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Watch Case Polishing

for Rolex and other watches

Which color
rouge do I
need?

Polishing your own watch and watch band can be a deeply satisfying experience, because the neighborhood jeweler will not come close to the shine and brilliance you can impart safely to your own watch. Although you may be hesitant to apply a very small power tool to your watch, the chance of any problems occurring is minimal when using common sense and following these directions, especially if one understands the role of polishing rouge and which to select.

Note: To re-satinize or apply a brushed finish to your watch bracelet or case, you should use a [satin bar](#) or check out the instructions and product details for [CrystalClear Brushed Satin Finish](#).

Determine metal content

The first step to a brilliantly shined watch case and watch band is to determine the metal content, and therefore hardness of the case or watch band. Generally, platinum is about as hard, or even harder than stainless steel. White and yellow gold are soft. Titanium is softer than gold in pure form, but is always mixed with alloys so as to be as hard or nearly as hard as stainless steel (That's why many report easy scratching with titanium). Stainless steel (which comes in small varying degrees of hardness) is very hard. A plastic crystal is softer than gold, whereas a sapphire crystal is harder than stainless steel.

Determine depth of scratches

Next, determine how deep the scratches or gouges are with the case. This should be done with a jeweler's loupe. Keep in mind that a relatively smooth finish thru a loupe is the goal of polishing the case. Shininess on a case is a direct result of applying ever finer and finer scratches to the metal, so a brilliantly polished case will show very small, but consistent in size, scratches through a powerful loupe.

Equipment and Polishes Needed

Polishing is done using a Dremel. Watch polishing is typically performed with a revolving buffing wheel on a mounted buffing machine, similar in appearance to a key machine. The speed of the spinning wheel used and recommended for polishing precious and semi-precious metals is within the 600 to 6000 RPM range. This is important as too fast a polishing wheel will burn through the subject metal too quickly and result in an uneven finish, or worse, a ruined piece. It may not seem like there is much difference between 6000 RPM and 10,000 RPM to the naked eye, but it does make a difference when polishing.

Another important point to remember is that jewelers [polishing rouges](#) (explained below) are engineered to be used at the lower speeds ? below 6000 RPM. Many household Dremels have a speed range of 10 to 15,000 RPM, which although high for jewelry and for the polishing rouge, are good at their lowest speed. The polishing rouge works by the friction of the buff melting the rouge onto the buff for application to the metal. If a higher speed Dremel is used, extreme caution must be exercised in the evenness of pressure applied to the piece (best results, or shininess, must not be expected).

Dremels with lower speeds (good for watches)

Dremels with polishing speeds of 6000 RPM and below:

Dremel 750D Minimite Cordless Dremel (\$34.99)



Dremel 3962-02 Variable-Speed MultiPro Took Kit (\$69.99)



Dremel 3956-02 Variable Speed MultiPro Super Kit With 77-Piece Accessory Kit (\$77.99)



Polishing felt wheels

Along with the Dremel, polishing felt wheels are needed. Get one-inch or smaller (very inexpensive, available at watch supply house). The Dremel has stock felt wheels but these are harder than the jewelers felt wheels and are not satisfactory. In addition, try to obtain softer cloth, chamois or muslin polishing wheels, usually in one-inch (1.00?) size although these are not absolutely necessary. The softer the wheel, the better for high luster or final phase.

Soft cloth

A [soft cloth](#) is useful for wiping the piece down after each polishing step.

Rouges

The polishing job is accomplished by using various sticks of rouges. The rouge is a mildly abrasive, chalky substance that is usually available in five-inch, one-pound bars that have different degrees of abrasiveness. They are matched to the metal being polished and the finish desired. Tripoli rouge in fine grade has a good amount of cutting power to polish away deeper scratches in gold and stainless steel. But, first try a polishing rouge to see if that works.

Polishing rouges leave a high luster and shine and also get out most surface scratches. Orange polishing compound for [platinum](#) is for platinum, [red rouge](#) is for gold, [green rouge](#) is for stainless steel and leaves a very high polish, [yellow rouge](#) is also good for stainless steel and leaves little residue, supposedly also good for platinum alloy mixes. [White rouge](#) is also good for stainless steel, probably the most abrasive of the three stainless steel polishing rouges.

The idea is to start with the least abrasive polishing rouge and see if that gets the scratches out. If it doesn't, then go down the scale to Tripoli, which comes in grades such as fine, extra fine etc. and is also matched to the metal so there is a gold Tripoli, stainless steel Tripoli etc.

Which color rouge?:

- **Gold Watches** start with red rouge, then go to Gold Tripoli fine grade to get the scratches out, then back to red rouge to polish it to

final luster.

- **Platinum Watches** try orange rouge, then to platinum Tripoli, then orange again for final polish.
- **Stainless Steel Watches** try green first, then go to white or yellow, then to stainless steel Tripoli if necessary, then back up the scale to finish with a green rouge. If you have them, use the cloth polishing wheels only on the final rouge you are applying to impart high luster, otherwise felt will do fine.

Applying the rouge

First, apply the rouge to the felt or cloth polishing wheel attached to the Dremel. The heat friction melts the hard rouge onto the polishing wheel for application. Spin the Dremel at the lowest possible speed and cut into the rouge stick or compound. Put a good amount on, no need to be stingy, but you don't need gobs either. Tripoli should be more heavily applied. Then with a light but firm (don't be afraid of being firm) touch, apply the rouge coated and spinning polishing wheel to the watch. Do not polish the edges of the watch, you want them to remain as sharp as possible.

Polish on the same plane as the face of the material. For Tripoli or cutting rouges, use a buffing action that is in the opposite direction as the spinning of the wheel. For the final polish, buff in the same direction as the wheel. Don't rub endlessly, let the rouge do the work. If it is not getting the scratches out, go to the next more abrasive rouge compound. You must use a separate buffing felt wheel for each rouge type. Do not mix the rouges, which also means before starting with a new rouge, wipe the old off the case with a cloth or polishing cloth.

Where to buy rouge

You may [purchase rouge](#) at The Watch Prince.

Buy parts watches

A good practice idea is to buy a parts watch in both stainless steel and gold on an auction website, then try the various rouges and touches to apply them.

Polishing the crystal

Stay away from the crystal, especially the plastic ones, when polishing the watch band as they are softer than the metal. Use a plastic polishing compound or rouge to buff out scratches on plastic or acrylic crystals. Use a very light touch and don't rub more than a second or two where the scratch is, taking care not to rub down through the material. Sapphire crystals, being harder than steel, will not respond to any of the rouges and it is best to leave these alone or replace them. Another thing to remember is to not to rub hard or go nearby the case or crystal seals or by the crown seal. Forcing rouge into the case with your polishing wheel will cause movement problems. Either avoid the seals or just lightly touch them with a minimum amount of rouge.

Finishing After you have applied the final polishing rouge and the watch is very shiny, it is best to wash off residue with warm water and a very small amount of liquid soap. Soap is necessary to cut the grease of the rouge and actually get the rouge off. Most rouges do not dissolve in plain water. Gently wash by hand with soap and water. Then dry and for a final touch, use the jewelers polishing cloth to rub it down. Your watch will be sparkling

clean and shiny with no scratches.

Skip this step if your watch is not water resistant.

Deep gouges

The methods described above will not remedy deep gouges in the metal. You will need to use a different process for deep gouges, as even the most cutting Tripoli will not bite into metal enough to sand a deep gouge. Generally, the next step is to use jewelers sandpaper, which is available at a watch or jewelry supply house (not the hardware store). It is available in various grits, 08 being the finest grade. Again, step down from the finest, least abrasive sandpaper to a grade that is actually cutting and smoothing the metal. Finish with the above mentioned rouge/steps recommended.