

Next, locate the one area most likely to settle the first question.

Then pause before cleaning, plugging in, sharpening, polishing, unfolding, or taking anything apart.

Finally, separate your quick screening decision from final identification.

That is the whole test.

It is not magic, and four seconds is not a stopwatch rule. Sometimes you will take two seconds. Sometimes you will take ten. The point is to build a repeatable motion so your eyes and hands do not wander.

STEP BY STEP

The Four-Second Test

- 1 **Spot the candidate.** Notice unusual age, material, shape, construction, decoration, or completeness.
- 2 **Locate the decisive tell.** Go directly to the seam, stamp, base, casting, joint, label, or attachment point most likely to reveal useful information.
- 3 **Pause before changing it.** Do not clean, test, oil, sharpen, repair, or separate parts until you understand what may be altered.
- 4 **Separate screening from identification.** Decide only whether to pass, protect, or investigate further.

“Spot the candidate” does not mean grabbing everything old.

Age alone is a poor filter. Plenty of hundred-year-old objects are common, damaged, incomplete, and hard to sell. Plenty of newer objects have collector interest because of the maker, model, design, or short production run.

Look for difference.



Tell One: Seams

A seam is evidence of a process.

On a bottle, begin at the heel. That is the lower curve where the side turns under toward the base. Find the vertical mold seam with a fingertip, then follow it upward with your eye and flashlight.

Do not stop at the shoulder.

See whether the seam continues onto the neck, fades below the lip, or runs through the lip itself. Look separately at the mouth. The lip may have been

Here is how I generally think about the main choices.

VENUE	OFTEN SUITS	TYPICAL TIME TO PAYMENT	MAIN COST OR RISK
Local estate or farm auction	Furniture, tools, machinery, mixed household groups	7–30 days after sale	Seller commission, uneven bidder depth
Specialty auction	Rare pottery, advertising, fine mechanical objects, advanced collections	30–60 days after sale	Commission, insurance, transportation, long lead time
Online marketplace	Shippable objects with searchable model names	1–14 days after buyer payment	Fees, packing, returns, account risk
Dealer sale	Objects the dealer already understands and stocks	Same day to 7 days	Lower offer in exchange for speed and certainty
Consignment shop	Decorative furniture, vintage clothing, regional home goods	30–120 days or longer	Markdown schedules, space limits, delayed payment
In-person direct sale	Large local goods, inexpensive groups, practical equipment	Same day	No-shows, bargaining, privacy and payment concerns

Those time spans are practical examples, not universal rules. Read the contract. Ask when payment is issued, what can be deducted, and what happens if the object does not sell.