



## CHOOSING a BeadMAKING CLASS & MAKING it Great!

You've always wanted to take a bead-making class but it's a big investment and you want to spend your money wisely, right?

I'd like to jump in here to assist you in making that decision. What do I know that you might not yet know? Well, I am in my 20th year of beadmaking, hard for me to believe, and I've been teaching about a class a week for 14 of those years. Here are some tips I can offer to help make your choice a great one.

### Deciding on a teacher & a class

Begin by looking at the teacher's work. Are they doing something that excites you? If you want to learn how to make flowers, are they doing fabulous flowers in their own work? Choosing the teacher who is an expert at what you would like to learn makes a great class.



Read the description of the class carefully. Does it focus on what you'd like to learn? Do you have the skills to do the work?

If you are a beginner and the class is a higher level or if you have

questions, contact the instructor before making a final decision. I love talking to my students or potential students.

Once you have narrowed it down to a teacher and/or a class, ask people who have taken the class if it was worth the investment. By the time you have paid for a flight, hotel, food, class supplies and treats you have definitely made an investment so that class better be a great one!

### Expectations

We all have expectations about who is responsible for making a class great. I find it really boils down to three parties in this equation: the teacher, the studio and you! Each has a part in making the class experience truly great.

### As the teacher what is my job?

First and foremost I need to KNOW my topic. I like to feel confident about what I'm teaching so I spend a lot of time developing the classes I teach. Many teachers, including myself, have made the mistake of starting to teach WAY too soon because we were so excited that we could keep hot glass on a stick! Today there are lots of very professional teachers out there with lots of experience to choose from.

A teacher needs to communicate clearly with the studio and the student. This part of my job starts before I even arrive for the class. I provide the studio with a complete list of supplies needed for the class, including photos of the tools I want students to bring to class and a detailed description of the class.

During the class it is important for the teacher to:

- Arrive on time, rested & prepared
- Present the information described in the class description
- Deliver the information in more than one way because everyone learns differently. For example: I use a combination of drawing on a white board, talking about what I will be doing and then doing an actual demonstration on the torch.
- Give students time to try what is demonstrated
- Keep a careful eye out for students who may be struggling
- Manage students who have different skill levels making sure each student is challenged. This may mean everyone is not on the same page.
- Give each student time
- Respond well to surprises

As a teacher, my goal is to give a fun packed class but still be a task-master who crams as much information as possible into the student before they leave.



**True story:** One time in a class I even saved a finger! A student very carefully licked her finger then just as she was about to touch the hot glass on her mandrel with

her now spit-protected finger.... I screamed, in a most professional way of course, and that did the trick to keep her finger intact.



## What is the studio's involvement?

The professionalism & safety of a glass beadmaking class has come a long way in the last 20 years. I shudder to recall some of the things that happened in those "early days". I once arrived at a class to find the torches had been set up to face towards the students. Yikes! Today, most classes are taught in fully furnished glass studios with permanent torch set-ups.

The studio provides the environment for the class. If the facilities are poor it can be difficult for the teacher to provide a great class. A well-run studio will have:

- A safe and clean place to work (including the bathroom!)

- Working torches, proper tools, good ventilation, first aid items and fire extinguishers.
- Reasonably comfortable chairs for that long day at the torch
- Enough elbow room for each student.
- A generous supply of glass and tools related specifically to the class being taught
- Provided students with tool/supply list from the teacher. (A class may require a specialized tool to do a certain technique or complete the project.)

## Other services offered by a good studio:

- Student screening to determine if they have the right level of knowledge for the class. By doing this a class is more cohesive and everyone will be at the same level.

- Controlling access to the class by people who have not paid to be there. Students have paid a considerable sum of money to take a class and it is disruptive to allow others to be there.

## A great studio goes one step further to:

- Help students with accommodation and transportation ideas
- Provide lunch for the students and teacher...this promotes camaraderie and keeps everyone in the same area so class can resume on time.
- Take good care of the teacher. As a teacher I have to mention this because often I don't know the area when I arrive at a studio so their help with logistics is greatly appreciated and helps me arrive at class "on time & well rested".

## How can you help make it a great class?

As a student there are things you can do to get the most out of your class. Do these and when the class is over it will have been a great class.

### Preparing for the class:

- Know what you need to bring. Read the supply list provided by the teacher and bring the tools requested.
- Contact the teacher or studio before the class if you have questions about anything and especially if you have any special needs.\*
- Be well rested.
- Label your tools. There will be many others similar to yours there and you don't want to lose one.
- Bring examples of your current work so the teacher can help you troubleshoot any problems you may be having.

\* I have had students in class with hearing difficulties I was unaware of. It was frustrating for me and my student. I felt terrible and wished I had known before the class so I could have made adjustments to make their class a great one.



### During the class:

- Arrive on time. The information given at the beginning of the class is usually vital to everything else being taught.
- Listen carefully to the material being presented and try what the teacher asks. It may not feel comfortable at first but that's OK.
- Give yourself a break! You are being presented with new information and are working on an unfamiliar torch in a new space.
- Turn your torch off when the teacher is demonstrating.
- Make your space neat and tidy at the end of the day.
- Ask pertinent questions! A good question helps a teacher focus on what their students may be having trouble with or are particularly eager to learn.
- Let the teacher answer the questions.

### And just remember...

I have observed that students can be very hard on themselves. I'd like to encourage you to avoid criticizing your work too soon.

You are in this class to study a technique. Your skills will mature as you practice, practice, practice in your on studio. Please be patient with yourself!

### When the class is over:

I love to hear from my students; before or after class! Let me know how your work is progressing.

Bonus points for the students who send the teacher photos of their work after the class.

A class is not about production but is a time to play and expand your skills and your mind. Drop those shoulders, breath and ENJOY this time!

Recently I realized I am in the middle of my flameworking career. I was able to take a deep breath and relax knowing I have many more years to work in glass.



My best days at work are the ones where I discover something new.

I know the best beads are built on a strong foundation. I feel it is my mission to share this with my students and I am compelled to write tutorials to help do this.

Sometimes I feel like a circus clown juggling production work, creating new work, teaching, designing tools and writing.



*Heather*

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