Cut Shape and Style

In This Lesson:
- The C of Personality
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- The Features of Cut
- Today’s Diamond Cuts
- Shape, Style, and Cost
- Presenting Cuts and Brands

**THE C OF PERSONALITY**

In the diamond industry the term “cut” has two different meanings. One is descriptive. It refers to the diamond’s shape and faceting style. The other relates to quality, and includes proportions, symmetry, and polish.

Many customers are familiar with only the first meaning – cut shape and style. This is the aspect of cut you’re going to examine in this lesson. The next lesson explores the second part of this C.

For many customers, cut shape and style is part of their mental image of a diamond. Shape can also contribute to the messages a diamond sends about the person who gives or wears it.

When presenting this aspect of cut, you need to match the images and messages of the diamonds you show with the customers you serve. With branded diamond cuts, you may need to explain other elements that add appeal or value. When you’ve accomplished these objectives you’ve taken an important step toward closing the sale.
Lesson Objectives

When you have completed this lesson you will be able to:

• Define the optical components of diamond’s beauty.
• Describe diamond cuts in understandable terms.
• Explain how cut shape and style relates to value.
• Interpret the “messages” of diamond cuts.
• Present branded diamond cuts effectively.

OPTICAL PERFORMANCE

You can tell customers that cut is almost always the most important factor in a diamond’s beauty. A well-cut diamond gathers light from many directions. Then it reflects and radiates that light outward to dazzle the eyes of beholders.

This optical performance has three main components – **brilliance**, **dispersion**, and **scintillation**.

• **Brilliance** – This is the total intensity (or amount) of white light reflected from the diamond’s surface and interior. Most people think of reflections as coming only from an object’s surface. Transparent gemstones produce both internal and external reflections – and no gem does this more effectively than diamond. You might say brilliance is a diamond’s superior brightness and radiance.

No gem produces brilliance like a diamond.

Photo courtesy Louis Glick Starburst® Diamonds.

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• **Dispersion** – The splitting of white light into spectral hues. This is the rainbow effect you see when light passes through a prism. You can also see dispersion in a well-cut diamond. Dispersion – also called *fire* – is the multi-colored display that blazes from within a diamond.

A well-cut diamond gathers and concentrates light from many directions, then reflects and radiates it outward to dazzle the eyes of every beholder.

• **Scintillation** – The dance of bright reflections you see as the diamond, the light source, or you move. Scintillation is the diamond’s mesmerizing sparkle.

In sales presentations you can emphasize that each facet and every angle helps to create or maintain a diamond’s brilliance, fire, and sparkle. You’ll see how cut quality affects these characteristics in the next lesson. You’ll learn the secrets of their origin in Lesson 9. It’s important to remember them now because cut shape and style play a part in displaying them.
THE FEATURES OF CUT

To discuss cut shape and style, you need to be able to describe diamond cuts in terms you can easily define for customers. This includes diamond anatomy and cut styles.

**Diamond Anatomy**

Almost all diamond cuts have two main parts – crown and pavilion. The crown is the upper part of the diamond. The pavilion is the lower part.

The area where the crown and pavilion meet is called the **girdle**. This is the widest part of the diamond. It provides a setting edge for securing the diamond in jewelry. A diamond cut’s shape is the outline of the girdle seen face-up, as it appears when the diamond is set.

**Facet** is a term most professionals take for granted, but it can confuse customers. To be clear, define the word when you first use it. All you usually need to say is that facets are the diamond’s flat, polished surfaces. (You’ll learn how they get there in Lesson 12.)

In almost all diamond cuts, the largest and most prominent facet is the **table**. This is located right on top of the crown. The names of other parts and facets often depend on the cut style. You’ll be introduced to these in the following pages.
Cut Style

A cut’s style is determined by the shapes of its facets and the pattern in which the facets are arranged. There are three basic styles of cut – brilliant cut, step cut, and mixed cut.

- **Brilliant Cut** – This style has mostly kite-shaped and triangular facets arranged in a radial pattern around the diamond. Many customers associate the term “brilliant cut” with a round shape, but brilliant-style faceting can be adapted to almost any shape.

- **Step Cut** – In this style, most facets are rectangular (or more precisely, trapezoidal). They’re arranged in rows that look a little like flights of stairs. This resemblance gives the style its name.

- **Mixed Cut** – This style features a combination of brilliant and step facets. Most mixed cuts have step facets on the crown and brilliant facets on the pavilion. In some the pattern is reversed. The two types of facets can also be combined on the crown, the pavilion, or both sides of the diamond.
TODAY’S DIAMOND CUTS

With today’s diamond cuts, you can offer customers many choices of basic looks and interesting variations. Despite technical differences, most cuts can be grouped into two categories – round brilliants and fancy shapes. The styles known as branded cuts include both categories but have added features that set them apart.

The Round Brilliant

The round brilliant – sometimes called the standard round brilliant – is the top-selling diamond cut in many consumer markets around the world. The design evolved over hundreds of years, along with cutting technology, scientific understanding of light, and modern appreciation of diamond beauty.

The round brilliant produces high weight yield from most diamond crystals. It can also maximize diamond’s brilliance, dispersion, and scintillation.

A round brilliant cut has 33 facets on the crown. In the center there’s a large octagonal table. This is circled by 8 triangular star facets and 8 kite-shaped bezel facets. Around the crown’s outer area are 8 pairs (a total of 16) upper girdle facets.

The girdle is normally polished smooth, but it may be faceted. Additional girdle facets don’t count as part of the design. To save weight, the girdle is sometimes left unpolished.

At the bottom of the pavilion there’s usually a small facet called the culet (KYOO-let). Its purpose is to protect the point from chipping. Some diamonds – especially smaller ones – don’t have this facet. When they do, it’s often too small to see without magnification.

From the culet (or bottom point) 8 elongated kite-shaped pavilion main facets extend to the girdle. Separating the mains are 16 narrow triangular lower girdle facets arranged in pairs. Depending on the presence of the culet, there are 24 or 25 facets on the pavilion.

This makes a total of 57 or 58 facets for a standard round brilliant. Pointing out that there are this many carefully polished facets on a diamond that measures only a few millimeters in diameter can impress customers with the skill and labor your product represents.
You don’t need to recite all the facet names and numbers, but it’s good to know them in case customers ask. They may also help when you’re discussing other Cs. For example, if you’re using a plotting diagram to explain clarity, you might say, “The plot shows there’s a group of pinpoints under the star facet. That’s the triangle-shaped facet you see right here.”

Classic Fancy Shapes

Any cut shape and style other than the round brilliant is considered a fancy shape. Another term that means the same thing is *fancy cut*.

Like the round brilliant, fancy shapes represent a marriage of technology, science, and aesthetics. For customers, they expand the choices of beauty diamonds can offer.

Classic fancy shapes include the emerald cut, oval, pear, heart, princess, and marquise. (The last term is usually pronounced mar-KEEZ, but mar-KEE is also accepted.)

The Emerald Cut

The emerald cut is the most popular kind of diamond step cut. Its design is based on the traditional cutting style for emeralds. (That’s where the cut got its name.) An emerald cut’s girdle outline is basically rectangular or square, but there are small beveled corners, creating a shape that actually has eight sides.

The standard number of facets for an emerald cut is 58. On the crown there are 25: a table and three rows of step facets on each of the four sides and four corners. There are also 25 facets on the pavilion: an elongated culet and three rows of steps on each side and corner. The girdle is always faceted, and these 8 facets are counted as part of the cut’s design.
**Other Fancy Shapes**

Many other fancy shapes are adaptations of the round brilliant. It’s easy to see this in the oval. The facets are often arranged the same way as they are on a round, and there are usually 58 of them. Facet shapes may be stretched or compressed to fit the girdle outline.

Pears, hearts, and marquises are usually brilliant cuts as well. The pear combines a rounded head with a point. The heart has a central cleft between two lobes that sweep down to a point. The marquise has a point at each end.

Most fancy shape brilliants have basically the same design as the round, but the number and arrangement of facets can vary slightly. Instead of a large bezel at the point, the crown of a pear, heart, or marquise may have additional star and upper girdle facets. This configuration is called a *French tip*, and it’s designed to add scintillation.

To improve brilliance, extra bezel and pavilion main facets are sometimes added to fancy shapes. These minor variations don’t affect the names of the cuts, but you might hear professionals refer to them with terms such as “six-main oval” or “nine-main heart.”

The princess cut is also a type of brilliant. It has straight sides (like an emerald cut) but the facets are mostly triangular or kite-shape. The corners are sharp – or right-angled – instead of being beveled.
SINGLE CUTS AND BAGUETTES

Small round diamonds are sometimes fashioned in a style called the single cut. This has only 17 facets: the table, 8 facets on the crown, and 8 on the pavilion. There’s usually no culet.

Diamonds were once cut this way because fashioning them with the full number of facets took extra time and added to the labor cost. Today mechanized cutting makes it easy and less expensive to cut small diamonds by machine. As a result, most small diamonds are now full cut, with 57 or 58 facets.

A simplified step cut for small diamonds is called the baguette. There are two versions – straight (rectangular) and tapered, with one end smaller than the other. Baguettes usually have 17 facets. In addition to the table, the crown has one row of facets on each of the four sides. There are two rows on each pavilion side, and 4 facets around the girdle.
HISTORICAL CUTS

Today’s diamond cuts evolved over centuries. No one knows for sure when or where diamond cutting began. It might have been in India, which was the world’s only source of diamonds for thousands of years. The first steps toward modern cutting probably occurred in Italy during the 1300s.

Among the first styles to capitalize on diamond’s superior optical potential was the rose cut. In its usual design, this is flat on the bottom and has a domed crown with symmetrical faceting. There’s no table, and the crown facets form a peak at the center. This creates a resemblance to a rosebud, which gave the cut its name.

Rose cuts first appeared in the 1500s and remained popular until the early 1900s. In recent years, they’ve enjoyed a comeback.

Cuts recognized as ancestors of today’s round brilliant were developed in the 1600s and 1700s. One of these was the triple cut – now usually called the old mine cut. It had a squarish girdle outline. A similar design with a round outline is known as the old European cut. Both styles had facet patterns like the modern round brilliant, but their proportions were different. They were much deeper, with small tables and large culets. These cuts were manufactured until the early 1900s, when changes in technology triggered changes in diamond design.
To many customers – and some diamond professionals – old mine cuts and old European cuts look “odd.” In the past, many were re-cut to more modern proportions. Today collectors recognize and value their nostalgic charms. If you sell antique or estate jewelry, you may have opportunities to present these historical cuts. You might see rose cuts in pieces from the Victorian period or earlier, and also in modern designs.

**OLD MINE CUT**

The old mine cut is characterized by squarish girdle outline, small table, lumpy crown and large culet.

**OLD EUROPEAN CUT**

The old European cut is characterized by a round girdle outline, small table, lumpy crown and large culet.

*Photo courtesy Gary Roskin.*
Branded Diamond Cuts

Over the years, the interplay between technology, science, and creativity has produced a wide variety of cut shapes and styles that go beyond the standard round brilliant and classic fancy shapes. Many of these could be considered novelty cuts. They include flowers, butterflies, fish, horseheads, crosses, stars, and half-moons – to name just a few. Today there are also a growing number of branded cuts.

Branding has been common with other consumer products for decades, but it’s a recent development with diamonds. It emerged in the US during the 1990s, and then snowballed in the new millennium. There are now more than 100 different diamond brands based on cut, and new ones appear every year. (There are also brands based on other factors, such as geographic origin.)

Branded diamonds are available only from the firms that developed them or licensed the right to produce them. Some are simply “labeled” – with the manufacturer’s name or logo inscribed on the girdle, for example. Others are formally trademarked or legally protected by copyright.

In addition to the name, a true brand has distinctive characteristics that are easy to recognize or consistently present. The branding effort is usually supported in various ways. Advertising and other forms of publicity are among the most important. Many branded diamonds are sold with quality reports issued by trade laboratories.
From the standpoint of technical design, branded diamond cuts fit into two categories – *creative cuts* and *ideal cuts*.

- **Creative Cuts** – Many of these are based on traditional designs, with relatively simple changes in the style, arrangement, or number of facets. Examples include the Lucida, Quadrillion, and Radiant. These adapt brilliant-type faceting to the emerald cut shape. Modifications of the standard round brilliant include the Century, Gabrielle, Leo, and Zoë. All of these have more than the usual number of 57 or 58 facets. There are also more radical innovations, like the RoyalCrest and Spirit Sun, which don’t look like traditional diamond cuts at all.

- **Ideal Cuts** – These include brands such as Hearts on Fire, Lazare, and Rand. Ideal cuts aim at perfecting the design and execution of the round brilliant. Each of the branded ideal cuts has specific manufacturing standards as part of its brand identity. Over the last couple decades, ideal cuts have gained in popularity, and they now represent a sizable part of the market. You’ll learn more about them in the next lesson.

Diamond branding offers both opportunities and challenges. As a result of branding, consumers have more product choices. Jewelers are also better able to set themselves apart in a competitive retail environment. Many experts think branding will help diamond sales maintain healthy growth into the future. On the downside, multiplying names and claims may lead to confusion in the marketplace, unless professionals learn to present branded diamonds effectively. In the final section of this lesson, you’ll learn how you can deal with that issue.
**THE RATIONALE OF CUT**

Customers may ask: “Why are diamonds cut the way they are?” While it’s often impossible to know the answer for a specific diamond, you can give some likely reasons:

- To obtain high weight yield, cutters often base the cut’s shape on the original shape of the diamond crystal. A symmetrical crystal can usually be made into two round brilliants or two princess cuts. If the crystal is distorted, a fancy shape of similar contour might be cut.

- Clarity is sometimes a factor. The cutter may choose a particular shape in order to eliminate large inclusions in the rough crystal. The complex patterns of light reflection in brilliants make clarity characteristics less noticeable. On the other hand, the simpler reflections of the emerald cut and other step cuts can emphasize the absence of characteristics in high clarity diamonds.

- Color can be a consideration. The intricate reflections in brilliants make light tints of color less visible. Colorlessness is often easier to appreciate in emerald cuts or in cuts such as the Quadrillion or Radiant.

Cutting decisions can also involve aesthetics, customer appeal, and market demand. Diamonds larger than 4 or 5 carats are often cut into fancy shapes because many customers feel that large rounds are too showy. Some branded cuts are designed to highlight a specific visual component – brilliance, dispersion, or scintillation. Others create internal reflection patterns that look like stars, crosses, flowers, and so forth.

Whatever the diamond’s cut shape or style, you can tell customers it was chosen to produce maximum beauty and value from the original crystal.
SHAPE, STYLE, AND COST

For the Cs you examined in previous lessons – carat weight, clarity, and color – there are direct links between value and natural rarity. Cut is different. It’s the human contribution to diamond value. You therefore need to present it differently.

The relative values of cut shapes and styles often fluctuate with conditions within the diamond industry – for example, the supply of various types of rough reaching the market. Prices are also influenced by trends in consumer buying. This includes fashion and the cycles of popularity that it creates.

You can explain that three factors affect the cost of any cut shape or style. These are weight yield from rough, the labor expense of cutting, and overall market demand.

You can illustrate these points with specific examples:

- Round brilliants produce high weight yield from most diamond crystals, and the demand for round brilliants is always strong. However, cutting rounds to precise (ideal cut) standards usually means sacrificing weight for beauty. It also takes extra labor.
- Fancy shapes are often cut from specially selected crystals. They usually produce very high weight yield. Cutting large fancy shapes requires a great deal of time and skill, which add to the labor cost.
- Emerald cuts and other square or rectangular shapes typically save the most weight of all cuts.
- Small marquises – especially well-made ones – are difficult and expensive to cut.
- Branded cuts may be more expensive because of their limited availability. They often require extra labor as well. Support materials and services can also add to the cost.
- The demand for some cuts is cyclical. For example, hearts sell well in some years or seasons, but not in others. Their prices tend to vary with the ups and downs of popularity.

It’s not necessary – or advisable – to use all this information in a single presentation. Select only what you need to help customers make decisions about the diamonds they’re considering.
If the choice is between round and emerald cut, you might say the round has higher value because of its immense popularity. At the same time, the emerald cut’s lower cost could be considered an attractive bargain. This puts prices in a perspective that customers can easily understand and weigh.

PRESENTING CUTS AND BRANDS

In sales presentations you need to use slightly different approaches for traditional cuts and those that are branded. Both may involve creative interpretation on your part.

Interpreting Cut Shape and Style

When customers walk into your store, they often have a certain cut shape and style in mind. For most, this is one of the first decisions about a diamond purchase. Whatever the customer’s preference may be, you need to validate and reinforce it.

If the preference is based on personal taste, you might say something like, “This marquise is a perfect choice for your long, slender fingers.” If value is the priority, your comment could be, “The oval cut represents a great buy in the current diamond market.”

Some people just want something different. In that case, you might say, “By choosing this shape your diamond will stand out from those of your friends.”

With statements like these, you increase customers’ confidence in their ability to make other choices that lead to the final purchase decision.
To accomplish this important objective, you need to know the selection of cut shapes and styles you have to offer. You must also be prepared to present each one’s strengths accurately, concisely, and evocatively.

The best way to prepare is to become completely familiar with your inventory. Spend time looking at the diamonds in your showcases. Think about how to describe them with words and images that will appeal to the customers you serve.

During presentations, pay close attention to your customers. Try to identify psychological or emotional messages they hope to send by wearing or giving the diamond. Then mirror these messages in the way you discuss the cuts.

You need to develop your own way of interpreting diamond cuts, but here are some examples to help get you started:

- The round brilliant’s symmetry creates a balanced yet changing display of brilliance, dispersion, and scintillation. It represents feelings that may change with time, but will always be filled with warmth, depth, and light.
- Fancy shapes are eye-catching and unusual. They’re ideal for those who wish to express feelings that are extraordinary.
- With its straight sides and brilliant-style faceting, the princess cut is traditional yet high-tech, dramatic, and playful.
- The straight lines and classic look of the emerald cut create a sense of stylish sophistication and self-assurance.
- The oval’s gentle curves convey an image of grace and refinement, with a dash of creative originality.
- The dual points of the marquise give this cut a dynamic beauty. The message it sends is at once elegant and daring.
- The bold sweeping lines of the heart reflect passion. The shape is perfect for Valentine’s Day – or any romantic occasion.
- The pear’s rounded head and point communicate balance and stability combined with energy and focus. This is the shape of the Great Star of Africa, the world’s largest diamond of fine quality. (There’s a profile of the Great Star of Africa at the end of Lesson 2.)

With a few well-chosen words, you can make a diamond’s individuality stand out. At the same time, you’ll open your customer’s eyes, heart, and imagination to the C of personality.
Articulating Branded Cuts

When you present a branded diamond cut, you need to interpret it in the same way you would a traditional cut shape and style. A brand usually includes other elements as well. You need to be able to highlight all of these, and tie them together in a way that’s both meaningful and convincing to the customer.

Besides having a distinctive shape and facet design or manufacturing standard, a branded diamond cut may come with a laser inscribed logo and serial number, a laboratory quality report, and an interesting history or background story – any or all of these. The manufacturer might provide an instrument that’s designed to demonstrate key features of the cut. Advertising and promotion connected with the brand can also suggest certain themes, ideas, or associations.

The first step toward selling a branded cut is to identify all the elements that make it unique and add to its appeal or value. The supplier’s website and promotional materials are usually good sources for this kind of information. Your store’s owner, manager, or more experienced coworkers can probably help, too. Then you need to work on translating features into benefits, and weaving everything together in a smooth presentation. Also rehearse any instrument demonstrations and comparisons that might be appropriate.

As you’re doing all of this, work on finding the proper balance. It’s important to understand how a specific brand fits in with your store’s overall marketing effort. Recognize, too, that branded diamonds aren’t for everyone. Meeting each customer’s individual needs should always be your top priority.
FTC GUIDE §23.16 Misuse of the words “brilliant” and “full cut.”

It is unfair or deceptive to use the unqualified expressions “brilliant,” “brilliant cut,” or “full cut” to describe, identify, or refer to any diamond except a round diamond that has at least thirty-two (32) facets plus the table above the girdle and at least twenty-four (24) facets below.

Note to §23.16: Such terms should not be applied to single or rose-cut diamonds. They may be applied to emerald (rectangular) cut, pear-shaped, heart-shaped, oval-shaped, and marquise (pointed oval) cut diamonds meeting the above-stated facet requirements when, in immediate conjunction with the term used, the form of the diamond is disclosed.

FTC guidelines also prohibit using the unqualified word “diamond” to describe any diamond that “has not been symmetrically fashioned with at least 17 polished facets.”

With well-chosen words you can make any diamond’s individuality stand out.

Photo courtesy Diamond Promotion Service.
RECAP OF KEY POINTS

• There are two aspects of diamond cut. One involves shape and style. The other concerns proportions, symmetry, and polish. Cut shape and style is more familiar to most customers. It’s also an important part of the personal images and messages diamonds communicate.

• Diamond’s beauty depends primarily on brilliance, dispersion, and scintillation. Brilliance is the total intensity of white light reflections. Dispersion is the splitting of white light into spectral colors. Scintillation is flashes of bright reflections seen as the diamond, light, or observer moves.

• The crown is the upper part of a diamond cut and the pavilion is the lower part. The area where crown and pavilion meet is the girdle. Cut shape is the girdle outline seen face-up.

• Cut style is determined by the shapes of facets and the pattern in which they’re arranged. There are three basic styles. Brilliants have triangular and kite-shape facets in a radial pattern. Step cuts have rectangular facets in rows. Mixed cuts have a combination of brilliant and step facets.

• The round brilliant is the top-selling cut in many markets. It produces high weight yield from most diamond crystals. It can also maximize diamond’s optical performance.

• Any cut other than the round brilliant is a fancy shape. Classic fancy shapes include the emerald cut, oval, pear, heart, princess, and marquise. The emerald cut is the most popular diamond step cut. The oval, pear, heart, princess, and marquise are adaptations of the round brilliant.

• Branded diamond cuts represent a relatively recent – but strong – market trend. There are now more than 100 brands based on cut. Many are creative adaptations or innovations. Ideal cuts aim at improving or differentiating the standard round brilliant.

• Factors that affect the cost of any cut shape and style are weight yield from rough, labor cost, and market demand.

• To present cut shape and style effectively, you need to describe each diamond’s cut in ways that mirror emotional or psychological messages that are important to the customer. With branded cuts, you need to be able to explain all the elements that add to value and appeal.
LESSON 5 FOLLOW-UP CHECKLIST

____ Select a round brilliant cut diamond and look for its brilliance, dispersion, and scintillation. (A full-spectrum display light will bring out the effects, and they’re easier to see in diamonds that weigh a carat or more.) Then role-play pointing out and describing them with a coworker.

____ Rehearse objective descriptions of the diamond shapes and styles in your inventory (like those in “The Round Brilliant” and “Classic Fancy Shapes” sections of the lesson).

____ Develop and practice brief statements about cuts and value. Work with different combinations – round and marquise; pear and heart; round, oval, and emerald cut; and so forth – so you’ll be prepared for different situations.

____ For each cut shape and style you sell, develop several statements about psychological or emotional messages. Focus on making each cut stand out individually. Try brainstorming this with coworkers.

____ Learn about any branded cuts your store offers. Visit the manufacturer’s website and read promotional literature that’s available. Develop a presentation and role-play it. Also talk to your manager about how brands fit into your store’s marketing strategy.
Lesson 5 Self-Test

This lesson also includes a Self-Test that’s designed to help you gauge your comprehension of the lesson material. The test is an important part of the learning process, so be sure to complete it.

When you’re ready to take the test, go to the Course Materials page (the one that lists all the lessons) and click on “Self-Test.” Make certain you select the test for this lesson.

All questions in the test are based on Lesson 5. More than one answer for a question might seem correct, but you should select the one best answer based on the lesson discussion.

As you take the test, you may refer to the lesson. To do this, you’ll need to have the lesson loaded in a separate window of your browser.

If you feel certain about a question, try answering it without looking at the lesson. If you’re not sure, check the lesson before answering.

After you answer a question, you’ll receive immediate results and feedback. You’ll find out whether you answered correctly, what the correct answer was (in case you missed it), and also the page number in the lesson where the information can be found. Take time to review any material you’re not completely clear on.

At the end of the test, you’ll receive your overall results. Then you’ll be able to continue to the next step in your coursework.

If you have questions or need help, please contact us. You can use this website – just click on “Help.” You can also email studenthelp@diamondcouncil.org or phone 615-385-5301 / toll free 877-283-5669.