Nail File Grit Selection Guide

A quick-reference guide to help DIY nail learners choose appropriate manual nail file and buffer grits according to the task.

Core Grit Principle: Nail file grit values work inversely. A **lower grit number** indicates a coarser, more aggressive abrasive that removes material quickly but leaves deeper, wider scratches. A **higher grit number** indicates a finer, gentler abrasive suited to controlled shaping, surface refinement, smoothing, and finishing. The correct choice depends on whether you are filing a natural nail or an enhancement product, the volume of material to remove, and your specific stage of work.

Grit Range Reference Matrix

Grit Level & Band	Primary Applications & Purpose	Key Guidance & Safety Boundaries
80 Grit **Very Coarse**	Heavy reduction of hard artificial enhancement products like acrylic.	Highly abrasive. Intended strictly for substantial artificial product reduction. **Keep off the natural nail plate.**
100 Grit **Coarse**	Reducing bulky artificial enhancements, shortening product, and early-stage structural shaping.	Primarily an enhancement grit, not a natural-nail surface tool. Change to a finer grit as less product remains.
150 Grit **Medium-Coarse**	Intermediate shaping and refinement of enhancements when extra cutting power is useful.	Functions as a transition between coarse product reduction and fine refinement. Do not use as a default for routine natural-nail work.
180 Grit **Medium**	Shaping artificial enhancements, refining overlays, and smoothing surfaces during shaping progression.	Provides controlled refinement. On a natural nail, use conservatively with a light, controlled touch. (240 grit remains the gentler default).
240 Grit **Fine**	Shaping the natural nail free edge, gentle natural-nail surface prep, and controlled finishing work.	Useful general starting point for routine natural-nail work. Provides high control. Use light pressure and avoid over-filing.
360 Grit **Very Fine**	Gentle manicure work, delicate natural nails, or situations where a softer abrasive is highly preferred.	Offers finer, gentler refinement than 240 grit. Perfect when minimal, delicate abrasion is desired.
400–900 Grit **Very Fine Buffer**	Smoothing artificial-nail surfaces and progressively reducing visible file scratches.	Primarily for refinement and scratch smoothing before final polishing. Not for structural shaping or bulk removal.
900–1200 Grit **Ultra-Fine Buffer**	Final high-shine polishing, minor scratch refinement, and finishing artificial surfaces.	Finishing tools only. Strictly used for surface aesthetics, not for structural shaping.

Choose-by-Task Quick Guide

Target Task / Objective	Starting Point	Educational Rationale & Technique
Remove substantial bulk from acrylic / hard enhancement	**100 Grit**	Coarse abrasive reduces substantial artificial product efficiently. Change to a finer grit as the product thins or approaches the natural nail plate to keep clean control.
Refine the shape or surface of an artificial enhancement	**180 Grit**	Medium grit provides controlled refinement after major bulk reduction is finished.
Shape the free edge of a natural nail	**240 Grit**	Fine grit provides controlled natural-nail shaping without the aggressive abrasion of enhancement files.
Gently prepare or refine a natural nail surface	**240 Grit or finer**	Limits unnecessary abrasion. Use a light touch and strictly follow the preparation requirements of your specific product system.
Work on particularly delicate natural nails	**360 Grit**	Softer, finer abrasive provides gentler refinement with minimized risk of over-filing.
Smooth visible file marks before a polished finish	**400–1200 Buffer Range**	Progressively finer buffer grits blend away scratches and smooth the surface without altering structural bulk.

Core Selection Principles to Remember

- **Match the grit to the material:** Artificial enhancement products can safely tolerate much coarser abrasives than sensitive natural nails.
- **Match the grit to the stage of work:** Bulk reduction, structural shaping, fine refinement, smoothing, and polishing are distinct jobs requiring targeted grits.
- **Move finer for control:** A grit that is highly efficient for initial bulk reduction will be far too aggressive for late-stage refinement.
- **Protect the natural nail plate:** Use finer abrasives and controlled, lightweight pressure. Avoid any unnecessary removal of natural nail material.
- **Follow your specific system instructions:** Natural-nail preparation methods vary across enhancement systems and manufacturers. Always defer to manufacturer guidelines when specific grits are specified.

IMPORTANT — NATURAL NAILS

Artificial enhancement products and natural nails should never be treated the same way. Coarse grits intended for significant enhancement reduction must not be used on natural nails. For routine natural-nail work, 240 grit is the gentler default. While 180 grit can be used conservatively within specific systems, it requires highly controlled pressure and should not automatically be treated as an everyday choice. Avoid unnecessary filing or thinning of the natural nail plate.

PRO TIP — STEP DOWN THE GRIT & MANAGE PRESSURE

Do not use a single grit throughout an entire enhancement process. Implement a step-down approach: use coarser grits when significant product needs removal, transition to medium grits as less product remains, and finalize with fine abrasives/buffers for ultimate surface control. Remember, **pressure matters too**. Excessive force increases unnecessary abrasion even on fine grits; let the file's abrasive surface do the work rather than compensating with pressure.