

NATIONAL BUTTON SOCIETY

B E G I N N E R S' B O O K L E T

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C O N T E N T S

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OFFICIAL NBS CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM (Blue Handbook) – USE OF

Putting a tray of buttons together properly, whether for yourself or for the competition, requires knowledge of most everything in the “Official NBS Classification & Competition Guidelines” handbook (aka The Blue Book) – or at least the knowledge of what’s to be found in the handbook and where to look. In addition, the new Glossary of General Terms in the back refers you to specific pages, so make generous use of this very helpful tool. Our official handbook is regularly updated and comes with the February bulletin each year. We hope to encourage you to see this as a worthy goal to work towards and to inspire you to make the effort. Until you have reached this stage in button collecting, you won’t know the full sense of satisfaction and pleasure that it can bring. To some, this may sound radical, but I do not say it lightly.

Once I was a beginning button collector too, and can remember how overwhelmed I felt at first – how everything seemed so foreign and strange, even the vocabulary. I can’t tell you how many times I read and reread the blue NBS handbook, each time gleaning one or more new facts that stuck with me. I don’t expect to memorize everything in it, but I can find what I need. So keep the blue “Classification System” booklet handy and refer to it often.

SOME BASIC HINTS FOR BEGINNERS

Sorting: Styrofoam trays from the grocery are practical for sorting. With a marker pen you can write directly on the end of the tray as to what you want to put in it, and they can be easily stacked when necessary. Your labeling can be clearly seen during sorting, as well as when stacked. If you already have a nice variety and quantity, I’d suggest starting with a tray for each material section (from the blue handbook), so labeled. If you’re already specializing in themes, say insects, you’ll want a sorting tray for each theme. Be sure to handle your buttons carefully, so you don’t chip or otherwise damage them (especially the glass ones).

Measuring: There are two good measures for NBS sizes: (1) The flat standard official “Dubois” measure with three holes, sold by NBS, and (2) the “spoon style” Linley measure with four sizes available from some button vendors. Measure buttons carefully, holding them perfectly level. Don’t tip them as you pass them through the ring, or you might get a false measurement, especially if it is a tight fit. A button is “large” if it will **not** go through the largest hole or ring; it is “medium” if it goes through the largest hole but **not** through the middle-sized hole; it is “small” if it goes through the middle-sized hole but **not** the smallest hole, which is the measure for “diminutive” size. On the Linley spoon-style measure, the second smallest size is 1/2” and is mainly used for a certain type of button called “Austrian Tinies.”

Mounting: You need to start as soon as possible in getting your buttons mounted. This helps you to see at a glance what you have and gives order to your collection. As a beginner, you may start mounting on “work” cards made from any kind of cardboard, providing it’s not too thin or thick. If too thin, it will bend under the weight of the buttons -- if too thick, some shorter shanks won’t pass through.

If the cardboard isn’t clean, you can cover it with a sheet of paper, glued or stapled on. Pieces of scrap matboard can be purchased fairly cheaply from frame shops. Trim your cards to 9”x12”, but save the smaller pieces for special mountings, such as for smaller frames, show and tell, button gift presentations, etc. Mount with the 9” side at the top. For permanent mountings, you might want to consider using acid-free board.

Label your work cards at the top so you can quickly see what they contain. At first, don’t worry about special mountings following NBS rules of size and quantity -- that can come later. The main thing is to get your buttons sorted and mounted as you acquire them.

For mounting buttons, it’s preferable to use plastic-coated copper wire from telephone or computer cables. This kind of wire is in the process of being replaced by extremely fine fiber-optic wire and someday may not be readily available to us collectors. So, if you’re around when these changeovers are being made, try to get a good supply of this wire to set aside for the future. Regular pipe cleaner is not recommended for many buttons that could be damaged by the

moisture absorbed by the pipe cleaner from the atmosphere, which may cause its wire inside to rust, and consequently the shank and/or back of the button to rust or corrode.

You'll want to cut your wire in pieces about 1½-2" long. To mount, first run the wire through the button shank; then fold downward at the center, put through the hole in your card, open up and fold or twist down as necessary. To punch the holes, a short awl is best for better control. You can get these in hardware stores in a couple of widths, or at sewing notions counters. You should back up your punching process with a Styrofoam board about an inch or more thick, or folded towels, or other protection against punching holes in yourself or other surfaces.

You'll probably want to protect the cards from each other and possible damage from the wires on the backs. Plastic bags work okay, but don't seal them up -- leave them open so air can circulate and your buttons can "breath". Likewise, don't close up buttons in jars or cans. Learn to identify celluloid buttons and separate them from other materials for all but short term. Do not store celluloid buttons in plastic bags or holders. I prefer to separate these cards just with a piece of heavy paper or cloth, leaving plenty of air circulation possible.

Some Basic Tools of the Hobby: In addition to the tools already mentioned, you will need a magnet to test for steel buttons. Look in the hardware store for the pencil style, the magnet end of it being no larger than the eraser on a pencil. It is handy to use, as you can test a small part of a button such as a shank, rim, back, or steel embellishment. You may also find it useful to have a pair of small needle-nosed pliers to use when pulling through stubborn wire fasteners, as well as other tasks. You will find it essential to have a good lighted magnifying glass, preferably 10x. I use and recommend the LED 15x Magnifier sold by Lee Valley Tools and others.

For a special tray, you may want to pick a mounting pattern and draw it on your card. Templates are available through the mail or at national conventions from the makers. Portland (Oregon) Button Club purchased a selection of these templates for their library so that members can check them out. I would encourage other clubs to do this also. They cost about \$4 each and make it really easy to get some nice patterns laid out on your cards. Pre-designed cards are available through different club members and/or other vendors, at state and national shows, or ads in the national and various state bulletins.

As You Up-Grade: You can start a "supply" card with your "second bests." Don't be in a hurry to discard damaged buttons, or pieces thereof. They are always interesting to study for construction, etc. – or to furnish a "spare part" to repair a similar button in the future. And never dispose of any buttons until you thoroughly understand collecting. You might let go of some really valuable, if not especially beautiful, buttons.

Join and Be Active: If you do live close enough to a local club, the best thing you can do is join and be active. Button collectors are a friendly group, and you'll find one or more "older" collectors who'll be happy to mentor you. As soon as you can, get into competition at state and national levels. It is better to take an active part, win or lose, for this is the best way to really become a more knowledgeable collector. In fact, *all competitors are winners because of the amazing amount we learn when putting our trays together for competition.* By all means, make every attempt to attend any of the annual state or regional shows that are near you. And it goes without saying that the annual national convention is the highlight of the button collecting year and you should give serious consideration to attending, especially if it is not too far away from you.

If You're on the Internet: Consider joining ButtonBytes, moderated by Ronnie Wexler. To join, go to <https://groups.google.com/forum/#overview>. At the top, put ButtonBytes in the dialogue box and that should lead to the group where you can request to join. Many state button organizations have wonderful websites now, so do a web search for your state or nearby. National Button Society has a wonderful website full of many resources. Some are available to everyone, while other information may be accessed in the "Members Only" section. Go to www.nationalbuttonsociey.org. Another valuable online button resource is Button Country at www.buttoncountry.com.

Collect All Types: Collect and study modern buttons, as well as the older ones, to help learn how to tell the difference between the two. Many fabric and yarn stores today are a great source of modern buttons. They usually have seasonal sales at good discounts, so watch for these. Collect and learn about all types of buttons. There are many inexpensive ones to start with.

Build a Reference Library: Start now to acquire all the written information you can find on buttons. There are many current as well as out-of-print books available. Back issues of NBS bulletins and "Just Buttons" magazines are available on the national website, members only section. These are usually offered for sale by vendors at state shows and the annual national convention. Also, many local clubs maintain lending libraries that contain some of these publications. National Button Society offers several very helpful handbooks on various types of buttons, including glass, china, shell, overall/work, synthetic polymers, etc. These are available at very reasonable prices and may be ordered from the people listed on the inside back cover of each bulletin.

"Question" Card: Keep an ongoing "question" card. You'll inevitably find buttons that defy your classification efforts, or about which you have questions. Mount these on a card as you come across them, writing IN PENCIL next to the button what your question is. Take this card to every button meeting or show that you attend to ask more seasoned collectors what they can tell you.

Write their responses next to the button for handy reference later on. It may be useful to note the name of the person giving the information. When you remount the buttons on their proper cards, you can transfer any comments you wish to keep with the button. As you empty your "question" card you can erase the comments to make room for more buttons and questions.

What About Repaired and Restored Buttons?

The goal of all button collectors should be to preserve and/or restore buttons to their original condition, if possible. Therefore, it is acceptable to repaint, repair shanks, replace pastes or cut steels, replace thread on thread-bound glass, etc. **if it is done as close to the original as possible.** For example, lacy glass may have repainted backs, but the work should be done in the original color(s) and design. Restored and repaired buttons are allowed in button competitions. However, it is the duty of the restorer/repairer to let future owners of the button know just what has been done. I suggest noting this directly on the mounting card and keeping that information with the button so when it passes into other hands, it will be documented. It should be noted that values of these buttons generally will be less than if in original condition, but more than if not repaired or restored.

CHECKLIST OF MOST BUTTON MATERIALS (in alphabetical order)

Antler	Other	Metals:	Tintypes
Bamboo	Cinnabar	Aluminum	Other
Bone	Coconut Shell	Brass	Nut
Ceramics:	Composition	Chrome	Paper
China	Cork	Copper	Papier Maché
<u>Earthenware:</u>	Enameled Metal	Gilt/Gold Plate	Pearl (Iridescent)
Barum	Fabric	Gold	Pine Needles
Norwalk	Feathers	Iron	Pits
Ruskin	Glass:	Pewter	Plaster of Paris
Satsuma	Black	Silver	Raffia
Zia Indian	Clear/Colored	Steel	Rubber
Other	Glass Mounted	Tin	Seeds
<u>Porcelain:</u>	In Metal	Tombac	Semi-Prec.Gems:
Arita	Gourd	Zinc	Agate
Dresden	Gutta Percha	White, Other	Amber
Kutani	Hair	Yellow, Other	Coral
Meissen	Horn	Metal Crafts:	Jade
Other	Ivory	Bidri	Jet (very rare)
<u>Stoneware:</u>	Leather	Damascene	Lava
Jasperware	Linoleum	Niello	Malachite
Wedgwood		Shakudo	Obsidian

Onyx	ABS	Nylon	Other
Tiger's Eye	Acrylic	Phenolic Resin	Tortoise-Shell
Turquoise	Amino Resins	Polyester	Vegetable Ivory
Other	Casein	Polymer Clays	Vulcanite
Shell (Non-Irid.)	Celluloid	Polystyrene	Wood
Synth. Polymers:	Cell. Acetate	Synthetic rubber	Other

IDENTIFYING AND TESTING for MATERIALS:

Many button materials resemble other materials. There are many factors to consider when identifying materials, including: style, design, construction, shanks, color, luminosity, surface appearance (i.e. crazing, mold/saw/carve marks, unpolished inner surfaces as inside the self-shanks), etc. However, for some materials, to be certain, the hot needle test is necessary. Hot needle testing is not everyone's cup of tea, and that is fine. If you decide that you want to identify materials yourself in this manner, here are some suggestions worth considering:

1. An electric hot needle gives the most reliable results because it has a consistent temperature that is hot enough to test all materials that can be so tested. I recommend the Hot Tool brand with the needle tip.
2. Any test should be performed in as discreet a manner as possible, so as not to leave a blemish on the button. This means that you should use the finest needle tip possible and touch it to an area that is the least visible. Normally this will be on the back of the button, under or as near to the shank as possible, but could be in a crevice or other hidden area. Do not test transparent materials if the mark can be seen through to the front. Try not to make more than one test mark, and use the same spot if a retest is necessary.
3. It is a good idea to practice testing the different materials using known examples of "junkers" to get used to the hot needle results.
4. Here are some materials that can be tested with a hot needle and the odor you can expect. More detailed information on testing plastics is available in the NBS Handbook on Synthetic Polymers.

Amber – pitch/resin	Horn – cooking meat or burning feathers
Bakelite – formaldehyde/carbolic acid	Jet – coal gas
Casein – burned milk	Lucite – nail polish remover
Celluloid – camphor	Rubber – burning rubber/sulfur
Composition – shellac/lacquer	Tortoise-Shell – stagnant salt water
Gutta Percha – faint rubber but less acrid	Vegetable Ivory – burning walnut shells
	Wood – burning wood

Some people use various different chemical products to test for Bakelite. While these products may not be harmful to Bakelite if the button is immediately and thoroughly cleaned and dried, they can do damage to many other plastics. A test popular with some collectors involves putting the button in very hot water to get an odor. We do not recommend either the chemical or hot water test, as they can damage some buttons being tested.

There are other ways to determine a material, such as the following basic tips:

1. Glass and stone will feel colder on the cheek than other materials. To determine between **plastic, glass, china or stone:** click on your (actual) teeth. Plastic will give a duller sound than the harder materials. You can also use the tooth test to determine between cold plastic enamel finish and true enameled metals; just be sure to click on the enameled surface, and not the metal.
2. A magnifying glass, minimum 10x but preferably 15x, is indispensable in determining many materials. Between **bone and ivory**, look for tiny black specks in bone, where the blood

traveled, whereas ivory will be finer grained and often show undulating or crosshatch lines. Usually, the workmanship on ivory is finer than on bone.

3. “**Composition**” has been erroneously overused to cover various different molded materials. The term “composition” should be used for only those buttons molded of shellac or comparable binders that are filled with ground minerals, plant matter, etc. Surface impression inlays of pearl tesserae and metallic flecks are often found on composition buttons.
4. It is sometimes difficult to tell between **glass and china or porcelain**. Look at the backs. China will show a more granular or pockmarked back surface where it rested in the kiln. Porcelain may have unglazed portions on the back. Glass was molten when made into buttons, so will have a smooth surface on the back, and may show some mold marks. Old glass may have some slight surface “wrinkles” which occurred during the molding process, and are not defects.
5. **Horn** buttons may have a small hole gouged in the back of the button where it was picked out of the mold, called a “pick mark”. That’s just one way to tell horn. Some molded horn buttons have back marks, often French. A city in France, Caen, is often named. Another way to tell horn is to hold it to a very strong light. Many times you will be able to see the translucence of the material near the edge or in thinner places, even though it looks opaque black when not held to the light. The backs of some horn buttons show layering or flaking like old splintery wood. Most of these hints apply to the dyed (usually black) molded horn buttons. Besides black, horn can be found in blond, as well as dyed red, green, blue, etc. Natural horn is unprocessed and cut and carved from the horn tips.
6. A drop of water on the surface of **jade** will not spread out, but may draw in instead. However, on **glass** the drop of water will spread out.
7. True **jet** buttons are very rare. It is not unusual to see black glass being called jet, so don’t fall into this trap. Jet is fossilized coal, and is carved, not molded. You may see individual carving marks. They usually have a self-shank or are mounted on metal. They may have a glossy surface if polished. If chipped, you will see a conchoidal fracture. You may scrape the back of the button with a knife and get a very fine black powder.
8. Older **pewter** contains lead and will leave a pencil-like mark when drawn across a piece of paper. **Steel** will be attracted to a magnet. The back of the button may be japanned tin, which will also be attracted to a magnet. Be careful when testing with a magnet that you’re not getting results from the back of the button when the front may not be steel. Metal buttons are usually classified by the material on the front when it is 2 or 3-pc. construction.
9. **Hard rubber** buttons are backmarked Goodyear, **N.R.C., I.R.C.C., D.H.R.Co, or A.R.Co.** and are usually black or dark brown, with tan and orange being scarce and desirable.
10. **Vegetable ivory** is made from the Corozo (also called Tagua) nut. Since dye won’t penetrate deeper than the outside layer, the natural creamy color can be seen in the sewing holes unless the button was dyed after cutting the holes. With good magnification, vegetable ivory will show an overall grid of tiny dots, particularly on the back of the button where it is less finished.
11. **Wood** buttons are made from natural wood, or they can be pressed or molded wood, such as Syrocco, Burwood, ANN or GAP types. The wood fibers in the pressed wood buttons should be visible under a magnifying glass.
12. “**Plastic**” refers to all semi-synthetic (celluloid, cellulose acetate and casein), and synthetic (phenolic, amino, polyester, acrylic resins, polystyrene, nylon, polyclays, ABS, etc.) polymers. If you are interested in learning more about these buttons, study the synthetic polymers glossary in the NBS classification booklet. National also has available for a modest fee a “Synthetic Polymers Handbook” that will give you much more information to aid in your identification efforts and general plastics education. Look on the inside back cover of your NBS bulletins for ordering information.

CLEANING BUTTONS

1. Do not wash or clean any buttons unless you know what they are made of and how they are constructed. Many buttons have a cardboard inner piece, which, if it gets wet, will cause the button to oxidize. Furthermore, some materials and finishes don't do well being washed. Different materials require different cleaning methods. If you can't identify a button's material, **do nothing** or only lightly dust the button with a clean, dry cloth.
2. Don't overclean or overpolish. Basic cleaning supplies include an old toothbrush and a good metal polish and/or a jeweler's polishing cloth. I love the small microfiber polishing pads, as they contain no chemicals or other cleaning agents -- just microfibers which pick up the dirt; but beware of using on painted or tinted surfaces. If you use paste polish, it is best to rub some into a terry cloth rag, let it dry, and then rub the button on the cloth. This helps to avoid getting paste in the crevices of the button that makes it difficult to clean out thoroughly. If you don't, the residue paste will start a corrosion process worse than if you had left it alone. Metal buttons showing rust or corrosion need to be isolated until they can be properly cleaned. Ask seasoned collectors in your club for cleaning advice. Some basic tips follow:
3. **Bone:** Rub with a clean polishing cloth; cut a lemon in half, dip one of the halves in salt and rub over the surface. Wipe with a damp cloth and let dry.
4. **Celluloid:** Wipe with a polishing cloth, being careful of any painted surface. If a celluloid button feels sticky – and is of 1-pc. Contruction, you may wash quickly in tepid water and dry carefully.
5. **Ceramic:** Fired ones can be wiped with a damp cloth. Leave the unfired ones alone if they are painted.
6. **Composition:** Wipe with a polishing cloth. May be polished with mineral oil or furniture polish on a soft cloth, although I've never found that to be necessary.
7. **Enamels:** Wipe with a cloth moistened with household ammonia to remove dust and dirt. DO NOT do this if the button has painted portions, as it WILL remove the paint. You may polish the metal portions with a jeweler's cloth or metal polish. DO NOT try to clean Motiwala enamels, as this is a photographic technique that is not fired on and will be damaged; gently wipe with a soft, dry cloth only.
8. **Fabric:** Care must be taken to rub or brush old fabric buttons, as the threads may be weaker than they look! You may want to try a bit of cleaning fluid in a small glass jar. Put the button in and gently shake it for a couple of minutes. Remove buttons and place on an absorbent cloth to dry, preferably outdoors. DO NOT use this method if there are any glued on embellishments, or wood interiors that may stain the fabric.
9. **Glass:** Wipe with a polishing cloth. Be careful if washing not to remove any luster or paint.
10. **Horn:** Wipe with a soft cloth with mineral oil. Keep horn buttons dry and protected from infestation by parasites by adding a mothball where they are stored. New horn acquisitions can be placed in the freezer for several weeks to kill any parasites that may be living in them.
11. **Ivory:** Clean as for bone; may be rubbed with a soft cloth and baby oil after cleaning. Wipe dry.
12. **Leather:** Wipe with mineral oil or saddle soap.
13. **Metals:** There are several good metal polishes available. Polishing with a Dremel Tool is another possibility, as it is quick and easy and doesn't require paste or other chemicals. I

recommend using *only the smaller cordless battery-operated Dremel*, as the electric cord version is much more powerful and difficult to control on delicate buttons. Best Dremel results are on yellow metals, and some whites with high fancy embossed surfaces or filigree type designs. Avoid buttons with a lot of smooth shiny surfaces, or with original tint or paint.

Steel: Handle with the fingers as little as possible, as the oils and moisture on the skin can lead to rusting when the buttons are stored. To remove rust, you may rub with the lead of a pencil or an ink eraser, but the rust may return. You may use a commercial rust remover such as WD-40. Steel wool (000) is good to remove rust on backs and shanks of steel cups.

14. **Plastics:** Wipe with a damp cloth. Do not wash, dunk or apply chemical products, as some plastics can be damaged this way.
15. **Rhinestones:** Never use water -- just a gentle brushing and polishing with a soft cloth.
16. **Rubber:** Wipe with a polishing cloth.
17. **Shell:** Rubbing with a cloth moistened with mineral oil, then carefully drying can usually restore the luster. Don't wash with water.
18. **Vegetable Ivory:** Wipe with mineral oil on a soft cloth.
19. **Wood:** Wipe with mineral oil on a soft cloth.
20. **The “Green Meanies”:** Green corrosion means that the metal beneath is damaged, at least to the extent that it has lost its plating and will not polish up the same as before. Catsup is a favorite of many people to clean off the green stuff. It is thick enough to stay just where you have very carefully put it with a toothpick. Leave it for 5-10 minutes, but keep checking it. If the green corrosion is very heavy, you might try a brisk brushing or scraping before you use catsup, but there are no guarantees as the button may already be damaged beyond restoration. Carefully remove all traces of the catsup and wipe dry. It is the vinegar in the catsup which works, so you may use straight vinegar, but it is harder to keep it off the rest of the button.
21. **Cleaning Metal Shanks:** A gray eraser block with a groove cut into it is an effective way to clean rusted metal shanks. Just fit the shank into the groove and briskly move the button back and forth.

STORAGE OF BUTTONS AND DETERIORATION PROBLEMS

Generally speaking, it is best to store like materials together. Celluloid should be stored alone, as should other plastics. Never store any buttons in closed containers. If you use plastic bags, do not close them up. Buttons need to be aired and kept in a constant temperature and humidity environment. It's a good idea to review your buttons periodically, looking for signs of corrosion or other deterioration.

Metalized plastics can show the green signs of corrosion and should be stored alone. Some plastics don't do well being stored with metals. The later transparent yellow and opaque cream colored Celluloids are particularly susceptible to self-destructing (cracking, off-gassing harmful fumes, or oozing a liquid that will "eat" your mounting card), which can hurt other buttons nearby. Especially watch out for those with metal parts or shanks. When they show the first signs of cracking/fracturing, I throw them out, or at least completely isolate them. Revisit your Celulloid buttons at least every six months to look for signs of degradation on the problem types.

PUTTING TOGETHER YOUR FIRST SPECIAL TRAY

How do you get started putting together your first special tray? Especially if you don't have a lot of buttons? Review what you do have and see what you have a good start on. It could be a material - a color -- a subject, etc. After you have decided what kind of button you want to make a nice tray of, then decide what size you will concentrate on. Unless you have a lot of buttons to work with,

you probably will have to start with 25 "any size". That will allow you to get a tray together sooner than if you are restricted to any of the other size requirements. (See NBS Classification Handbook re: sizes.) Some buttons don't come in all sizes, so that may be a factor in helping you decide what sizes you will focus on.

If you want to do all one material, for example black glass, use the classification system to guide you as to what's included to completely represent that material. Sometimes more detailed classifications are available in back issues of the NBS Bulletins or in the NBS handbooks on specific topics. Do as much research as you can on your choice. Most long-time collectors are more than willing to answer your questions, so feel free to ask for help.

After you've mounted your best selection from your collection, make yourself a checklist of all the other types you want to look for to complete your tray. Carry it with you as you go button shopping, especially at state shows, and even at club meetings. A photocopy of your tray might also be helpful.

If you want to do a topic, for example, "Birds, Assorted Materials," what should you put on this tray? It tells you in the front of the Blue Book under "Frequently Asked Competition Questions". This tells you to have as many different kinds of birds as possible, various activities, multiples, etc. followed secondarily by as many different materials as possible. The section to which the award is written carries the most weight in competition.

After you have completed your tray, you can begin the almost never-ending process of upgrading it – to your own satisfaction, of course. As soon as you are far enough along in putting one or more special trays together, ask a more advanced collector to look them over, give you suggestions, look for errors, etc. Eventually when you are ready, have an award sponsored (either by your club, a friend, or even yourself) that matches what you are working on. But this is only possible if you start out following NBS rules in the blue handbook. (In principal, all state button societies follow national rules.)

A WORD ABOUT VALUES

One of the questions most asked by beginners is: "How much are my buttons worth?" There are no quick, easy answers. If you were to ask a roomful of vendors what is the value of a particular button, you would get a wide range of answers, depending on such factors as: regional differences; how much the person knows about or likes the button; was the evaluation for resale, for a collection, or insurance purposes; etc.

So you see there is no one fixed price for each button. However, our **best guide** is still THE BIG BOOK OF BUTTONS, originally published in 1981, reprinted in 1991. A revised and augmented second edition was recently done in two volumes and available at about \$400 for the set. The first printings are still useful, however, and occasionally will be listed on eBay, or with other booksellers, or button collectors who acquire an extra copy with a collection. I cannot recommend strongly enough that you make this a high priority to acquire a copy as soon as you can. While the 1981 and 1991 prices are out of date, the new 2-volume edition has a separate price guide that may be purchased from the publisher. Prices there are referenced by the plate numbers, which did not change from the first edition's two printings, so it is useful, no matter which version of the BBB you may acquire.

THE JOYS OF BUTTON COLLECTING

As you progress, many joys will be yours. To name but a few: (1) the pleasure of possessing these bits of art and beauty, for many of them are of wonderful workmanship; (2) the enjoyment you get in completing cards of different types; (3) the fellowship you enjoy in knowing other collectors; (4) the actual education you absorb from studying and finding out about the buttons and related topics; and (5) the pride you feel in showing them to your friends and exhibiting them at the shows. There is nothing quite like it, believe me!

HOW TO WRITE (OR READ) AN AWARD

Button judging is not a perfect science, but we are always trying to do better. Perhaps one of the most important ways to improve matters is to work on writing better and more understandable awards. We usually have some awards with no entries because they were difficult or almost impossible to assemble. Sometimes the wording is ambiguous; i.e., Red, White and Blue Plastic -- does this mean red buttons and blue buttons and white buttons, or does it mean all three colors on each button -- or something else? How an award is worded can make all the difference.

How do you write an award to be exactly what you want it to be, and how to read an award to put the best possible tray together? Here are two similar, but quite different, awards:

- (1) Sec. 5, Cl. 5 - Black glass assorted - Specialized to flowers
- (2) Sec. 18, Cl. 18.2 - Flowers assorted - Specialized to black glass

These are both for flowers on black glass, but how do they differ?

In example (1) the prime importance is placed on the selection of black glass. The greatest number of classes of black glass portraying flowers would be the first consideration. And our rules require that such an award be labeled as to class unless the sponsor said otherwise. The secondary consideration would be the selection of flower types. The best tray would be the one that used the greatest number of classes of black glass and then the best variety of flower types.

In example (2), following the classification, you would want to select as many different varieties of flowers as possible, using both 18.2 Flowers Assorted, as well as the subclasses 18.2-18.6: lilies of the valley, pansies, roses and thistles. "Flowers Assorted" includes all recognizable flowers. Stylized examples are not acceptable, because they are considered patterns and not pictorials. Of secondary importance in this award is the specialization to black glass, so after you have selected as many different types of flowers as possible, then you should try to cover the black glass classes that haven't already been included, using duplicate flowers.

In Oregon on our judging sheets we take into consideration the primary and secondary importance of an award in the points allowed for the different items; i.e., we award two points for those of primary importance, and one point for those of secondary importance, according to how the award was written. I hope judges elsewhere do similarly; I know at least some do.

If your award is for a topic, such as flowers, but not specialized to a certain material, then it is assumed that one should use assorted materials, and as many different kinds of flowers as possible. The emphasis of the award will be on the section number(s) first.

Whenever you write an award for competition, it is best if you have already tried to put that tray together. First, you will know that it *is* feasible; secondly, you have probably discovered the pitfalls of the award and can write it to help avoid many problems. Please don't submit awards that you create from your imagination, just because, for example, you think they would be pretty to see mounted. Have some practical working experience behind what you submit to help make your award as clear and non-ambiguous as possible. If you are not sure how to write up what you want, ask for help before you submit it.

On any award that could be long and complicated to judge, consider requiring labeling, even though national rules don't. This is especially true for diminutive awards, and many of the black glass awards, especially size small, and particularly, if all black.

EXHIBITOR TIPS AND POINTERS

Dispelling a myth: Have you ever heard that if you don't have such-and-such a button on a certain tray, you don't stand a chance to win? For example, an 18th Century button on a Div. IX award? This just is not so. One or even a few good buttons cannot cause a tray to win a blue ribbon, if the rest of the award's classes are not adequately covered. An experience I had once at national was a good example of this for me. I entered the diminutives, assorted materials, but when I heard that one tray had three rarities that I had only dreamed of finding -- a Wedgwood, a Satsuma, and a Tingue, I figured I didn't stand a chance. Imagine my thrill when the showroom

opened, and I saw that I had won the blue ribbon! Why? Because I covered the materials assortment the best, while the other tray was lacking many materials. The judges did their jobs well, and of course, I did have some choice buttons on my tray along with the more common ones. **Do your homework -- study the award -- cover the classes as best you can, and you should do well.**

Lack of **studying the rules and regulations** for competitors and judges, as well as the **glossary**, both found in our classification handbook, continues to cause problems. It is absolutely necessary for all participants in the process to continue referring to the information printed in the blue handbook. Do not follow all you read in various articles and books about buttons -- even those in the NBS bulletins, if the rules have not been approved by the general membership at an annual meeting. The NBS blue classification handbook for the current year is ***the*** reference to follow.

Read the award before starting your tray -- reread it while putting it together -- and again when it is finished. Verify section and class numbers, quantity and size - before, during and after doing a tray. If it hasn't happened to you yet, **it will** -- that you get off on some tangent, forgetting some aspect of the award, especially on last-minute changes. Listen to the voice of experience here!

Understanding “Other Material Embellishment” vs. “Decorative Finish”: There always seems to be confusion here. It is clearly explained in the NBS handbook glossary. Read and reread this whenever you are writing an award, or starting to do a tray following an award that considers this aspect of our buttons. In brief:

Other Material Embellishment: A **material** used to enhance a button's face design or for ornamentation. Examples are: cut steels, paste jewels, glass, pearls, pewter, etc. *The term "trim" has been discontinued*, and any amount of trim or ornamentation is now considered embellishment. We have used the two terms interchangeably for some time to describe the one thing, and it's confusing, so we are going to strictly call it embellishment, other material embellishment, or OME for short.

Decorative Finish: A **treatment or coating**, including: lacquer, tole, transfer/decal, enamel, paint, pearlized, cold plastic enamel, gilt, wash, luster, tint and finishing color applied to the surface of the button.

SO.....embellishment is a physical **material** that you could actually hold in your hand, while finish is a coating that is applied to the **surface** of the button.

Special Note on Enamels: These have their own material section, but to qualify as an enamel, approximately 50% of the surface must be enameled, OR, the focal point of the button must be enameled. What do we mean “focal point”? The enameling could be in the center only, but less than 50% of the surface; but if this is the case, the enameled portion should have subject matter that creates the focal point -- not just be plain enamel. Or, in the case of the rare plique-a-jours, no matter how much is enameled or where it is found on the button, NBS accepts them as enamels. So, if your metal button is embellished with, for example, just a band of enameling around the outside edge, it would be classified as “metal with enamel decorative finish (DF)”. Refer to the classification handbook glossary for more information.

Labeling: Certain classes require special labeling, per the classification handbook. On all other awards **not** requiring labeling, here are some considerations:

1. Certainly, if you are using a rare or unusual button that most judges might not be familiar with, label it. Often the owner of a button has done special research and has information not generally known -- so label it for the judges and other collectors alike.
2. Label your buttons for materials, even if not required, especially if not readily apparent. It helps the judges to determine what the material is, and it should aid you in winning points. Judges are all volunteers who do their best, but some are less informed than the person entering that particular competition and may not recognize some materials for what they are. But please, if you label, be sure it is correct.
3. Label any time you think it can aid the judges. For example, if a tray of small buttons of black glass pictorials is labeled, even if not required, it just might help the judges' tired eyes see something they might otherwise have missed.

4. Labeling must be on the front of the tray, not on the back, so it can aid not only the judges, but also be of educational value to all viewers. Labeling must be typed or printed legibly (per the rules in the blue handbook) -- please be neat.
5. Do not label the same class more than one time; i.e., even if you have more than one moonglow on a tray, just label one of them "Moonglow". You can only earn points one time for each different thing, and it just hampers the judges' work to have to read through duplicate labeling and causes unnecessary confusion and delay. Of course, if you're doing an award where labeling is required, you may be obliged to use the same class number more than once. Another exception would be if you're using several variations of one class, as changes in the classification have lumped some classes together. However, the glossary spells out that each different type is to receive credit, even when the class number label is the same. Therefore, your class numbers would be duplicated, but your wording, different.
6. Label any back interest (which can't be seen from the front) for which the judges might award points, depending on the kind of award, such as: back marks, shank types, back types, etc. If these aren't labeled, the judges may not see or give them points.
7. Just because something isn't listed on the judging sheet (*), doesn't mean you can't or shouldn't use it. It would be good to label it, though, to call attention to it, as some judges, particularly the newer ones, don't always catch points if not check-listed on the judging sheets. It's very difficult for the preparer of the judging sheets to know in advance of every possible button that could be used on a tray if he/she hasn't already done that award. So even though not shown on the judging sheet, your button may be more than just appropriate -- it may be rare or unusual, so call the judges' attention to it by labeling.
 (*) Not all states use pre-written judging sheets as we do in Oregon, but it's a great idea, as all competitors have advance knowledge as to how the award will be judged and can prepare their trays accordingly. It helps to keep the judges and the competitors "on the same page".
8. There are many good ways to make your labels. You can type using a small font, and even further reduce them at the copy machine if desired. Tiny labels are less obtrusive on the tray. Then you cut and paste. I recommend using the removable "Post-It-Note" type glue stick, as you can adjust the position or change the place of your label as needed. There are label makers on the market now that some people prefer, using clear plastic, which looks neat on the card. Those who are knowledgeable enough with the computer can design an entire sheet, with circles for the buttons and labels preprinted below each button, which can then be applied directly to the mounting card.
9. Some sections and/or classes (clear/colored and black glass assortments, summaries, etc.) **require labeling as to section and/or class number** (and mounting in numerical order). This is duly noted in the classification itself. However, for the benefit of the general public, as well as your fellow collectors and friends who might be looking at your trays, you might want to also label the name of the class and not just the required number(s).
10. Errors involving inaccurate labeling when labeling is not required **should not** result in the disqualification of a tray -- at the discretion of the judges, with the approval of the Chair of Judges, but a correction should be noted on the tray slip for your education. I've found most judges to be fairly friendly and helpful on this score. However, in the case of the summary awards, there is no room for "discretion" and any mislabeling will result in disqualification. (See the rules concerning disqualification, errors, and labeling in the front of the Blue Book).

Mounting your buttons:

1. When **mounting sew-throughs**, it's good to use two small holes; otherwise, the button may move around in one hole and not stay in the position you want. If you want to call attention to the fact that it's a sew-through, use a contrasting colored wire. Otherwise, choose a wire color like the button. A corncob holder makes a good 2-hole punch.
2. **How you punch your holes is important.** Shank buttons usually need only one hole – but make it no bigger than necessary to push the shank through so the button won't spin in the hole. Some self-shank buttons, glass for example, need one larger hole so the button fits down in and flat against the card, or two little holes so you can pull the wire through and twist down tight to keep the button from wobbling and tipping on the card. You don't want some of

your buttons flopping around loosely when on display. That's one of the signs differentiating a beginner from an old pro, and can send an unwanted subliminal message.

3. **Some buttons are harder to mount and require special attention.** For some fragile buttons, you may want to wrap them in a square of plastic film, twisting the extra into a "pigtail" and pulling the pigtail through the hole, then taping it securely. Other techniques are: larger or special-shaped holes; a dab of "Fun-Tak" (a tacky clay) or similar product to stabilize, but use only when displaying trays; "spiders" for buttons with fragile or broken shanks or pad/thread backs. Spiders are crossed wires or strips of metal with a shank, made especially for button collectors. They can be shaped and trimmed to fit a button.
4. Spiders can also be used to mount buttons upside-down **to show back interest.** You can also use elastic thread to mount buttons when you want to be able to look at the backs without removing the button, such as when the back types or marks are important. Acetate "cards" can also be used in this case. Spiders and pre-punched acetate sheets are available from some button vendors.

Assembling your trays:

1. I recommend drawing **patterns** using prefab templates to fit regulation sizes. This helps avoid the problems of miscounting and mismeasuring, and it usually makes for a neater looking tray. Buttons mounted inside the circles can look better than if buttons are mounted somewhat haphazardly, giving the impression of "wandering" on the card. Circles help focus the eye on the buttons, and the patterns can add to the attractiveness of the tray. Do try to center your buttons in the circles. There are some who don't care for these patterns for mounting, and that's okay too, as long as the buttons are well placed and neatly attached.
2. Of course, **we judge only the buttons** - but, other factors such as neatness in mounting and labeling, positioning of the buttons on the card, and how they are affixed can be sub-consciously absorbed and possibly have an effect on the outcome. Even the color of the mounting card can make a difference. To show off most buttons, white is usually best. Other colors may detract from the beauty and details of some buttons, or dull the overall effect.
3. **Where you place the buttons** is important too. Unless the award you're preparing requires numerical-order mounting, you should strive for a balanced look. The size of the button may determine its placement on the card. For example, you're doing a tray of 42 small, and you are using one or more small-smalls. They should be somewhere in the middle, and if you have just one, it should be right in the center. Usually, when you're doing smalls and you choose to include small-smalls, it's because they represent something unusual or rare, or cover a class for which you have no full-sized small examples. Size "small-small" is not officially designated, but usually means just bigger than a diminutive, up to 5/8", unless the award specifies otherwise.
4. **Regarding Balance:**

Sizes: Try to spread the biggest ones around equally -- not top- or bottom-heavy or lop-sided. This is one reason the prefab templates are good -- they've already taken such factors into consideration. However, if you're doing straight rows, you probably will want the smallest at the top, on down to the largest at the bottom to avoid looking top heavy.

Colors: Don't put all one color together -- mix them up as evenly as possible (unless the award specifies otherwise). For example, if you have two yellows, put them opposite each other.

Materials: Mix them up on an assorted tray. Don't put the same type together if you have other options.
5. You should try to **mount any rarities and other "counters"** where they are most obvious to the judges -- and the viewing public--in the middle of the card. Try not to mount a choice button where it will be covered up by the tray slip or a ribbon. In fact, when you are choosing layout designs, keep that in mind. If your tray is to enter in competition, you might want a design that does not go clear out to the corners causing you to hide one or more buttons under the tray slip and, (hopefully), your ribbon.
6. If you have **buttons with directional impact** -- looking right or left, for example, place the button so that the eye is directed towards the center of the card, and not to the edge; e.g., a

woman looking right should go on the left side of the card so that she is looking toward the center.

Miscellaneous Exhibitor Tips:

1. The use of more **than one of each type of “counter”** on a tray is not a plus. One may use as many counters as possible when making up a tray, but the use of more than one of each type is a minus situation. Why? Because each time you duplicate a class, you have one less chance to represent another different class and earn another point. **What is a "counter"?** There is no pat answer, as it varies depending on the award. What may be a counter in one award, might not be in another. A counter is really nothing more than a button that will earn points in a particular award. Of course, rarities are usually counters.
2. **Recount and remeasure** your buttons when you have made your last selection. Beware of the odd sizes, heart shapes, rectangles, squares, etc. It's very easy to think of them as a smaller size than they really are, as just a little corner may prevent them from passing through the measure of the desired size. NOTE: Hold your button flat and still when you pass the measure over it. Don't let it tip, as your measure may slide on over and give you a false result.
3. **Beware of the last-minute substitutions** to “upgrade” your tray. I'll bet every one of us has earned a few “measles” (*) on this account! It's okay, of course, to improve your tray at the last minute, but don't forget to go back and reread the award, the section and class numbers, and size requirements. It's very easy to get caught up in the last minute rush and overlook a key element of the award. (*) “Measles” are what we call the little dot stickers that the judges place beside the buttons that caused the tray to be disqualified.
4. **Regarding damaged buttons:** Generally, no points are deducted because you have used a button in less than perfect condition (i.e., missing shank [use a spider], repaired shank, [please note on back of card “repaired or fragile shank”], chipped or worn, etc.). However, if the damaged button is also a common one, and the judging results are tied, that might possibly help break the tie in the other competitor's favor.
5. If **judging errors** do slip through and you receive what you believe to be an undeserved measles, or do not place as well as you think you should, try to remember: “To err is human --to forgive divine”. We are all doing our conscientious best, but no one knows everything, and there will always be gray areas. And, you too may someday be a judge, and then you'll find out how hard most judges work. Remember, this is not a killer process -- we are all still learning together -- and hopefully, having a good time at it.

SHAPING UP ON SHAPES

There is still much confusion about shapes -- how to use them and how to count them in judging. We need to understand more clearly the concept of shape in our buttons, how we look at and perceive shapes, and their importance on a tray.

It's true that some years back, button shapes were highly regarded – almost revered! Competitors loaded their trays with shapes to try to win more points, which worked for some time. However, thinking people today know and understand that when the handbook says “complete representation,” that means way more than every possible shape. In order to more completely represent whatever the award calls for, many times you will have to make choices between buttons -- do you go for a different linear shape, e.g., or for another technique not yet represented, which just happens to be on yet another round button?

As always, you may submit awards which require more shapes, such as “with a minimum of so many linear, contour” - or whatever you'd like. An attractive and interesting tray will usually have a variety of shapes represented.

Unless an award specifies otherwise, you'll want to represent, if possible, all three shape types. In addition, there is always the chance to earn rarity points in those cases where ANY shape is rare, such as for lacy glass, or “Design in/under Glass in 1-piece Mounting,” Satsumas, or Div. I Celluloids mounted in metal, etc.

So, what are the three shape types? **Linear shapes** are those which, if you were to lay your button down on paper and draw a line around it, that line would be either round, square, oval, rectangle, triangle, scalloped, irregular, etc., which represents the **linear** shape.

For **contour shapes**, you need to look at your button both from the third-dimensional point of view and from the side or cross-section. Do you have a ball, a cube, a cone (or pyramid), a dome, or some other geometrical form that has a dimension beyond flat, or nearly flat, that is significant in defining the button? If so, you have a contour shape. Other contour shapes would be: deeply concave (opposite of a dome); or chunky or bulky looking buttons; or where the depth is similar to the width or length. You have to look at the whole button, not just at what line you would draw on paper around it. For example, a ball shape would give you just a round line, right? But it is more than just a round button – it is a ball, and must be considered a ball contour shape. The only exception to this allowed by NBS was approved in 1996, and that is that you may now count a cube contour as a square linear shape if you need or want to. However, you may *not* count it as *both* on the same tray -- it's one or the other.

Realistic shapes have given us their own kinds of problems over the years. A realistic shaped button is one having the shape of something found in the four pictorial section. Therefore, a realistic button cannot be made of the real thing itself, such as a small shell, pinecone, nut, real coin, etc. – those are real, not realistic. Another pitfall to avoid is if the subject matter is framed by another shape or item, such as "Elsie the cow" head in a circle surrounding her head. If the circle were not there, it would be a realistic cow's head. However, as it is, it's a round button with openwork mold design. The exception to that is the plastic circus set with a ring around the clown, etc., which has been deemed to represent a real circus ring, and thus still a realistic. Another example would be a horse head encircled by a horseshoe. If the horse head were enlarged to life-size, the horseshoe would then be much bigger than life-size and no real horse would have a giant horseshoe going around his head, right? Can we have a round realistic? Of course. Any depiction of something that is round in "real" life would be a realistic shape. Examples: clock, ball, orange, full moon, coin (not an actual coin), etc.

A heart shape or a paisley shape are not considered realistic shapes, but linear shapes, and belong in patterns. The exception, approved at the 1996 national general meeting: the astronomical pictorial class may now include a single crescent or star, even in "realistic" shape, and may be used both in pictorial and pattern awards

When choosing or judging shapes, if in doubt, i.e., whether round or something else, look at the back of the button. Sometimes the front design will give the impression of a different shape, but the back will be perfectly round, or square, or whatever. So when in doubt, look at the shank side. If still in doubt, carefully draw a line around the outside edge of the button and see what shape you have on the paper.

The national thinking now is to award a tray up to three points for the three shape types if represented, plus rarity shape points when appropriate. I'm not sure if all states are doing the same at this time, so if in doubt, try to find out at your state level how shapes will be judged. It may make a difference as to which buttons you select for your trays.



OPEN COMPETITION

These trays are entered (at national and in a few states) at the choice of the competitor in whatever category they desire, **not** from the year's special awards list. The trays must follow the general rules of the National Button Society competition. The tray slips used are according to the specific division represented. The current limit per exhibitor in national open competition is ten (10) trays. **Please note:** only trays in the standard size groupings (i.e., 42 small, 56 diminutive, 30 medium, 35 mixed, etc.) are eligible for national open competition. Trays of "any size" are not acceptable here. See the Blue Book for more information, Page 8 in the 2017-2018 edition.

PRESENTATION AWARDS vs. SPECIAL AWARDS

All presentation awards are special awards, but not all special awards are presentation awards. This is an area of confusion for many newer competitors, so a word of explanation seems in order. *All the awards listed in our December bulletin for the following national competition are special awards.* The presentation awards are listed first, and give special prizes. These can be from any division of buttons and are particularly challenging to do. We have competition in either (1) special awards, including presentation awards, or (2) open competition. When you request your tray slips, you need to keep this in mind and order them accordingly.

EXPLANATION OF THE DIVISIONS (designated by Roman numerals)

Division I: (White tray slips) - These buttons are the oldest, and may include those made from the 17th Century up to 1918.

Division II: (Goldenrod tray slips) - These are military and other uniform buttons.

Division III: (Pink tray slips) - We consider these buttons to be of "modern" manufacture and include those made from 1918 to the present.

Division IV: (Blue tray slips) - This division is for specialties related to buttons, such as bridle rosettes, cuff buttons, netsuke, obidome, costume trimmings, studs, buckles, button covers and buttonhooks are used here. Age is not a consideration.

Division V — Not in use at this time.

Division VI: (Green tray slips) - This division is for non-competitive displays. The only rule is that the entry must be on a standard 9"x12" card.

Division VII: (Yellow tray slips) - These buttons are entered by junior members, who must be under the age of eighteen.

Division VIII: (Purple tray slips) – Educational displays entered by state and local button societies.
Division VIII: (Orange tray slips) – Special exhibits.

Division IX: (Tan tray slips) - These trays are assembled and judged without regard to the age of the buttons and represent a mixture of both old and modern buttons.

Note: No Division IV specialties may be used in Division I, III or IX. Division II uniform buttons **may currently be used in** Division I, III or IX awards **only if** specified by the award. Starting in 2018 competition, Div. II buttons will be allowed in all Div. IX awards, whether specified or not.