

# **CLASPS AND CLOSURES**

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When the thought of clasps and closures comes to mind, I immediately envision lobster claws and the type of closure or finding available to anyone through jewelers supply houses.

In my early days of learning to make jewelry, I used these exclusively. Once I found metal clay, it rocked my world! OH the possibilities!

This presentation will take you through the many types of clasps and closures available. Metal Clay has the unique ability to morph into almost anything. I would like to show you many ways of looking at clasps, which are a very necessary piece of your jewelry assemblage.

Once you have the basic concept of the form and design you would like to create, you can then take that idea and run with it. Just think of the many possibilities of what you can do, and then let your imagination take over! You will never look at the end of your beautiful jewelry creation in the same light again.

Years ago, I learned to make bead crochet ropes. I just love this type of necklace! I find that there are a million gazillion ways of coloring and creating patterns within them. Bead crochet ropes are something that is very touchy-feely. I use them for most of my large works. They have the weight and balance so necessary to accompany a large focal piece.

I decided to make my metal clay pieces to be displayed on the front of the rope as opposed to the back. This is contrary to the "normal" way of making a necklace.

This idea became a personal challenge to see what kind of pieces I could come up with and still have them as a closure, not just a bead.

## TOGGLES

The toggle design is one of the most commonly recognized closures. It is easy to use and has many possibilities. It is usually one of the first types of closures or fittings that most new jewelry makers use. It goes equally well on necklaces and bracelets. I find it to be one of the easiest closures to construct.

When you think about toggles, you imagine a circle with a hole in it and a bar with a ring attached. Let's try to get a more exciting mental picture.

Here are examples of different "looks" in toggles, a Lentil Shaped, Leaves and a Twig and an Ocean Theme using a piece of seaweed as a bar.

The twig and ocean themed have small stones imbedded. Ideas are endless, and you should begin to think in a way that releases you from conventional thinking and allows you to let your imagination flow.

Try to use a sense of adventure when designing toggles.

## HOOK AND EYE

The hook and eye closures are probably older than toggle. Starting with a simple hook and eye, we can easily alter the designs and create our own versions of this age old mechanism. Where does metal clay come into this picture? You can have lots of decorative shapes added to a hook or a decorative eye to enhance your overall design.

The first two photos show a very nice triple hook clasp and a single hook clasp. The eye in the second one is interesting as the maker used a metal clay shape instead of a wire eye. Ideas like this are just what you need.

This clasp was from my book. It looks like a cover with double end rings. Sterling wire, jump rings and metal clay were used to create it.

The same method was used for this second Bracelet clasp, only the artist used a box shape to compliment the beaded section.

## LITTLE BOXES, LITTLE BOXES

We started with a little box in the previous slide, but don't you just love little boxes? You could make them close in different ways.

The first piece is a shadow box with a keyhole and a tab/hook that secures it in place. I did a lot of experimenting to see how the wire should be bent to insure the clasp stayed closed. (Wire is slightly mangled and in need of filing.) What I enjoy most about making things with metal clay is the "how do I do that" part of it. When it all comes together, that's when I get my reward.

The second clasp uses a simple ball and wire to close it, the wires were placed after firing.

The next box has two loops, one on the body of the box and one on the lid. The lid is held closed with a small peg.

The peg is attached by a tiny chain and jump ring.

The fourth box clasp uses a purchased component. The original clasp "socket" was discarded for use with something else and the tongue part was used for this piece. The eye tabs were placed to line up with the purchased part. She got the clasp with tongue without having to fire in the tongue which is a delicate section and it would have annealed it.

The next two have actual key and keyhole components. (the keys were made from sterling silver wire – soldered into a "T" shape, then filed to finish shaping them.) Small boxes were made with this idea in mind. They work well and create a secure connection once closed. The Button and T clasp isn't really a box, but it does use the same concept in closing parts. Placement of the rings is important and should be taken into consideration when making any of the keyhole type closures. Another shape of clasp, with key and keyhole ends. This one is made like a cylinder and the ends screw together to form a finished rolled tube. The connection in the center overlaps the key and keyhole which appears as if it were a bead instead of a clasp.

## MAGNETIC CLASPS – WHERE THE FUN BEGINS

The Dragonfly and Lady Bug Magnetic Clasps. These two clasps were extremely fun to make. The two halves hold a magnet, which are secured in with epoxy. The magnets are Rare Earth Magnets, or Neodymium. Shown is a view of the magnets once they were set in the body cavities.

The small pegs help keep the top body cavity on the base without slipping. Once these little guys were fired and polished, I used Pebeo Glass Paints to color them in all their Dragonfly and Lady Bug glory!

### End Caps – Magnetic

Originally I had been commissioned to create end caps for this beautiful Cloud Necklace. The customer wanted the cloud hung on a bead crochet rope and also wanted the rope to be removable. So, I devised a set of magnetic end caps that are attached to the bead crochet. The end caps are tapered (not a gradual taper) to fit within the loops (less than ¼" diameter) on the back of the cloud. I created end caps with a hole drilled across in order to insert rivets to secure the bead crochet rope. The rope is attached in the end caps with a wire figure eight and then (captured) riveted into/onto the end caps.

## BARREL CLASPS WITH SWIVEL ENDS

Creating a barrel clasp was fairly simple. I wanted to try the stainless steel screws and this seems like it would be easy. Well it was easy. So, from there, I devised a way to incorporate the barrel and screws into another "look." I grew a flower!

This Fuchsia Flower is also a barrel clasp. The ends have wire eyes which swivel, so that when you do put it on, the necklace does not get twisted.

## CONSTRUCTION PROBLEMS

Why did this happen? Construction problems are fairly common when you experiment with metal clay. When good ideas take a turn and end up not so good, what do you do? Examining the piece helps you see where the stress, or in the case of a weakness, in the design is. Maybe a stone or inclusion was too close to the edge and gave you a pulling effect – just not in the way you wanted.

How do I repair it? Repairing your metal clay piece is probably one of the best teachers you can have. Repairs give you the experience that is necessary to move onto bigger and better designs and ideas.

The two clasps in the examples had problems after firing. The first box clasps' key would not fit into the keyhole. (funny, it did before!) A set of good files and patience took care of this. When constructing this type of clasp, take care to make sure the key will clear the inside of the box. Also be aware that you need enough clearance for shrinkage allowances.

The second example shows the box clasp with the purchased component. When created, the ends of the eye tabs were trimmed to fit the tongue. Once fired, the shrinkage was a little more than expected and then there was not enough room for the tongue. This was minor and was also taken care of with filing.

## WEIGHT OR LACK THEREOF

The first thing you want to consider when making any type of closure is weight. This is probably your second feature after design that is very important. For instance;

What is wrong with this picture? Nice pendant, nice chain – should not be together.

If you have a particularly beautiful chain or lightweight necklace, you don't want to put a large, pendant on it. This does not look right. It becomes visually or even physically heavy – even if it is made from paper-type clay. Size does matter. The opposite is also true, to a point. If you have a large chain or necklace and want to have the

closure fairly invisible, then by all means, put something tasteful, but small on it. This will help to enhance the chain or focal piece. A small closure should generally be worn at the back of the neck. You can easily make small and delicate metal clay toggles, or barrel clasps, etc. for your necklace.

What is considered heavy anyway?

This is a personal comfort factor. Each person should decide for themselves if the piece they are making or are interested in, buying is heavy or not. The rules are - there are no rules.

With metal clay you do want to try to make lighter pieces. Because of the density of the material, it does weigh more to begin with, so use good judgment and enjoy what you do.

## USING ALTERNATIVE MATERIALS

Sterling and fine silver wire – I use wire for armatures and jump rings for attachment ends all the time. I never fire above 1200 degrees and fire for 30 minutes. The sterling does get brittle if you fire too much/too long/too hot, so try to avoid that.

Sterling sheet can be used as armatures as well. I have not been able to use them as tongues in box clasps yet. This may be because I just don't have enough silver smithing experience.

Stainless steel nuts and bolts seem to be a good way to connect things for clasps. They fire well.

Hook and eyes, commercial hook and eyes come in all kinds of designs. You can create them yourself, but adding metal clay into the mixture does create the same cautions as when using sterling wire – fire at low temps.

## MEASURE TWICE CUT ONCE

Experimenting with design – what will or will not work? How to tell?

Keep in mind when designing that when adding embellishments, such as glass and natural stones, that the “inclusions” can affect the outcome of your piece. Something too close to the edge could create an uneven edge.

This could be good, or not, depending on whether the adage of “I meant it to look like that” applies.

## Clasps Ideas

If you can think it up, there is a way to make it – sometimes with a bit of altering.

## QUESTIONS