

Feature



Accessorizing 18th C. Wigs and Hairstyles *Kendra Van Cleave*

Accessories played an important role in the hairstyles of both men and women in the 18th Century. This guide to embellishing wigs and natural hair will help you achieve an authentic look of the period.

When I wrote the book *18th Century Hair & Wig Styling: History and Step-by-Step Techniques* in 2014, I focused primarily on the history and how-to of hair and wigs – which styles were worn when across the century by both men and women, how hair and wigs were created and styled in the period, and, of course, practical and step-by-step techniques for reproducing those styles easily, taking advantage of modern tools and techniques.

Many of these wig and hairstyles were accessorized with a number of decorative elements, but an ever-growing page count meant



For historical information about 18th C. hair and wig styles, and recreating them, see Kendra's book, available on her [18thCenturyHair.com website](http://18thCenturyHair.com).

that I was limited in how much detail I could include on this topic in the book. This primarily-photographic article will expand on this topic, focusing on the specifics of which accessories go with which styles and eras, and practical techniques for reproducing some (not all!) of these styles yourself.

Of course, I'm not able to go into every possible trend, so I've just focused on the most prominent ones from France and England. Similarly, although I've included information about women's cap styles in this article, reproducing them would be a whole different article. I've left out hats entirely.

Men's Styles

Let's discuss the boys first, because although this is an era of the male peacock, they were still limited in terms of decorative accessories compared to women's hairstyles. There are three main accessories, all worn with queue wigs (wigs with long "ponytails"): bows, cockades, and bags. As queue-style wigs were worn from about the 1730s through the 1790s, these three accessories were fashionable throughout most of the century.

Bows

The most usual item to tie a man's wig queue (tail) is a bow, almost always made of black silk ribbon. Here is some artwork from throughout the century that show examples.



Nicolas de Largillierre, Detail from *André François Alloys de Theys d'Herculais* (1692–1779), 1727, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Notice how the bow in this painting has been covered in white powder from the wig! Here are several paintings from later in the century that also shows a black silk ribbon used to tie the queue.



Above: William Hoare, Henry Hoare, *"The Magnificent"*, of *Stourhead*, about 1750 - 1760, Getty Museum. **Below:** Johann Zoffany, Detail from *The Sharp Family*, 1779-1781, National Portrait Gallery.



Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Bust of Marie-Sébastien-Charles-François Fontaine de Biré*, 1785, Getty Museum.

Any time you see a dark blob on the side of a man's neck in a portrait of the period, you can be 99% sure it's a bow on his queue. Above is a bust in profile from late in the century that shows the bow.

Of course, I know what you're thinking: I can tie a bow! Yes, but can you make a beautiful structured bow? One that doesn't get wonky in the middle, or list to one side, or look limp and lame?

My favorite bow-making method was taught to me by fellow costumer Bridget Bradley-Scaife. You can adapt it to different widths, numbers of layers, etc. (Yes, I used lesser-quality synthetic green ribbon for this demo.)



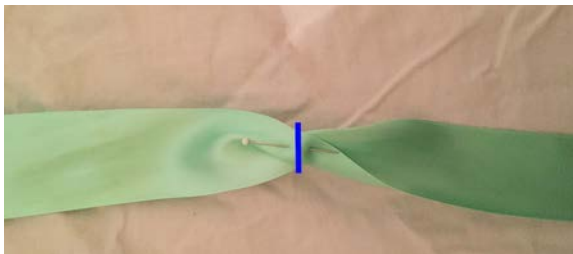
Yes, you can just tie a bow around a queue (above), but wouldn't you rather have a lovely, structured bow that sets off your wig to its best advantage (below)?



1. Cut three lengths of ribbon: **A.** will be the bow loop underlayer – this should be twice the finished length, plus overlap; **B.** will be the bow loop top layer – ditto on length; **C.** is the tails, this should be long enough to go from bow centers to ends



2. Fold **C.** tails on itself, at an angle, at the center. Sew this point down where the blue line is.



3. Fold the tails in half at the stitch point and set aside for now.



4. Fold **A** and **B** into loops, folding over the ends on one side, keeping the ends at the center of the loop. Stitch down where the blue line is.



5. Fold a small tuck in the center of both **A** and **B**, treating each loop as one layer.



6. Stitch across each folded center where the blue line is.



- Cut a length of ribbon (**D**) long enough to loop around the folded centers of the loops. Create a tuck down the length of this piece, but don't stitch it...



- Layer the two loops on top of each other. Wrap **D** around them, folding under the ends on one side. Stitch **D** to itself where the blue line is.



- Tuck **C** (tails) into the loop, through the back side, aligning the center stitching of **C** in the middle of the **D** loop. You can stitch the tail piece and loops to the center loop, if desired.



Cockades

Men's hair/wig queues were less often accessorized with a cockade, again in black silk ribbon.



At its most basic, a cockade is a length of ribbon pleated into a circle. There are numerous variations, however, that one can make.



Above: Cockades can be accented at the center with a button or bead. **Below:** The same cockade from the back.



Bags

One particular style of queue treatment was a fabric bag. This was a rectangular bag that encased the queue, which served to both keep the hair neat and protected the clothing from the powder and pomatum used to style hair/wigs. I give you instructions for making a wig bag in the *18th Century Hair & Wig Styling* book – the short version is that it's simply a rectangular bag with a casing and drawstring at the top. It was usually worn with a cockade or bow at the top of the bag.



Wig, 1780-1800, Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Notice how the bag in the médaillon below is tied low on the man's shoulders, while in the bottom portrait, it is tied higher, at the nape of the neck.



Médaillon : *Portrait d'homme*, Rennes, musée des Beaux-Arts



Maurice Quentin de La Tour, *Self-portrait with Lace Jabot*, c. 1750, Musée de Picardie



Wig Bag, c. 1770, Germanisches Nationalmuseum.



Ribbon-Wrapped Queues

Queues were often wrapped with a ribbon for most of their length, often with a bow or cockade at the top.



Nicolas Lancret, Detail from *Picnic after the Hunt*, probably c. 1735/1740, National Gallery.



Thomas Rowlandson, Detail from *Box-Lobby Loungers*, 1785, Getty Museum.

Women's Styles

Now it gets more complicated! Let's first look decade-by-decade at the options for hair decoration, then we'll get into the how-to of making many of them. Of course, any attempt to organize things by decade ignores the fact that fashions come and go much more fluidly, so note that the decades are general indicators only.

1700s-1710s

Fontange caps:



Eleanor James, c. 1690, National Portrait Gallery, UK



Bernard Picart, *Vijf vrouwenhoofden in verschillende standen, met fontange*, 1703, Rijksmuseum

One small cluster of flowers, usually placed asymmetrically:



Johann Rudolf Huber, *Portrait of a Lady*, c. 1710, Historical Museum of Bern

1720s

One small cluster of flowers, usually placed asymmetrically:



Louis de Silvestre, *Portrait of Katarzyna Barbara Radziwiłł*, 1728, National Museum in Warsaw.

Small caps, worn on top of the head, with ruffled edging:



Jean-François de Troy, *Le jeu de pied de boeuf*, after 1725, National Gallery UK.

1730s

Small flowers distributed on top/side of head, usually placed asymmetrically:



Antoine Pesne, *Portrait of Elisabeth Christine von Braunschweig-Bevern, Prussian queen*, c. 1739, Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten

Caps with wide ruffled edges that tie under the chin or behind the nape of the neck:



Antoine Coypel, Detail from *Portrait of the Marquise of Lamure*, c. 1732-1735, Worcester Art Museum

1740s

Caps with wide ruffled edges that tie under the chin, often with pleated ribbon across the top:



Maurice Quentin de La Tour, Detail from *Portrait of Madame de Rieux in Ball-Dress Holding a Mask*, 1742, Musée Cognacq-Jay



Allan Ramsay, *Anne Bayne, Mrs Allan Ramsay*, d. 1743. Wife of the artist Allan Ramsay, c. 1739, National Galleries Scotland

Caps with wide ruffled edges, often with ribbon tied around:



Jean-Étienne Liotard, *A Lady Pouring Chocolate*, c. 1744, National Gallery UK

One small or medium cluster of flowers, usually placed asymmetrically:



Charles Antoine Coypel, *Double Portrait Presumed to Represent François de Jullienne (1722–1754) and His Wife (Marie Élisabeth de Séré de Rieux, 1724–1795)*, 1743, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Small cluster of jewels distributed on top/side of head, usually placed asymmetrically, or distributed across head (below top); Small flowers distributed on top/side of head (below bottom):



Louis-Michel van Loo, *Details from the Family of Philip V*, 1743, Prado Museum.



Pleated lace or ribbon across top of head, often with small cluster of flowers or jewels placed center top or asymmetrically:



Jean-Marc Nattier, *Madame Adélaïde de France*, 1749, Palace of Versailles

1750s

Caps with wired edges, often with small cluster of ribbon or flowers placed center top:



Jean-Francois (Colson Gille), *Lady with a Serinette (La Charmeuse)*, c. 1750, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

Caps with wide ruffled edges that tie under the chin, often with pleated ribbon across the top:



Francis Cotes, *Unknown Young Woman*, mid-18th century, Victoria & Albert Museum

One small or medium cluster of flowers or ribbon, usually placed center top or asymmetrically:



François Boucher, *Portrait de madame Baudouin, fille du peintre*, c. 1755-60, Musée Cognacq-Jay
Pleated lace or ribbon across top of head,

often with small cluster of flowers, jewels, or feathers placed center top or asymmetrically:

Small flowers distributed across head,



Alexander Roslin, Detail from *Portrait of Katarzyna Mnischek*, 1752, Skokloster Castle

usually placed asymmetrically:

String of pearls wound through hair, usually



Jean-Étienne Liotard, *Portrait of Madame Saint Pol, half-length, in a light blue gown trimmed with blue silk bows and white lace*, 1757, Christie's

placed asymmetrically:



Thomas Gainsborough, Detail from *Mary Little, later Lady Carr*, c. 1765, Yale Center for British Art

1760s

Caps with wired edges, often with small cluster of ribbon or flowers placed center top or across the front:



Jean-Étienne Liotard, *Marie Therese d'Autriche, Impératrice reine d'Hongrie & de Bohême, peinte d'après nature par Liotard*, 1762, Rijkmuseum

Caps with extra height on top:



Nathaniel Dance, Detail of *A Portrait of Sir James and Lady Hodges, their sons John, James and Henry, and their daughters Mary and Elizabeth*, circa 1766, Cincinatti Art Museum

One small or medium cluster of flowers, ribbon, or feathers, usually placed center top or asymmetrically:



Allan Ramsay, *Jean Abercromby, Mrs Morison of Haddo*, 1767, York Museums Trust

Small flowers or jewels distributed across head, usually with an asymmetrically placed feather or jewel spray:



Johan Joseph Zoffany, Details from *Queen Charlotte (1744-1818) with her Two Eldest Sons*, c. 1765, Royal Collection. The side of Queen Charlotte's head can be seen in a mirror (below) in the painting.



Pleated lace or ribbon across top of head, often with cluster of flowers, feathers, or jewels placed center top or asymmetrically:



Michel-Barthélemy Ollivier, Detail from *Une partie de dames dans un jardin*, 1765-70, Musée Cognacq-Jay

Pearls wound through hair; usually placed asymmetrically, often with asymmetrically placed feather or jewel spray:



Legros de Rumigny, *L'art de la coëffure des dames françoises, avec des estampes*, 1768-70, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Lappets of ribbon (two streamers hanging down on either side back); ribbon bow on top of back hair:



Jean-Michel Moreau le jeune, Detail from *Have No Fear, My Good Friend*, 1775, Getty Museum



Marie-Joséphine-Louise de Savoie, comtesse de Provence (1753-1810), Palace of Versailles

1770s

Combinations of:

“Pouf” caps puffed or twisted on top, often with ribbon:



After François Hubert Drouais, *Marie Clotilde of France (Madame Clotilde) with a guitar*, c. 1770

Caps with extra height on top:



Johann Zoffany, Detail from *The Sharp Family*, 1779-1781, National Portrait Gallery

Asymmetrically placed feather or jewel spray:



John Downman, *Isabella, 2nd Marchioness of Hertford, as Lady Beauchamp*, 1781, Wallace Collection

Large spray of ostrich feathers:



Jacques-Philippe Dumont, *Rosalie Levasseur (1749-1826), cantatrice*, Valenciennes, musée des Beaux-Arts

1780s

Combination of:

“Pouf” caps puffed on top, often with ribbon:



Antoine Vestier, *Marguerite Lachapelle*, Musée d'Orsay.

Ribbon, string of pearls, or flowers wound through or tied around hair:



François Martin, *Buste présumé de Françoise-Thérèse de Choiseul-Stainville*, 1789, Musée Cognacq-Jay

Large or small spray of ostrich feathers:



Antoine Vestier, *Charlotte Marie de Gasville*, 1785, Carnegie Museum of Art.

1790s

One or more loops of ribbon tied around the hair:



Jean-Laurent Mosnier, Detail: *Portrait of a Woman and Child*, c. 1795-8, Metropolitan Museum of Art

Scarf-style fabric wrapped around the head:



Jean Laurent Mosnier, *Marie-Françoise Henriette de Banastre, duchesse de Bouillon*, 1789, Evreux, Musée de l'Ancien Evêché

“Pouf” caps puffed or twisted on top, often with ribbon:



Jean-Laurent Mosnier, *Portrait of the Marquise de Grécourt, née de la Fresnaye, in a red velvet dress with a white chiffon scarf*, c. 1790

Reproducing Hair Accessories

Here are some ideas and techniques that you can use to reproduce the different hair accessories seen above.

Flowers

This 1780s wig has, among other elements, a spray of small roses placed asymmetrically, along with a few roses in back, and a small feather spray.



1780s wig with spray of roses and small feather spray.



To make the rose wreath, I purchased some vintage fabric roses on Etsy. Each rose was wired, so I simply twisted the roses together, standing each one up a bit from the base twist. I placed the wreath on the wig, using a few bobby pins periodically to keep it stable in the hair.



Vintage rose wires twisted together to form wreath.



Wreath placed on wig with bobby pins.

To reproduce the small clusters of flowers, or scattered flowers, I've found two main options. The first option is to use individual flower pins placed together. This has the advantage of being able to arrange the flowers differently on different wearings. The disadvantage is that each has a pin that must be hidden in the hair.

The second option is to use a cluster of flowers that are pre-attached to a base, so they always form the same shape. The disadvantage is that you can't reposition the flowers, but there are fewer pins to deal with.



Above: Individual flowers pinned in place. **Below:** Clusters of flowers pre-attached to base.



For the first option, I made individual flowers and glued each one to its own bobby pin.

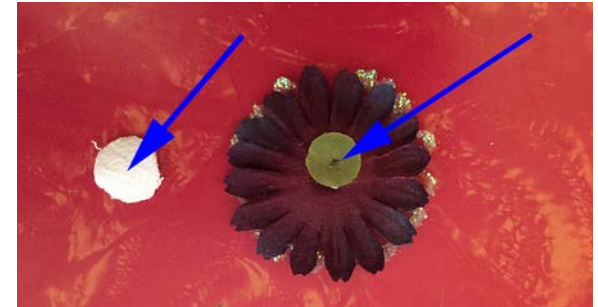


Individual flowers glued to bobby pins.

To make this style, you'll need a fabric flower and small circle of fabric (right, top). Put a drop of glue where the blue arrows indicate: on the center back of the flower, and on the center of one side of the fabric circle. Place the bobby pin into the glue (here marked in blue) on the back of the flower. This will glue the pin to the flower (right, center).

Slide the fabric circle in between the two legs of the bobby pin, with the glued spot pointing TOWARDS the fabric flower (right, bottom). This will mean that once the glue has dried, you'll be able to lift the outermost leg of the bobby pin all the way.

To make option 2, you'll need some fabric flowers and a piece of semi-sturdy fabric cut to the overall desired shape of the



Fabric flower and small circle of fabric.



Glue bobby pin onto back of flower.



Slide fabric circle between legs of bobby pin.



Cut semi-sturdy fabric to shape of cluster.



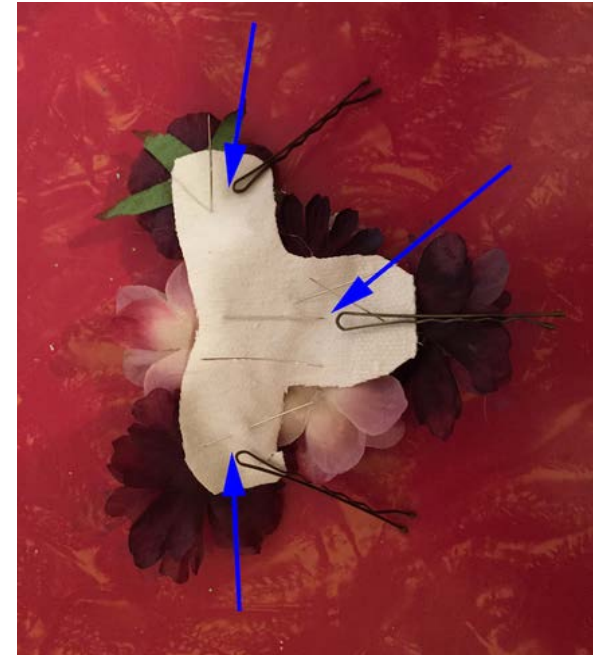
Glue individual flowers to fabric base.

flower cluster (left, top). Remember the fabric base will need to be a little bit smaller than the finished size. Place a dot of glue on the center back of each of the flowers and glue them down to the fabric base (left bottom). Make sure that the flowers overlap the edges of the fabric base, so that it doesn't show (below). (Yes, I am using pins here rather than glue because this is just a how-to example).



Flowers should overlap the edges of fabric base.

Decide how many pins you need to attach to the base of the piece. Glue each pin to the fabric base, as indicated by the blue arrows (right top). You can use a small circle of fabric in between the legs of the pin, if desired. Remember to keep all the pins aimed in one general direction, so that you can push them into the hair!



Glue bobby pins to fabric base.

Here are some other flowers attached to pins in a similar manner to option 1. Some have fabric between one leg of the clip, and others don't.



Flowers with pins, some with fabric between legs.



Bows

See the section on bows in the men's styles for instructions on how to make a structured bow. Here are just some other examples of structured bows that I have made. This bow has four loops in a cross, with longer top loops than bottom. With this style, I found it easier to stitch the legs to the back of the loop rather than pull it through.



Bow with four loops in cross, stitched to back of loop.

Here is a set of matching striped bows in different sizes.



Striped bows in different sizes, front and back.

Feathers

There are two key points about feathers: The first is that layering feathers creates a lush look. Here's your standard ostrich feather from multiple angles.



Single ostrich feather.

Now here's the same feather but doubled — two feathers are sewn together to create one that is more lush.



Doubled ostrich feather looks more lush.

You can create a doubled ostrich feather by sewing two feathers together to create a more lush effect. Take two feathers of roughly the same size, and hold them in one hand. Align them so that the spines of both feathers lay right on top of each other.

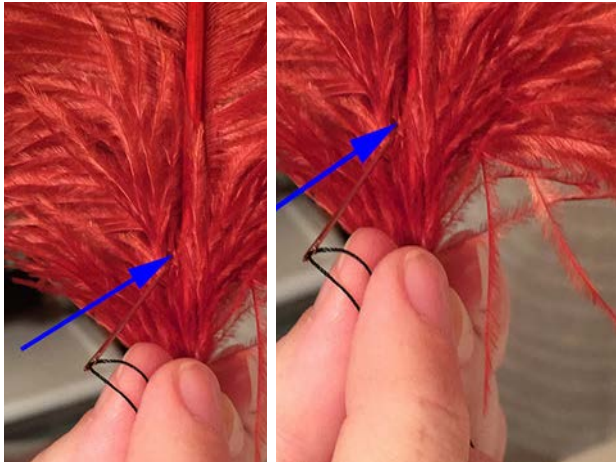
Take some thread that matches the color of the ostrich feather spines (here I'm using black for contrast) and tie them together at the base, leaving a long length of thread on one end.

Thread that long length on a needle, and working from the BACK side of the



Tie two feathers together at base.

stacked feathers, stick the needle through the feather's barbs (the individual bits coming off each side of the spine), on the left side of the spine (blue arrow, above left). Bring the needle/thread around the front of the spine,



Stick needle through barbs on back side, bring around the front of spine, then back through barbs on right side.

and then back through the barbs on the right side (blue arrow, above right).

Take the needle/thread and bring it UNDER the looped-around-the-spine thread, then start the process again an inch (25mm) or so up the spine (blue arrow below, right). Keep stitching the length of the feather. On the outside of the feather, all you will see is



Bring needle under looped-around-spine thread, then start process again an inch or so up the spine.

the bit of thread that loops around the spine. Which, if you use matching thread, will be almost invisible.

The second point I want to make about feathers is that if the feathers are larger, you may want to attach the base to a clip. For these large double ostrich feathers, I often glue ribbon around the ends, and then glue a clip to the base of the feathers for ease in attaching them to your hair or wig.



Details of ribbon/clip base.

This feather (right top) has its base hidden with matching fabric roses. I did a clunky job of wrapping the flower wires around the base, but who cares? No one will see this!



Feather base hidden by matching fabric rose.

Jewels

There are lots of brooches, pendants, and other jewelry items that can be pinned into a hairstyle or wig. I've used both this brooch and this pendant on wigs.



I've used this brooch and pendant on wigs.

***Kendra Van Cleave** has been creating and studying historic costumes for over 20 years. Her current emphasis is on costumes, hair, and wig styling of the 18th C., although she suffers from CADD (Costume Attention Deficit Disorder) and really loves most eras. She performs with *Bella Donna Venetian Courtesans*, at *Dickens Fair*, and is a past president of the *Greater Bay Area Costumers Guild*. Visit her [website](#) to see more of her work.*