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## Using Rhinestones

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(as published in Minnesota Dancing Times October 2012)

### What rhinestones should I use?

If you find the prospect of having to embellish your own costume, or help with embellishing costumes for an entire group a daunting task, and wonder just what is the best way to go about it, read on! Some people LOVE to rhinestone and others aren't so sure! Adding glitz to a costume can truly take the costume to the next level, or if done poorly, it can detract from the overall look of the costume, NOT what you are trying to achieve.

First of all, you need to decide what type of rhinestones to use for your dance costume embellishment project. There are many different styles, qualities and colors. The best, most brilliant, highest quality and yes, most expensive are Swarovski rhinestones – made in Austria, and Czechoslovakian rhinestones. There are several qualities of Czech stones and several rhinestone web sites that help to inform you on what makes a better stone. Do some research to learn more. The lesser expensive, Korean rhinestones are a much lower quality of rhinestone. The ones that I've seen are not nearly as brilliant, especially the colors, but they are still much better than Acrylic rhinestones. Acrylics are plastic and look plastic, and generally should not be used.

### Should I set, sew, glue or 'hot fix' my rhinestones?

Many larger rhinestones are only available to sew or glue on. But most of the flat-back rhinestones that are more commonly used for embellishing dance costumes can be set, sewn or glued. Be aware that it is harder to permanently apply rhinestones to any surface printed spandex. This finish makes the fabric very slick, and stones will not stick as easily as to any other type of spandex or costume fabric.

Old-school costume embellishers generally have stuck with gluing or setting their rhinestones. Setting stones has always been problematic with the metal prongs that are used. These prongs can easily shred chiffon or spandex unless there is extra care to cover each prong with a dab of glue to protect it. Seems like wasted time to me. I am not a fan of gluing or setting stones.

My preference is always 'hot fix'. Why? There are many reasons. They stay on better when properly applied, you do not run the risk of dropping a spot of glue on your costume, they can be washed or dry-cleaned, and they set immediately without any waiting. We have been using 'hot fix' stones for many, many years.

### What is a 'hot fix' rhinestone?

'Hot fix' rhinestones have glue on the back and heat is used to permanently apply them to all types of fabrics. There are many techniques and tools that may be used. Hot fix wands and various tools are available Online from many different sources. If you haven't tried this type of rhinestone, you should! They are the same quality stones as those with the plain back, and if heat cannot be used, you may still use your favorite glue on these.

## What color and what size rhinestones should I use?

In my experience, you get the most 'bang for your buck' with the plain crystal-colored rhinestone. It shines and glitters the most. Second choice would be Aurora Borealis, if it coordinates with the color fabrics you are using. Third would be the jewel-toned colors, followed by pastel and various other colors. Last would be jet (black) or the really dark colored stones. These dark stones just do not show as much as all the other choices.

What you need to do is visualize your choice of rhinestone from "performance distance", when deciding what size stone to use. At Satin Stitches, we have found that for an all-over scattered effect, we think that the size 20 works the best. If you are looking for a more subtle effect, then size 16 is a good choice (but the smaller the stone, the more difficult they are to apply). When you go larger, the stones start to look more like polka dots, unless the color matches the fabric exactly. For outlining effects on costumes, we have found that the size 30 and size 34 work the best - if you can afford the cost of the larger stones. Cost is also influenced by how far apart you space your stones.

Of course, the cost increases with the increase in the size of the rhinestones. Rhinestones are generally sold according to how the rhinestone manufacturer packages the stones, usually by the gross (a gross is 144). The smaller stones come in 10-gross packages, size 30 stones come in a 2.5-gross package, and size 34 stones come in one-gross per package. You will find that most rhinestone retailers offer discounts when you purchase in these amounts, because they don't have to repackage for smaller quantities.

## What pattern should I use to trim my costume?

Generally, there are three styles of applying rhinestones:

1. Outlining
2. Scattered
3. Precise pattern, based on a geometric or free-form design

## How do I determine how many stones I will need?

Math! If you are outlining design features on your costume, simply measure all the lines that you wish to outline. Then determine how many stones per inch, you will want to use. Then multiply to see how many gross you will need, and then round UP. If you are scattering your stones, you will need to place your scattered pattern in a 6 inch square, then count them up and multiply how many 6 inch squares you wish to cover with your rhinestones. When you are working with a precise pattern of stoning, you will need to count how many stones are used in one pattern, determine how many patterns you will use and multiply. If you find you do not have enough stones, or do not wish to use that many stones, you will be able to rework your plan before you start.

## How do I know how long my project will take, and what if I do not have enough time?

Math! Calculate how long it will take you to do one yard, or one section or one precise pattern and multiply to see how many hours it will take. If you know you do not have enough time, then edit your design, or start with one part of your plan.

Never stone one area of a costume heavily, first, unless you have calculated that you have enough time AND enough stones. Always embellish lightly, all over your costume, first, in case you run out of time or stones, that way you will be able to wear it, and take the time to add more later, for your next performance.

## **What if I do not know exactly how I want to stone my costume?**

Start simple, see if you like it, then stop if you do! It is always easy to add more and more stones. It is very difficult to remove any stones, especially if you put them on correctly!

## **How should we work on stoning a group of costumes?**

For a group, the most important thing to remember is that you want them all to turn out the same! You achieve this by working as a team, not individually. NEVER let everyone do their own costume because they will all turn out differently, even with specific directions. Everyone interprets the directions differently! Have one person do the same section of the predetermined design, so that they all look alike. Work together, so everyone can see what the plan is, and how it is going.

Most importantly, if there is a predetermined amount of rhinestones available for the project, stick religiously to the plan so you don't run out. Has anyone had to find more rhinestones at the last minute to complete a project? Avoid this by keeping track of how many stones are needed, after ordering a few more than you expect you will need.

Something else to think about, is what you do with the back of a costume. If you have no limit on the amount of stones or the time it takes to apply them, remember that dance is a 3-D performance, so add them to the back of your costume, too. But if you are limited as to how many stones you can use, put more on the front of your costume. You are facing the front more often than the back, and most of your pictures will be focused on the front. Put your glitziest face forward!

## **What if I can't do it on my own?**

If applying your own rhinestones seems overwhelming, you can always hand the task to a professional instead.

This "[Rhinestoning 101](#)" blog was first posted in January 2008, and can be found in our archived blogs at [www.satinstitches.com](http://www.satinstitches.com). Also click on our Satin Stitches [September 2012 eNews](#), for helpful tips on replacing rhinestones on your costumes.

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