

Wet Belt Sander – Belt Choice

Most people use just silicone carbide belts on their wet belt sanders. You would have to be doing a huge amount of work to justify the cost of diamond belts. What grit depends entirely on what you're doing. Here's a breakdown of how we chose what belt to use (keeping in mind that how you chose various grits will depend on how you prefer to work).

40 GRIT - used on rare occasions where we screwed up badly and need to remove a huge amount of glass from someplace we can't just score to cut it away. It's usually a 50/50 call whether it's worth trying to salvage or just add it to the landfill collection. I have a large collection of stuff for teaching to demonstrate all the ways something can be screwed up.

60 GRIT - same as 40 grit, but we just screwed up a little bit - or something came out of the kiln with an edge so mangled, the only way to salvage it is to grind off large parts.

80 GRIT - the most common grit to start with. It's rough enough to quickly take off enough glass to get below chips and imperfections from the break. Usually all that's needed is a once around swipe. We do everything (for stained glass and kiln work) with a once across swipe on 80. In our shop, "everything" is a lot of pieces of glass.

100 GRIT (used instead of 80) when we got a nice clean glass break from the cut, there's no chips to grind off, and all that's needed is to quickly smooth off the edge. This is an alternative starter grit. As with 80, usually just a once around swipe. For stained glass work, we do give all edges a once around with 100.

120 GRIT - used to further smooth off following 80 grit (but not 100). Once around does it.

200 grit - to further smooth off following either 100 or 120 grit. Also, just once around.

400 grit - to further smooth off. Once around.

600 GRIT - to further smooth off (instead of cork). This is used when that will be a satisfactory finish and cork isn't needed. Usually 2 or 3 rotations will leave the desired finish. If we're doing a slump only firing (single layer glass, not fired to fuse) this is the belt finish. It leaves the kiln looking fire polished.

CORK - when a very smooth finish is desired. As with 600, 2 or 3 rotations.

FELT - we don't use cork. The cork finish looks like fire polish and has always been satisfactory. Felt would be more appropriate for polishing fine jewelry.

BELT CHANGING - can be a nuisance even on the big easy to change machines, and tedious on a small sander. Our preferred method is to set out a stack of everything we want done on the sander, then do each piece with each grit before changing belts.