shoes:

We do not buy shoes specifically designed for sports such as cleats for soccer, baseball, football, etc. Basketball sneakers are acceptable.

## Over $25 or Under $3:

Any item that is going to be priced over twenty five dollars or fewer than three must get manager or shift lead approval on price before it is bought. This ensures that at least two employees will have had input on the price. When you have one of these items, you should approach the manager with the item and tell them what you think it should be priced at. They will then take that into consideration and with their input, come up with a price. This rule generally applies to suits, outerwear, jewelry, designer hand bags, and miscellaneous items.