

# Some info one Wire

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Here's my limited knowledge, and what I can remember, about my preferences on wire-wrapping issues when buying or making jewelry... and in no particular order.

## Material

I prefer to work with and to buy products made with either Sterling Silver or Gold-Fill (or solid Gold, but that's quite expensive).

There are craft and other wires that have lower silver content and/or are plated. Ugh! Plating wears off.

"German Silver" (aka "Nickel Silver" or even "Alpaca") is copper, nickel, and zinc (sometimes a bit of tin). No silver. Surprised? Hmph! Then you haven't been listening to me gripe about all the misnomers in the jewelry industry. Heh. The stuff's cheap, though. But be careful because about 5% of the population is allergic to nickel.

And just to confuse matters more, there's also a "German Silver" wire that is also know as "silver-fill". It is 40% sterling, bonded to a copper core.... Just as "gold-fill" is a certain karat of gold bonded to a base metal core.

There's also a "non-tarnishing Sterling Silver wire", with which I have no experience. It is Sterling wire that's been coated with something clear and is supposed to keep the wire from tarnishing.

There's "gold color" wire, which is usually made from Brass (can also be found in the coated, non-tarnishing variety).

There's "German Gold" which is 10 parts gold for 40 parts base metal. (Gold-Fill is generally 14 parts gold for 20 parts base metal.)

BTW, as far as Gold and karats thereof are concerned, here's a mini lesson... oh, but first, it's "karats" not "carats"... "carats" are the weight of gems; and another "btw"... when gold is referred to as "solid gold", it means the item is solid and is made from an alloy like those listed below; not plated or filled or washed or anything else.... Solid gold is the good stuff, the long-lasting stuff.

- 24k Gold is also called "pure gold" because 100% of it is gold.
- 18k Gold is 18 out of 24 parts gold, so about 3/4ths gold; can also be marked "750", for being 75% gold.
- 14k Gold is 14 out of 24 parts gold, so just over 1/2 gold; can also be marked "585", for being 58.5% gold.
- 12k Gold is 12 out of 24 parts gold, so 1/2 gold.
- 10k Gold is 10 out of 24 parts gold, so just under 1/2 gold; can also be marked "417", for being 41.7% gold.

24k Gold isn't used for much because it's just too darn soft. It needs to be mixed with other metals to make it stronger and harder. When it's mixed, that's called an alloy.

## Gauge

Did the jewelry maker use an appropriate gauge of wire for the item?

If the wire-work involves charms that are dangling off a fringe bracelet, the wire should be of substantial enough gauge so that the charms don't continue to bend at weird angles. If they do, they may eventually break off.

For the record, 24 and 26 gauge are relatively thin.... 20 and 22 are most often used... 18 and 16 is

pretty darn thick.

Also, certain beads (like Lampwork, which is glass, and therefore heavy) should be on a thick enough gauge wire to sustain the weight of the bead.

Hand-crafted clasps should DEFINITELY be made from the thicker gauges of wire.

### **Finishing/Edges**

Okay, these next two are biggies for me.

When the jewelry maker clips the wire, did she clip it at an appropriate angle so as not to leave a sharp, pointy end?

Did she file the sharp end down if it needed?

Did she tuck the end of the wire into the piece or leave it sticking out to invariably get snagged on that \$100 sweater you wanted to wear the jewelry with?

And... It takes time to tuck, so know that if you're buying a well-made charm bracelet, you'll also be paying for the jewelry designer's time. It takes time to get a dangle on the bracelet, wrap it nicely, then finish it professionally... moving on to the next dangle then.

### **Detail/Neatness**

This goes along with the above.

Look at the wire-wrapping.

Are the wraps even or are there gaping spaces every couple of wraps?

Are the wraps tucked in tightly to the wire onto which they're being wrapped, or do they lump and bump out in an uneven mess?

Are the wraps similar or does one dangle have two wire-wraps and its neighbor has six?

Is the wire-wrapping tight? The wrap should be from the base of the loop to the top of the bead... there shouldn't be room for your bead to slide up and down on the headpin. It should be snug, and there shouldn't be any straight length of wire between the top loop and where the wrapping starts.

Am I beginning to sound a bit too obsessive about this stuff?

Heh

Hey, it's all about quality and a professional product. Do you want to buy something that will last, or do you want to buy something that you can wear a couple times before something goes wrong?

One last thing about wire-wrapping... if you go to the trouble to wire-wrap to ensure long-lasting security of your item, don't then attach that wire-wrapping item onto the jewelry using a jumpring. It's only a matter of time until there's enough pulling on a jumpring (unless it's a REALLY heavy gauge) for it to open enough to let whatever it was holding slide out.

I am REALLY REALLY REALLY hard on my own jewelry... jewelry I wear. I'm not a dainty and graceful lass... I run into walls and furniture and get caught on anything in my path... I skateboard and ride motorcycles and play hockey... quality jewelry is imperative to me, and I want to give nothing less to my customers.