Gem
- naturally occurring mineral considered to have beauty, rarity, and durability
- gemological testing is usually required to accurately identify the specific gem and to distinguish natural from lab-grown synthetics or imitations

Natural
- created by nature without human intervention
- valued for beauty and rarity

Lab-Grown
- entirely man-made
- significantly less expensive than natural gems

Cultured Pearl
- created by an oyster or other mollusc, but with human intervention
- the bead nucleus to start the pearl is implanted, then the mollusc is returned to the water to grow the pearl

Un-treated
- color and clarity are entirely natural

Enhanced
- treatments such as heating, irradiating, oiling, resin-filling, or color coating are used to improve the color and clarity of the gem
- when treatments are not permanent (e.g. oiling emeralds, require special handling (e.g. color coating), or affect the value of the gem, they must legally be disclosed to customer

Synthetic
- a man-made version of a natural gem
- must have the same chemical, physical, and optical properties as the real gem
- not all gemstones can be successfully re-created in a lab
- legally, seller must label the stone as “lab grown,” “manufacturer created,” “synthetic” in order to clearly disclose it is not a natural product

Imitation
- mimics the color of a natural gem, but does not have the same chemical, physical, or optical properties as a real gem - just a “look-alike”
- examples include cubic zirconia (aka CZ), glass, Swarovski crystals
- legally, seller must label the stone as “imitation,” “simulated,” “lab grown,” in order to clearly disclose the nature of the product