

# How To Gel

*A comprehensive guide to getting the perfect artistic swimming look.*

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Atlantis

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## Introduction

Gelling is an important aspect of the artistic swimming experience, however it can be daunting the first few tries. This is a step-by-step guide to help new athletes in getting the perfect gel.

### Before you start: What you will need

- **Unflavoured Gelatin** (either the box packs found in the grocery store or the loose version found at Bulk Barn). Average 2-6 packs per application depending on amount of hair
- **Cup.** This should be microwaveable and/or able to withstand hot water
- **Hot Water.** Hot enough to melt the gel evenly. Note: this does mean boiling water is required, *DO NOT* put the gel on the athlete's head immediately after making, give some time to cool from boiling.
- **Hair Brush + Fine Tooth Comb.**
- **Ponytail Elastics.** Two sizes, bigger ones to hold the bun, small elastic ones to hold the braids.
- **Bobby Pins + Bun Pins.** depending on the amount of hair, there will be more or less pins required. Often, one pack will be enough but they get lost or broken easily.
- **Paint Brush.** This can be either a hair colour brush, a kitchen basting brush or even a traditional paint brush.

### Optional

- **Small Towel.** While not required, drips happen to even the most veteran gellers. The towel will keep the gel off the neck, back, shoulders, legs (drips go *everywhere*) and protect the suit/clothes.
- **Hair Nets.** Not necessary, but a good option to keep in flyaways for the bun.
- **Regular Hair Gel.** While also not necessary, it helps greatly with flyaways when putting the bun in.

This is a bit of a messy process but gel does dry fast and peels off of most surfaces with ease, hot water will also dissolve it from bowls and brushes if it has dried too much.

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## Part 1: The Bun

\* Some athletes do not have hairstyles that work with this method. Check page 5 for alternatives.

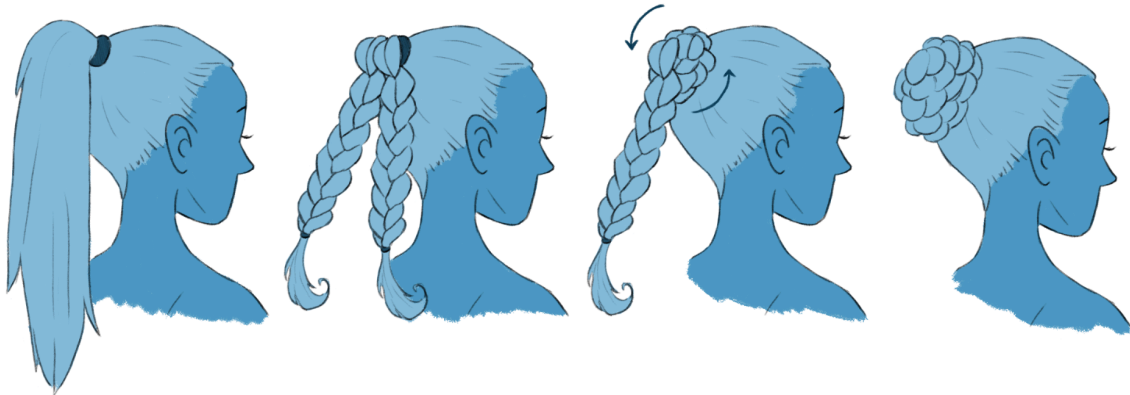
The hair needs to be pulled back out of the face while performing, this is the whole purpose of gelling. What this means is that we need to start with a good base before the gel goes on. This is the process of how to do the braided bun. This is not the end-all-be method, just the most common, do what is best for your athlete and their hair.

### Step 1: The Ponytail

- This should be smooth and tight, usually at the crown of the head (ask your coach before as they may have a different preference). A good reference point is by lining up with the top of the ears. The goal is to slick all the hair back as much as possible, here is where the regular hair gel comes in to catch all the baby hairs.
- Secure all the hair with the bigger hair elastic.

### Step 2: Braids

- The amount of braids needed for the bun is determined by the amount of hair your athlete has. More hair = more braids. (This guide will explain using 2 braids.)
- Divide the hair into two even portions and braid each section. Secure with the small elastics.
- Wrap the first braid around the base of the ponytail and attach it using your bun pins. 2-5 pins should keep it secure.
  - *Note: if your athlete hasn't started complaining yet, now will probably be when they start. Unfortunately, it is inevitable.*
- Repeat the above step with the second braid. The bun should be very secure. Test by having your athlete shake their head, the bun should not move.
- If you chose to use a hair net, this is when it would be put in. Wrap it much like a ponytail, looping it enough that it is secure. A bobby pin or two can be used to hold it in place.



## Part 2: The Gel

Now to put the gel on the head.

### Step 1: Making the Gel

- Making the gel is a 1-for-1 process, equal parts gel to water. Usually to get the best results, for one coat it is  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup gel to  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup water ratio.
- Start with the gel in the bowl then add in the boiling water (regular warm water will not mix the powder properly). Mix the water and the powder together - best to use either a whisk or a fork - until there are absolutely no chunks left in the mixture. Mix until you've reached the perfect consistency which will look and run like honey. If it is too watery and runs quickly add more gel, if it is in big chunks or runs too slow add more water.
- Once it is mixed together, take a fork and scoop out all the bubbles that have risen to the top of the bowl.

### Step 2: Application

- Give the gel a minute to sit so that it is not still boiling but not so long that it starts to harden.
- Take your brush and apply the gel to the whole head in an even coat. Start at the hairline and move to the center around the bun (**always follow the direction of**

**the bun!**). Make sure that all the baby hairs are accounted for and that there is gel directly at the hairline.

- *Optional: apply a little gel to the bun, this will help keep the bun cover on and secure.*
- Put on the bun cover around the bun. There will be an elastic which works the same as a regular hair elastic. Make sure to wrap it around the bun as many times as it takes to get it secure and at 2-3 bobby pins to the elastic.
- This is an optional step but quite beneficial, bake the gel with a hairdryer. This dries it quickly to be able to start the next coat.
- Once the gel is no longer tacky to the touch, the second coat can be applied following the previous brushing step. If the head looks sufficiently covered in gel, your athlete is good to go. It is better to have too much gel than not enough, too thin of a coat and you risk the hair falling out during the routine.

### **Step 3: The Headpiece**

- If there is a headpiece, this is the time to put it in (after the second coat). Firmly place the headpiece in the spot directed by the coach while the gel is still wet.
- Once the headpiece is in place, take your bobby pins and circle the outside of the headpiece with them. Do not be stingy with these, we want the headpiece to be sturdy.
  - *A note to guardians doing this stage: your athlete will probably not be happy, sometimes the bobby pins are uncomfortable and hard to get into the head as the gel dries. Push through it! They will survive.*
- Have your athlete shake out their head, much like the bun, you will know it is secure if the headpiece doesn't move.
- To be on the safe side, apply one final coat of gel around the headpiece to cover the bobby pins and lock them in place.
- Dry your hair one final time to bake it all in.

**You've done it! Give yourself a pat on the back.**

## Alternative Styles/Methods

We know not everyone is the same and gelling is not a one size fits all process. Here are some options for athletes with different hairstyles.

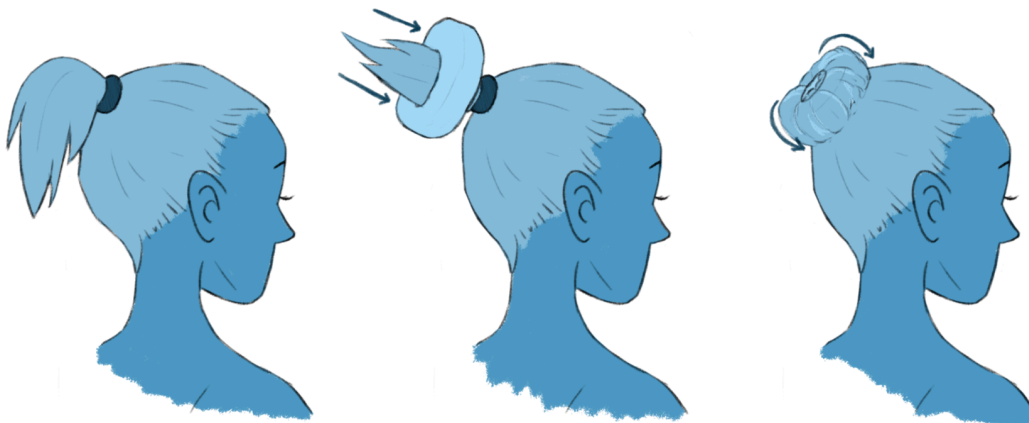
### Bun Alternatives

#### Bangs:

- Zig Zag Hair-band. This will pull the bangs back and out of the face and tends to be very secure when the gel is applied.
- Barrettes. A bit less full coverage than the hair-band, but a more subtle look.

#### Too short to braid:

- Bun form. Some athletes have enough hair to pull back but not enough to put in a braid, or they just want a fuller looking bun, a bun form is a good option. Slip the bun form around the ponytail and wrap the hair around it. Use elastics to keep the hair in place and bun pins to secure the bun form.



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## Gel Alternatives

### Too short to pull back in a ponytail:

- Braids. Split the hair down the middle in a center part. Starting from the hairline and working back, French braid the hair into two even braids, connecting them in the center of the head when the hair can no longer be braided. Apply the Knox gel using the above method, making sure to completely coat the braids.
  - *Note: for athletes who may have longer, naturally curly hair (2C-4C), any protective hairstyles such as braids may be a better option than the slicked back bun. As well, protective hairstyles such as cornrows or twists do not require the athlete to gel as the hair is already secured.*
- Pinned Mini Ponies. More often used for under wigs, this is a modified version of Pin Curls. Section off the hair using the small elastics. Twirl them down against the head and pin them flat. Apply the Knox gel as normal, covering the whole head.
- The Travolta. Take some regular hair gel and slick the hair back so it lays flat against the head. Repeat the process using the Knox gel, hairline to hairline. This is the difference with this method as you want a straight line from the front of the head to the back rather than working towards the crown. Ensure the entire hairline is covered, the more gel the better with this method, there is nothing to secure the hair if the gel comes out.