

Tips for Working with Findings

Creating a Custom Tool for Soldering Posts & Pins

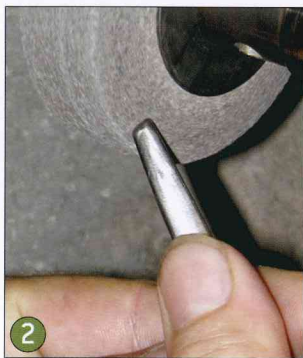
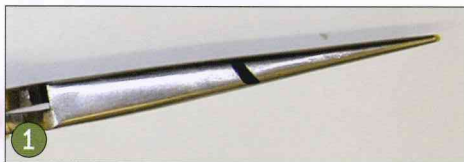
by Daniel Grandi

Need a tool that will allow you to hold small component parts during soldering? Daniel Grandi of Racecar Jewelry Co. in Cranston, Rhode Island, offers the following step-by-step guide to creating a customized holding tool that will ensure your posts and pins remain securely in place.

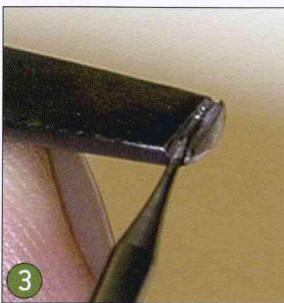
Imagine... You're sitting at your soldering bench, ready to put a nice 18k or sterling post on a drop earring. You've got that oxy/propane torch cooking away, the metal of the earring is approaching that dull red color, and your solder is ready to flow. You put the post in place—and suddenly it slips, leaving you cursing as it moves around inside your tweezers. And if your hands

have a tendency to shake, that makes the situation all the worse.

You can avoid these problems by modifying



a pair of stainless steel cross-locking tweezers. First, using a large grinding wheel or disc cutter, grind the tips of the tweezers back until they are about 5 mm wide. (The mark on figure 1 shows approximately how much of the tweezers should be removed, as well as the angle at which it should be ground. The angle and width can be adjusted depending on the type of part you want the tool to grip.) Remove the grinding burrs by using a 3M de-burring wheel (2); this will prevent your jewelry parts from being scratched by the tweezers. (Make sure you wear safety glasses to avoid getting shards of stainless steel in your eyes.)



Next, take a small-diameter cylinder bur (about 0.07 mm should work fine) and, following the same angle as you ground the tip, cut a groove into one side of the interior jaw (3). This groove needs to be about 1 mm to 2 mm away from the tip. Remove the burrs and rough edges with a rubber wheel, sandpaper, or a small 3M wheel (4).

Once the metal has been smoothed, your soldering tweezers are ready for use. Put the post or pin into the interior groove so that the head or back protrudes about 3 mm to 4 mm (5), and add a touch of solder paste. You can now solder away (6).

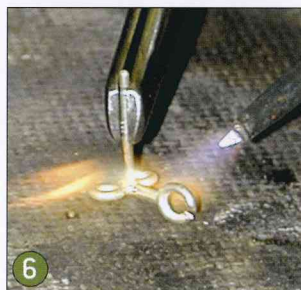
The advantage of these tweezers is that they will hold the ear posts at a slight angle, which is more comfortable for the jeweler when soldering. Also, the wide, flat area in which the post is held will not only provide greater stability (ensuring the post isn't jostled when it touches the piece), but also help to keep the post from overheating. If the tweezers start to heat up, simply dip the tool into water until it cools.

After soldering, allow the piece to cool for a few seconds, then use the tool to drop it into cold water (7) before transferring to a pickle pot. Especially with sterling, this quenching will preserve tensile strength.



[Note: If you decide to drop a sterling piece directly into a pickle pot, make sure that you don't touch the tweezers to the pickle solution while doing so, or you will end up with the dreaded "red silver" problem. The contact of steel and sterling silver simultaneously with pickle while the item is still hot will release copper oxide onto the sterling.]

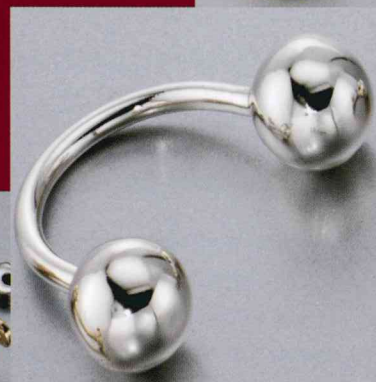
With these custom tweezers, you'll ensure that the soldering of findings becomes a "steady" part of your operation.



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