

Used Banjo Comparison Checklist

Use this list to keep a record of used banjos you're comparing, to help make certain you're comparing similar instruments. You can also use this to determine what new banjos with the same features would cost (sometimes it's the same as folks are asking for used ones).

Banjo Brand			
Model # if known			
Asking Price			
Country of Origin (if modern and not specified, assume China. If 1960s-1980 and not specified, assume Japan, Hong Kong, or Korea. A few very good banjos were built in Japan during this period. USA is best, of course, unless it's a cheap older banjo including baseline Harmonies and Kays.)			
Neck Straight? (or if slightly bowed, is the bowing the same on the left and right edge? You don't want a neck that is very bowed or skewed)	Y or N	Y or N	Y or N
Fingerboard a non-porous wood such as rosewood or mahogany?	Y or N	Y or N	Y or N
Tuners smooth and hold their position once you've tuned?	Y or N	Y or N	Y or N
Tuner Style:			
• Open guitar tuner (cheapest)			
• Closed guitar tuner (better)			
• Planetary tuner (best, if it is smooth and reliable)			
Neck Adjustment Rod? (Don't be fooled by fake adjustment-rod covers on early post-WWII banjos)	Y or N	Y or N	Y or N
Pot (body, shell) material?			
• Ceramic or plastic (avoid – super cheap)			
• Metal with no flange or spikes (cheap, older)			
• Metal with spikes (Pop-top, usually a step up from entry-level, not professional)			
• Multi-Ply wood (used on both cheap and expensive banjos. You can't tell by looking if it's good or not, but you can make certain it isn't showing signs of separating)			
Resonator? (not necessary for beginning, travel, or Folk, not recommended for Old-Timey styles like Clawhammer, critical for professional Bluegrass)	Y or N	Y or N	Y or N
"Drum" Head in GC?	Y or N	Y or N	Y or N
# of Brackets? (Less than 16 is usually bad, more than 26 may indicate an older instrument that started out with a skin head, average is 19-26)			
If a Resonator , is it attached by			
• One screw in the center of the resonator (Older, but not bad)			
• Screws going through four little stamped metal brackets (Cheapest)			
• Screws going through the spikes on a "pop-top" banjo (Better)			
• Screws going through a one-piece nickel-plated cast-brass flange attached to the pot. (Usually best)			
• Screws going through a one-piece stamped-metal or cast zinc flange attached to the pot (Not as good)			
• Deering Boston (Pro, but doesn't fit into any of these categories)			
Tone Ring? (A metal ring separating the drum head from the shell, critical for professional Bluegrass, nice but not necessary for other styles and uses.)			
Coordinator Rod(s) (Rod or bolt that runs under the head, connecting the neck to the tailpiece)			
• Wooden (Older, but not bad)			
• One bolt (Sufficient for most open-back banjos)			
• Two bolts (Better, recommended for any resonator or tone-ring banjo; critical for professional Bluegrass)			