

Turquoise... Or Not?

Article written by Jasmine Younkin



Turquoise is a highly desirable substance for jewelers and crafters. A good specimen can cost a hefty sum. Turquoise is also a very easy stone to copy or substitute with similar looking materials.

The most popular choice for turquoise substitute is howlite -- a naturally white stone. Howlite matrix (little lines/patters in and on stone) is very similar to turquoise matrix. When dyed properly, howlite is almost indistinguishable from turquoise. In fact, a lot of howlite is sold as "white buffalo turquoise."

One of the issues with turquoise is that it's mined all over the world. There are a lot of different types and varying qualities which all look very different. To top it all off, some turquoise is dyed to enhance color and beauty. So you might be holding a genuine piece of enhanced turquoise.

In this article, I'll be discussing how to tell if your turquoise is a fake. In particular, I'll discuss distinguishing howlite from turquoise. Please keep in mind that this article is directed for a general audience. There's a lot of technical mumbo-jumbo I'll be simplifying for easy digestion.

Turquoise vs. Howlite



(A)



(B)



(C)



(D)

Spot the Fakes – Answers Below

Matrix

Does the matrix seem too matrixy? Too many lines can mean it's a fake. However, sometimes turquoise does have a lot of matrix patterning, so this isn't a definitive answer.

Pyrite Flecks

Pyrite is a good sign! If turquoise has flecks or bands of pyrite, it's likely the real deal. Pyrite is also known as "fools gold" & is silvery colored. Here's an example of pyrite:



Hardness

Turquoise has hardness of 6. Howlite has hardness around 3. This means howlite will be a lot softer and more easily broken, while turquoise will be more durable.

Dye

Is coloring just too good to be true? Most natural turquoise has some variation of color, flecks of metal, or dark spots. Dyed howlite often looks a little too perfect, without enough color variation.

Price

Is it too cheap? If it is, you've likely got a fake. Genuine, high grade turquoise will cost about 5-10x similar quality howlite. Cheap, low-grade turquoise is affordable, but high grade can get pricey. However, price isn't always the best way to gauge if you've got a fake. Often bead shop owners will buy howlite thinking its turquoise and mark it up accordingly.



Color

If all else fails, break it open. I suggest using a sock. Place the mystery stone in the sock, bash with hammer until broken in half. If the stone is dyed, it will be immediately apparent. The inside will be white. If it's uniform throughout, you've got turquoise.



Example of "Howlite Turquoise"

Last Thoughts

Howlite is not the only stone masquerading as turquoise. Howlite, however, is the best fake I've found. Often gemstones are very difficult to differentiate once they've been processed into cabs or beads. Knowing how to differentiate howlite from turquoise can be very useful for this reason.



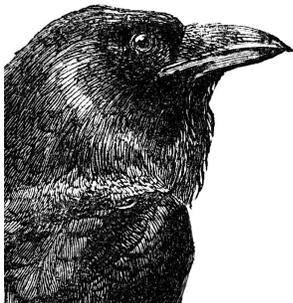
Howlite Pieces

Howlite can be a very beautiful material to work with. I prefer white howlite to dyed howlite. Howlite has a very nice, soft texture. Some pieces look like marble or granite.

I do occasionally use dyed stones in my work. They're cheaper and if done correctly can be a nice addition. Coral is a great example of a decent dyed stone. Actual pieces of natural red coral are outrageously expensive and rare. There are also some ecological and ethical concerns with red coral. However, dyed coral can be a beautiful alternative that costs about \$5-20 a strand.

ANSWER:

- A) Turquoise
- B) Howlite
- C) Turquoise
- D) Howlite



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