

Tricks of the Trade©
By Janice Parsons



Thank you for joining me today. Our class project is a multiple-strand necklace tapering down to a single strand. Today you will practice some "secret" formulas for success in designing and building jewelry. I hope these exercises will aid in removing your "bead blocks". I also trust they will increase your understanding of the design process, teach you some new stringing techniques and give you the self-assurance to create jewelry that reflects your inner voice.

Ingredients for Success:

This recipe is for a 16" finished necklace.

- A "pinch" each of Size 11/0 seed beads in 2-3 colors
- 36-50" of assorted beads for body of necklace. This can include gemstones, glass, metal, wood, pearl, crystal, etc.
- 6" approximately of beads for tapering ends
- 2 beads with large holes or 1 pair of cones
- 1 sterling silver or gold-filled clasp
- 1 spool .014 Soft Flex or comparable beading wire
- 2x2 sterling silver or gold-filled crimp beads
- Medium bullion wire in silver or gold

Tools for Success:

A photograph, fabric swatch or something from nature

- Ruler or tape measure
- Fine wire cutters
- Chain-nose pliers
- Crimping pliers

*Do not use a picture of jewelry you want to copy!

Part One: Beading is like Painting

Beading is very much like painting. Painting is a process of layering color, textures and shapes to create entire images. Before you begin beading, think of yourself as a painter. Take time to create the mood, to strike a balance between your creativity and your skill. Allow your imagination some time to play before you dive right in.

Find your muse... We are going to begin our creative process with the color selection. The exercises you are going to do will help free you up to think in terms of color rather than design. We often get too hung up on thinking about the finished design and then find we get "stuck".

Get the color right and the design will follow

1. Begin by selecting a photograph, piece of fabric or something from nature that "speaks to you" and acts as your muse. If you have a specific assortment of beads you want to work with, try to select a color palette from a source which has those colors in it. Find something that inspires you, something which excites and energizes you. Stay away from any depictions of jewelry! Once you have selected your inspiration, complete the following exercises:

- A. Write down 10-12 adjectives that describe the mood behind your source.
Examples of adjectives: Shiny, soft, nubby, bright, sharp, matte.

- B. Draw the shapes you see most in your source. Examples: circles, triangles, diamonds, ovals, etc.

- C. Now, how do you feel when you look at your source? Examples: relaxed, excited, happy, etc.

2. Begin selecting beads that capture the descriptions, shapes and feel of your source. Don't focus on design at all. Just think color, shape and texture. Be as true to your descriptive words, shapes and feelings from your inspiration as you can so as to reflect the look and feel. And, don't forget to keep breathing! If you need to, step back for a few minutes.



3. As you start to look closer, you will begin to see beads that work well together...that "speak to each other" and speak to you! Some beads will just tell you they want to be saved for another project. Is there a focal point or centerpiece that you want to incorporate? Does the mood feel big and bold or delicate and quiet? Right now all you have to do is listen to these intuitive feelings. If you're not feeling anything yet, just be patient. You might want to review your answers to the exercises on page 2 to reacquaint yourself with the descriptions, shapes and feelings you felt when you first selected your source.

Part Two: Beading is like playing the Piano

Before a concert pianist plays a piece of music, she warms up with practice scales. We are going to do the same thing with beads. Don't even think about composing your design yet. All you are going to do is warm up with creativity exercises.

Imagine, for a few minutes, you are writing a song. Think of each pattern as a short melody. Eventually, some of the melodies will be strung together to make the song. With beading, the notes are your beads. Each section of your necklace is a separate melody. They will eventually get connected to "sing" the whole song but right now they are finding their own "voice" or identity. And, primarily they are just warming you up!

A. Practicing on your straight-channel design board or directly on short lengths of beading wire, string beads in patterns 2- 4" in length. Use the beads you have selected for your project.

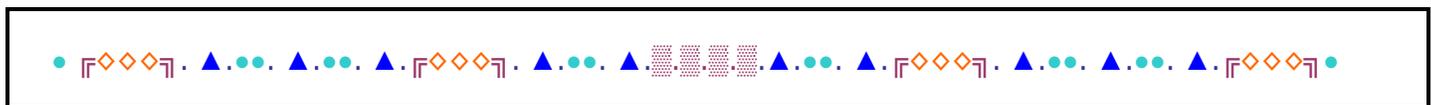
▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	▲●▲●▲●▲●▲●	▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲
▲●▲●▲●▲●▲●▲●	▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲▲	◆▲◆▲◆▲◆▲◆▲◆▲	◆◆▲▲◆◆▲▲◆◆▲▲

B. Think of seed beads, 2mm beads and other filler beads as the spaces between the notes. They help the musician read the notes better because they open up space between notes, so the melody is clear. Now try adding some spacer beads in your melodies. Also, don't be afraid to set off more important beads with caps (┌┐):

◆◆◆▲▲◆◆◆▲▲◆◆◆	▲▲▲.▲▲◆▲.▲▲◆▲	●.▲.●.▲.●.▲.●.	.▲◆◆▲.┌┐.▲◆◆▲.
▲.●.▲.┌┐◆◆┐┐▲.●.▲.	▲▲.●.┌┐┐.▲▲	●.┌┐▲┐.◆◆◆.┌┐▲┐.●	┌┐▲.◆.▲┐┐.┌┐▲.◆.▲┐┐

The permutations are endless! Probably the most valuable lesson in these exercises is that it takes your mind off "designing" the finished necklace. You have to focus on the task at hand....composing melodies!

C. You can also try taking one pattern, adding a focus bead or centerpiece and then flipping the pattern on the other side to create a mirror image of your pattern.



↑Mirror Image of Pattern on the left ↑

After some practice, your sense of what you like and don't like begins to emerge. The beginning of your "song" is starting to take form. Before we begin working on the project, let's take a break and decide on a length and style. This intermission is healthy! It allows ideas to rest before just rushing in. Trust that time away also can aid with the creative process.

Part Three: Beading is like Building a House

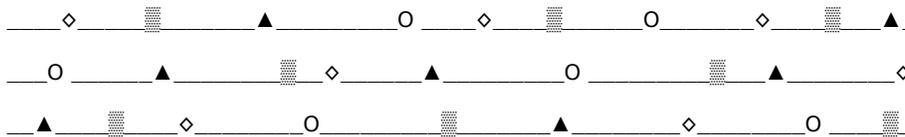
Before a carpenter picks up the first hammer and nail, she has to draw the house design, take measurements and calculate the entire project on paper. Fortunately, you don't have that much work! But, some preliminary calculations help set guidelines and keep the creative outcome more successful.

- A. What is the finished length of this project? When calculating the finished length, always factor in the length of the clasp and add an extra 3/8" for crimp beads. Because the project in this class is a multiple strand necklace tapering down to a single strand at the clasp, it isn't necessary to select a clasp with multiple loops. Opt for a clasp that reinforces the mood, shapes and textures of the beads you are using.
- B. How many strands do you want your necklace to be? After having played with some of the beads, you probably have a general idea of how many strands will look good together. If you aren't sure now, that's okay! The answer will surface later. My sample necklace is 5 strands.
- C. To diagram out the finished length, we start with the total length of the necklace. The total, finished length should always factor in the measurement of the clasp plus 3/8" for the addition of crimp beads. The main body of the piece follows this formula:
 - Decide how long you want your necklace to be.
 - Subtract the length of your clasp + 3/8".
 - Estimate the tapering ends will be 2 -3 1/2" in length per side.
 - The inches remaining are the best "guesstimate" of the length of the body of your piece. Remember, this can be adjusted as you string. You are not building a house... just a necklace! Your measurements can be re-evaluated later. This just gets you in the front door, so to speak.



Part Four: Beading is like driving on the freeway

We are now ready to start stringing our beads. This is where so many beaders meet face-to-face with their "bead blocks". Have you ever started your project and after about ten minutes started to think it doesn't look anything like you had envisioned? Or perhaps you are busy thinking about the ending while you are really still beginning? Well, try to think of stringing like driving on the freeway. Imagine you are in a small Volkswagen Beetle. It's just a little car. If you drive anything like me, you don't want big trucks jammed in on either side of you. A good driver will be defensive and keep space between the big trucks and also stay away from tail-gaters! So, we are going to start stringing one lane of beads at a time.



1. Begin by cutting a piece of beading wire 6" longer than the finished length of your necklace. This length is plenty of wire for each strand of the body of the necklace. We will be using a separate wire for the tapered ends.



2. Wrap a piece of scotch tape securely over one end of the wire so your beads won't slide off while you are stringing. Begin stringing with very small beads, like seed beads or 2mm beads. You only need a few small beads at the start and end of each strand. These little beads will eventually help each strand taper gracefully into the bead with a large hole on the single ending strand.

3. String on your beads without thinking too much about it. You've done your practice patterns so your brain has stored away some variations you already like. Just string! When you have reached a point on this particular strand where you get stuck, just can't think of the next thing to put on, stop and wrap tape around the wire after the last bead you strung. Don't try to force it!

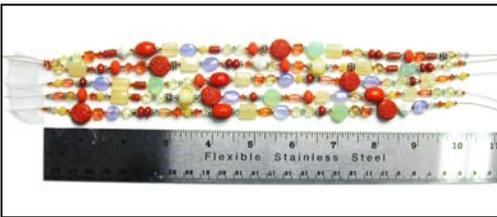


4. Pick up a second strand of wire, wrap tape around the end and then tape the two wires together. Begin this strand with several small beads. The beads can vary from the first strand, if you prefer, but they should be small.



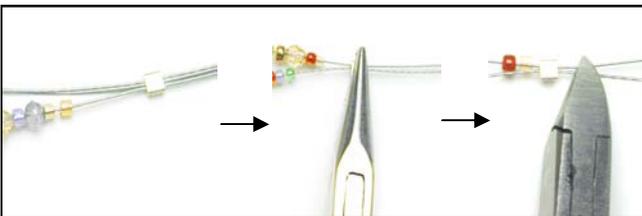
5. Now, here is where the freeway driving comes into play. As you string onto your second strand, keep your eye on what you strung on the first strand. The second strand should relate to the first. It doesn't have to be the same. It just wants to "talk to" the first strand, so keep that in mind. You are stringing randomly but with purpose. You want to space out the big or memorable beads and keep "traffic" from getting congested. Continue stringing on this strand until you feel a block or get stuck. When you start to freeze up, wrap tape over the wire after the last bead.

6. Start your third strand the same way you did your second. More than likely, you can go back to your first strand and continue stringing with newfound creativity. You have allowed your brain to process the block by going around it rather than trying to push through it! Continue stringing in this manner until you have all your strands the same length, within 1/2". This is not a science. The strands do not have to be exactly the same length, just very close if you want them to drape nicely.



7. Make sure you put tape on the ends before you hold your necklace up to do any measuring. Don't even think about looking in the mirror while holding up the strands if they aren't securely taped on both sides.

8. Now is probably the time to adjust for the finished length. Approximately 3" on each side is going to be added to the body length for tapered ends, clasp and crimp beads. Finish all your strands to the desired length of the body.



9. You are now ready to "flat crimp" using the chain-nose pliers. Gather up to 3 strands of wire and thread them through a 2x2 crimp bead. Since you are not running the wires back through the crimp bead, it is important that you don't overload the crimp bead with too many strands. In order for the crimp to be secure, there needs to be some crimp bead to bond with each strand of wire. I recommend 2-3 strands per crimp bead. You are flat crimping with the chain-nose pliers... not the crimping tools! After you have flat crimped, check that the wires have all bonded with the crimp metal by pulling on each strand. Next, cut the excess wire off, leaving just a short "buzz cut" above the crimp bead, using the wire cutters.



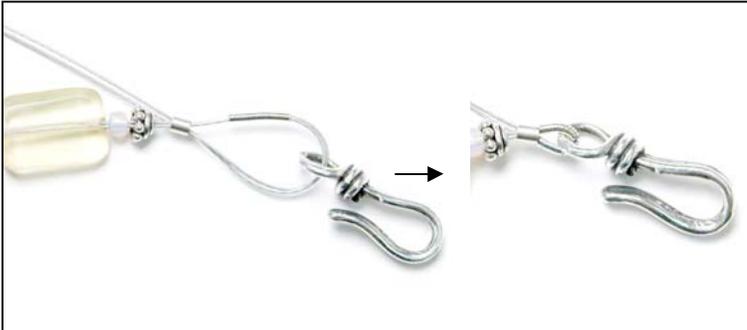
10-1. Cut a new piece of wire approximately 12". Loop the wire through the "legs" of the body of your necklace just below the crimp bead(s). If you are doing a 5 or 7 strand necklace, this will mean looping this wire through more than one group of strands.



10-2. Bring the two ends of the new wire together and then string on your bead with a large hole. The next bead you string on should nest inside the large hole. This helps keep the large-holed bead secure. Continue to string beads to your desired length. Repeat on the other side. Check your total length after you have stopped to measure it on you.



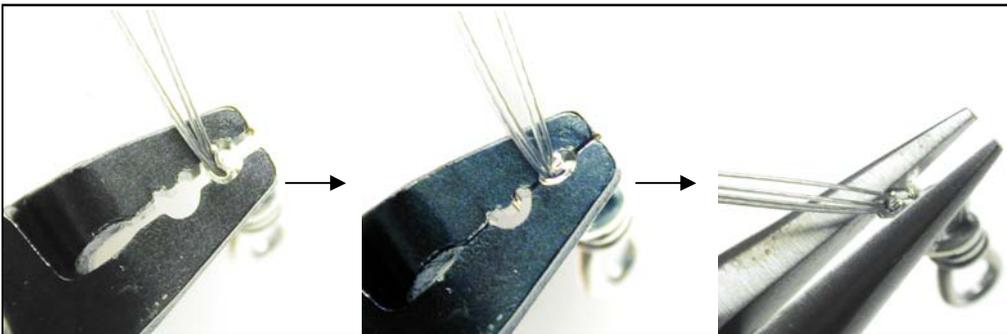
11. Now string on a crimp bead. Using a sharp wire-cutter or flush cutter, cut two pieces of bullion. Depending on the thickness of the loop on your clasp, the piece of bullion will be about ¼”.



12. Loop your ends through the ring on the clasp and go back through the crimp bead. Do not try to go back through the bullion once when you first put it on the wire. Position the crimp bead so you don't have any excess wire. Allow the bullion to rest on the wire without any undue tension. It shouldn't look wrinkled or scrunched. This will shorten the life of the bullion dramatically. Also note, bullion won't last long with an extremely heavy necklace. The weight of the beads causes too much pressure on the delicate wire and it will deteriorate.



13. Now, you are going to use the crimping tool to close the crimp bead on both tapered ends. You begin by using the inner channel of the crimping pliers. This is the opening that looks like lips or a heart. Center your crimp bead evenly between the jaws and gently press the pliers closed to form a "hammock". You do not want to squeeze hard! All you are doing is forming the hammock.



14. Move the pliers so the hammock is facing up and the oval jaws of the pliers are holding the hammock from underneath. This oval channel is closest to the tips. Again, gently fold over the hammock by pressing the handles of the pliers together. Remember, don't squeeze hard!

15. Using the chain nose pliers, gently compress the folded crimp bead for that last measure of security. Do not skip this step! Take your sharp wire cutters and cut the excess wire away. You really want to get as close as possible to the crimp bead and cut.

Well, now you are done. I hope you have enjoyed making your necklace and learning some of the tricks of the trade. If you have any questions or comments, I would love to hear from you. You can reach me at info@beadshop.com

Thanks so much and remember, bead happy!

Janice



Special thanks to Tricia Guild, author of my favorite book on the planet, "Tricia Guild on Color" and special special thanks to Jennifer Auh for all her awesome photography.

This handout is solely owned by Beadshop.com. Permission to reproduce is granted only with the written authorization from the author.