

NANDU NAI LEARNING

Hair Colourist

Salon textbook

English

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Colour work is a craft of reading hair, choosing chemistry with care, and knowing when to stop. This textbook teaches the decisions a colourist makes at the chair, from dark natural bases and stubborn grey to lightener and multi-visit correction. It is written for trained hands in a salon, and the product instructions always come before anything printed here.

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Level, tone, and natural dark hair



Reading the starting level

Start every colour service by reading the hair in front of you, not the photograph on the client's phone. Natural dark hair in this market usually sits between levels one and three, which means black to very dark brown, with dense underlying pigment and a tight cuticle. Under salon lamps that hair reflects light instead of showing colour, so it can look flat and unchanged. The client then asks for a visible shift without knowing what a shift costs in time and in chemistry. Your first job is to name the starting level out loud, write it down, and only then open a tube. The number you write is the foundation for the lift, the developer, the time, and the promise you make.

Read level and tone as two separate decisions. Level is depth, from one, black, to ten, lightest blonde, and tone is the warmth or coolness inside that depth. Dark natural hair often carries a warm cast that appears only when daylight hits it or when the ends have weathered. Do not judge tone from the midsection alone. Check the roots, the midsection, and the ends separately, because they are rarely the same. A client who says her hair is black may be a level two at the root and a level four at the ends from old growth and sun. Record three readings before you discuss a formula.

Take the readings in a consistent way so the next visit can be compared with this one. Look at the hair dry, in daylight near a window, and again under the salon light. Hold a swatch against the hair at the side of the head, not against the face, and move it until the depth matches. Then read the length of the regrowth to estimate how long it has been since the last colour. A two centimetre band of virgin root usually means six to eight weeks of growth, which tells you the client's real retouch cycle. A dark band across the mid-length usually means old box colour that has built up.

The starting reading decides almost everything that follows. Lift is target level minus starting level, so a level two going to level six needs four levels and that is not a one bowl service. Porosity decides how fast the ends grab tone, which is why the same formula can look cool at the root and muddy at the ends. Elasticity decides whether you lift at all today. Grey percentage decides whether a fashion shade can cover or whether you need a natural base. None of that information is in the photo. Write the readings on the card, say them back to the client, and let the client correct you before the mixing bowl appears.

- 1. Read three points before you mix: root, mid-length, and ends, and write three separate level numbers from 1 to 10.
- 2. Treat natural level 1 to 3 as a dense base that will show red first, not as a blank canvas.

- 3. Calculate lift as target level minus starting level, then match 1 to 2 levels with 20 volume and 2 to 3 levels with 30 volume.
- 4. Book two visits when the target is more than 3 levels away, because no single bowl takes a level 2 base to a clean level 9.
- 5. Test elasticity on a wet strand at about 30 percent stretch, and stop the plan if the strand stays stretched.
- 6. Check porosity by spraying water on the mid-length and watching how quickly it disappears into the strand.
- 7. Compare the swatch in daylight at the window, not only under the warm salon lamps that hide red and gold.
- 8. Record the starting levels, the target, and the number of visits on the card before the consultation ends.

Salon example

Ritika sits down with a photo of a cool level eight blonde and says she wants exactly that before her sister's engagement in five weeks. Her hair is natural, never coloured, and falls just past her shoulders. In daylight the root reads level two, the mid-length level three, and the last eight centimetres level four from sun and old trimming. The strand is dense, slightly coarse, stretches well when wet, and returns. I write the three readings on the card and turn the swatch book to level eight so she can see it next to her skin. The target is five levels away from her root. I explain that the first visit will lift her to a warm level seven, tone it to a soft beige, and that the second visit four weeks later will lift the new growth and refine the ends to the level eight she wants. She asks whether we can simply use a stronger developer to reach it today. I say no, because 40 volume on a dense level two base does not remove five levels of pigment, it only burns the scalp and leaves the hair orange. She takes the two visit plan, and I note the five week window as tight but workable.

CAUTION

Never accept the client's own level description, and never read a level from a photo taken with a ring light. Ring lights wash out warmth and make a level five look like a level seven.

What lift reveals: red, orange, yellow

Lightener does not jump from black to blonde in one step. It removes pigment in a fixed order, and the hair passes through every stage. As the natural colour comes out, the strand shows red first, then red-orange, then orange, then yellow-orange, then yellow, and finally pale yellow at level ten. You cannot skip a stage. You can only decide how far to go and how to neutralise what the stage shows. That is why a dark base at level two will always look warm and brassy at some point in the process, and why the warmth is evidence of work, not evidence of a mistake.

Each stage has a matching neutraliser, and the match depends on the level you reached, not the level you wanted. At level five or six the exposed pigment is mostly orange, so a blue-based ash or a blue-

violet at that level is the right direction. At level seven the pigment is orange-yellow, so blue-violet is usually the better fit. At level eight it is yellow-orange, and blue-violet still works if you watch it. At level nine the pigment is yellow, so a violet toner is the tool. At level ten, pale yellow, a violet or pearl toner finishes the work. Choose the toner for the hair you can see in the bowl, not for the hair in the photograph.

Time and temperature change what you see. A strand that looks level six at twenty minutes may look level seven at thirty, and the tone will have moved from orange toward yellow. Check from twenty minutes, then every five to ten, and read the strand wet and dry, because wet hair always looks darker and cooler. Wipe a small patch with a damp towel instead of guessing through the product. If the product is drying at the edges, the lift is stalling there. Note the actual time at each check, not the time you intended. That record is the only way to repeat a result on the next visit.

Plan the finish for the level you actually reach, and be honest when that level is short of the target. A level ten ash toner on a level seven orange base does not make platinum. It makes a muddy, grey-brown result that fades into a dull green edge. The correct move is to tone the level seven with a blue-violet, let the client live with a warm blonde for a few weeks, and lift again on the next visit. Pushing lightener to white on a base that cannot take it produces the damage that ends with a cut. White is not a target, it is a marker that the hair has been taken past the point where it holds tone.

- 1. Memorise the order: red, red-orange, orange, yellow-orange, yellow, pale yellow at level 10.
- 2. Read the exposed stage at 20 minutes, then every 5 to 10 minutes after that, wet and dry.
- 3. Match the neutraliser to the reached level: blue for orange at levels 5 to 6, blue-violet for yellow-orange at levels 7 to 8.
- 4. Use violet for yellow at level 9, and violet or pearl for pale yellow at level 10.
- 5. Do not put a level 10 ash toner on a level 7 base and expect platinum; the result will be muddy and flat.
- 6. Never take lightener to white on compromised hair, because white means the cuticle has lost its ability to hold tone.
- 7. Stop the lift at pale yellow when the plan is a level 9 or 10 toner, and rinse before the colour turns white.
- 8. Write the reached level and the actual development time on the card, because memory will flatter the result.

Salon example

Sana has a level three natural base, a history of one box colour two years ago, and a photo of platinum blonde. She has booked a single afternoon. Her mid-length is a little porous from a summer of swimming, and her ends are a level five from the old box colour. I take a strand from under the top layer, mix the lightener at the brand ratio with 20 volume, and watch it at ten, twenty, and thirty minutes. At thirty the strand is a clean level seven with a strong orange-yellow cast, and it still stretches and returns. That is a good result for one lift, but it is two to three levels away from platinum. I show her the strand and explain that the toner today will be blue-violet at level seven, which gives a warm sandy blonde, and that a second visit in four weeks can lift the new growth and take the midsection one step further. She agrees, and I write the numbers on the card. If I had mixed 40 volume and left it for fifty minutes, she would have left with a sore scalp and hair that could not hold the toner.

CAUTION

Do not judge lift under warm salon lighting, which hides orange and makes a level six strand look almost blonde. Step into daylight with the strand on a white towel.

Setting a realistic target

A realistic target is a level and a tone written in words, not a brand shade code and not a screenshot. Sit the client at the window, hold the swatch against the side of the head, and say the target out loud: level seven, neutral beige, with about two centimetres of soft root. Ask the client to say it back. Then explain what the target will look like in three weeks, not only on the day. Most disappointment in colour work comes from a target that was described as a shade instead of described as a level, a tone, and a maintenance commitment. The words you use in the consultation become the client's expectations, so use plain ones.

Time is part of the target. A lift of three levels on dense dark hair is a long appointment, and a lift of five levels is two appointments. Grey coverage is a four to six week cycle, and a cool or red tone usually needs a gloss at the same interval to stay fresh. Ask how many visits the client can give before the event, and what the client is willing to do at home. A client who washes daily with a harsh shampoo and uses a hot iron without protection is asking the colour to fade faster. Say that in the consultation, without scolding, and build the aftercare into the plan.

Sometimes the honest target is a compromise. The client wants level nine ash, the hair can reach level seven in good condition, and the difference is four visits and a cut. Offer the version that reaches a clean level seven with a cool beige tone, explain the gap, and let the client choose. If the client insists on the photo, say what it will take and what it will cost in condition, then book the first stage rather than promising the last. A colourist who refuses to promise the impossible is not being difficult; that colourist is protecting the client's hair and the salon's reputation at the same time.

Write the target on the card with the plan attached to it. The card should say the starting levels, the target level and tone, the number of visits, the formula used, the time, and the aftercare advice given. Give the client the same information in one short sentence before they leave: today we reached level

seven beige, in four weeks we lift the root and refine, and you wash with a colour-safe shampoo in cooler water. Then book the next visit before the client walks out. A plan that lives only in your memory is a plan the next colourist cannot follow, and the client pays for that gap.

- 1. State the target as a level and a tone, for example level 7 neutral beige, and never as a brand shade code alone.
- 2. Show the swatch in daylight and ask the client to describe the target back to you.
- 3. Quote the number of visits honestly: 1 to 2 levels can be one visit, 4 to 5 levels is two or three.
- 4. Give the retouch interval up front, usually 4 to 6 weeks for grey coverage or a maintained global shade.
- 5. Add a gloss at 4 to 6 weeks when the target is cool, red, or a fashion tone that fades fast.
- 6. Ask what the client uses at home, including wash frequency and heat tools, before you promise longevity.
- 7. Offer the achievable compromise when the photo is beyond the hair, and let the client choose it.
- 8. Write the target, the plan, and the aftercare on the card, and book the next visit before the client leaves.

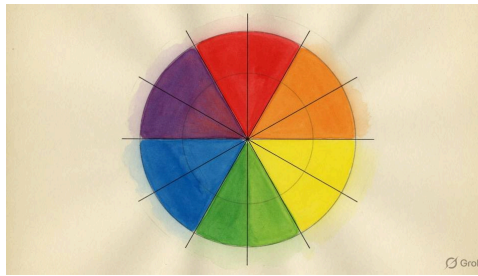
Salon example

Priya is getting married in three weeks and wants honey blonde hair. Her natural level is three, her ends are level four from an old gloss, and her hair is fine with moderate porosity. She has never lightened. Three weeks is not enough for a five level lift and a stable tone, and I say so before she sits back in the chair. The realistic plan is a first visit that lifts the mid-length and ends to level seven with a blue-violet toner, a gloss one week before the wedding to refresh the tone, and a second full lift four to six weeks after the wedding for the level eight she actually wants. She is disappointed for a minute, then asks whether the first visit will look good in photographs. I tell her it will look like a warm sandy blonde, not platinum, and that the roots will be soft because we are not lifting to the scalp. She books the first visit and the pre-wedding gloss. If I had promised the photo, she would have spent her wedding week with banded, over-processed ends.

CAUTION

An event date is not a reason to skip the strand test or to compress two lifts into one day. A rushed correction is remembered longer than a delayed appointment.

The colour wheel at the chair



The wheel as a tool, not a decoration

The colour wheel is a working tool, not a poster on the wall. In hair colour it does one job: it tells you which tone sits opposite the tone you want to remove. Blue sits opposite orange, violet sits opposite yellow, and green sits opposite red. The secondary corrections follow the same logic. Blue-violet sits opposite yellow-orange, and blue-green sits opposite red-orange. That is the whole system you need at the chair. The wheel does not tell you the brand, the level, the ratio, or the time. It tells you the direction, and the rest comes from the product and from the strand in front of you.

Read the unwanted warmth before you choose a corrector. A lifted level six is orange, so the opposite is blue, and a blue-based ash at level six is the natural choice. A lifted level nine is yellow, so the opposite is violet, and a violet toner at level nine is the natural choice. The level matters as much as the hue, because a blue toner at level nine can cool the yellow past neutral and leave a grey or green cast. The same blue that rescues a level six can ruin a level nine. This is why the wheel is read together with the level chart, never on its own.

Do not over-correct. A client who asks for a cool brown usually still wants brown, not grey, and killing every trace of warmth leaves a flat, dusty result that reads as old. Leave some gold in a warm brown target, and leave some beige in a sandy blonde. On dark bases, a heavy ash can turn the surface dull and slightly green under fluorescent light. Use one neutralising tone per application, because two correctors in one bowl usually fight each other and the result is a tone that belongs to neither. If the target needs two corrections, correct the dominant warmth first and reassess at the next visit.

The wheel predicts direction, not the final result. Porosity, the starting level, the artificial pigment already on the hair, the developer, and the brand's dye load all move the finish. A formula that looks perfect on the swatch can grab dark on porous ends or fade cool at the root. That is why every formula goes on a strand before it goes on the head, and why you check the strand wet and dry. The wheel tells you where to aim. The strand test tells you where you landed. Keep both, and write down what you saw, because the next visit will be easier if the direction and the result are on the card.

- 1. Use the three primary opposites: blue cancels orange, violet cancels yellow, and green cancels red.
- 2. Use blue-violet for yellow-orange at levels 7 to 8, and blue-green for red-orange at levels 5 to 6.
- 3. Match the corrector to the reached level, because blue at level 9 can go grey or green while blue at level 6 is correct.

- 4. Leave some warmth in a warm brown or beige target; a fully neutralised result looks grey and old.
- 5. Apply one neutralising tone per bowl, and correct the dominant warmth first if two tones are fighting.
- 6. Dilute a strong toner with clear or use a lower volume on porous ends, per the manufacturer.
- 7. Check a toner every 5 minutes, because porous hair can grab in under 10.
- 8. Strand test the exact toner on the exact hair, then record the direction and the result on the card.

Salon example

Neha has a level six base that was lightened three months ago and has faded to a strong orange, especially through the mid-length. She wants a cool brown, not a blonde, and she brings a photo of a level five ash brown. I read the mid-length at level six and the ends at level five with high porosity. The unwanted tone is orange, so the direction is blue, and because the target is level five I choose a blue-based ash at level five rather than a pure blue additive. I test it on a hidden section at the nape with 10 volume, checking at five and ten minutes. At five the strand is still warm. At ten it is neutral brown with a slight cool edge, and the ends have grabbed faster than the root. I mix the real formula, apply to the ends last, and check every five minutes. The result is a level five cool brown with no green and no grey. If I had used a strong blue additive at full strength, the porous ends would have gone slate.

CAUTION

A pure blue corrector on a level nine yellow base can turn the hair green. Read the level and the exposed pigment before you choose the corrector.

The three corrections you will use most

The first correction is blue for orange, and it covers the largest share of the work in a salon that lifts dark hair. Orange appears around levels five to seven, which is exactly where most first lifts land. A blue-based ash at the target level neutralises it without turning the hair grey, provided you watch the timing. On a level six orange base moving to a level six cool brown, the blue is doing a small, precise job. On a level seven orange base moving to a level seven beige, a blue-violet usually blends better than a pure blue because the exposed pigment has already moved toward yellow. Read the strand at twenty minutes and choose between blue and blue-violet from what you see.

The second correction is violet for yellow, and it belongs to the blonde end of the scale. Yellow appears at levels eight to ten, and it is the easiest warmth to neutralise badly because the hair is already light and porous. A violet toner at level nine takes five to fifteen minutes, and it can pass from clean to lilac-grey very quickly on the ends. Check every five minutes, and have the shampoo bowl ready before you start. A blue toner at level nine is a risk: it can knock the yellow into a grey or green cast that is hard to remove without another lightening step. When the target is a cool platinum, violet and pearl are the tools, and patience is the method.

The third correction is green for red, and it is the one most often misused. Red appears in the natural underlying pigment at levels two to five, and it also appears as artificial red from old box colour or a red gloss. Green neutralises it, but green is a strong direction and it can turn a porous brown olive in a few minutes. Use green as a toner or as a small part of a formula, not as a full-strength permanent shade on its own. For a red-orange cast at level five or six, blue-green is usually safer than pure green because it splits the correction across two directions. Test on the ends first, because the ends are where olive shows up.

The discipline behind all three corrections is the same. Identify the dominant unwanted tone, choose one opposite direction, match it to the level, and test it on the hair. Do not stack a blue toner on top of a green correction in the same visit, and do not try to fix a warm result by adding more of the same corrector without checking. If the first correction lands short, rinse, assess, and book a second pass rather than pushing the product. Correction is a sequence of small decisions, and each decision is checked before the next one is made. The colourist who checks is slower for ten minutes and faster for the whole appointment.

- 1. Blue cancels orange at levels 5 to 7, and blue-violet is the better fit when the orange has moved toward yellow.
- 2. Violet cancels yellow at levels 8 to 10, with a 5 to 15 minute check and a rinse ready at the bowl.
- 3. Green cancels red at levels 2 to 5, but use it as a toner or a small part of the formula, never as a full-strength shade.
- 4. Blue-green handles red-orange at levels 5 to 6 with less risk of olive than pure green.
- 5. Never stack two correctors in one bowl; correct the dominant tone, rinse, and reassess.
- 6. Test every corrector on the ends first, because porous ends grab the correction and show olive or grey sooner.
- 7. Stop a toner at the first clean result, not at the time on the clock, and check every 5 minutes.
- 8. Record which corrector was used, at what level, and for how long, so the next visit starts from evidence.

Salon example

Ayesha has a level four base with an old red box colour on the mid-length and ends. She wants a neutral dark brown, not red, and she has been covering the red with more red for two years. The mid-length reads level four with a strong red cast, and the ends read level three from build-up. The unwanted tone is red, so the direction is green, and because there is also some orange in the artificial pigment I choose a green-based ash at level four rather than a pure green. I strand test on the ends with 10 volume: at five minutes the red is softer, at ten it is neutral, and at fifteen the strand starts to look olive. I stop at ten. On the head I apply the ends last, check at five and ten, and rinse at ten. The result is a level four brown with a slight cool cast, and the client sees brown instead of red. I book a gloss at four weeks rather than promising the red will never return, because artificial red always fades warm.

CAUTION

Green is powerful on porous hair and can turn a level five brown olive in under ten minutes. Check at five minutes even when the manufacturer prints a longer time.

Testing a formula before the head

Every new client, every new product, and every correction gets a strand test. Take a hidden section, usually at the nape or under the top layer, about one centimetre wide. Mix the exact product, shade, and developer you plan to use, not a sample from an older bowl. Apply enough to saturate the strand, cover it if the manufacturer says to, and start the clock. The point of the test is to see the real behaviour of this hair with this formula, including the speed of the lift, the tone at each stage, and the condition of the strand afterwards. A test that is mixed differently from the service teaches you nothing.

Check at ten, twenty, and thirty minutes, and note what you see at each check. Wipe the product off a small patch with a damp towel and read the strand wet, then let it dry and read it again. Wet hair looks darker and cooler, so the dry reading is the one the client will see. At the end, rinse the strand, dry it, and feel it. Stretch it gently. If it stretches and returns, the hair has tolerated the process. If it stays stretched, feels gummy, or breaks when you pull, stop the plan. That strand is telling you what the whole head would do, and no additive or bond builder overrides that answer.

Test the toner separately, because a toner behaves differently from the lightener that came before it. On a porous lightened strand, a violet toner can grab in three minutes and go grey, while the same toner on a resistant root takes twelve. Apply the toner to the test strand, check at five minutes, and note how fast the tone develops. If the ends grab too fast, plan to dilute the toner with clear, use a lower volume, or apply the toner to the ends last. Those adjustments belong in the test, not in the middle of the service with the client's head half finished.

A strand test is a decision point, not a formality. If the test says the hair will not reach the target today, the answer is to change the target, change the developer, change the timing, or book another visit. Do not proceed because the bowl is already mixed, and do not tell yourself the strand was unusually porous. The strand came from the same head. Record the formula, the checks, the final level, and the condition on the card. On the next visit, that record is the test you no longer have to guess at, and the client's hair history becomes a document instead of a memory.

- 1. Take a 1 centimetre hidden strand at the nape or under the top layer, never from the face-framing hair.
- 2. Mix the exact shade, developer, and ratio planned for the service, and never reuse an old bowl.
- 3. Check at 10, 20, and 30 minutes, wiping a patch clean and reading the strand wet and dry.
- 4. Stop and change the plan if the strand is gummy, stays stretched, or breaks when pulled.
- 5. Test the toner on the lightened strand separately, because porous ends can grab in 3 to 5 minutes.
- 6. Note the lift at each check, not only the final colour, so you know how fast this hair moves.

- 7. Record the formula, times, reached level, and condition on the client card before the service begins.
- 8. Treat a failed strand test as a result, not an obstacle: change the target, the volume, or the date.

Salon example

Kavya is about forty percent grey, with resistant grey at the temples and a natural level four through the rest. She wants a level four cool brown, and she has been colouring at home with a box shade that has left her ends darker than her roots. I take a strand at the nape and mix the intended formula: a level four natural base with a level four ash, at 20 volume, one to one as the brand instructs. At twenty minutes the grey is still translucent and the resistant temple hair, tested separately, has barely moved. At thirty the nape is close but the temple strand is still patchy. I mix a second test with more natural base and leave it forty minutes, which is within the brand's limit, and the temple covers. The test tells me two things: the formula needs the natural base, and the temple needs to be applied first and checked first. Without the test I would have had a client with a grey halo at the hairline and a colour that looked patchy in daylight.

CAUTION

A patch test checks allergy and a strand test checks behaviour. One does not replace the other, and a negative patch test does not make an over-processed strand safe.

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Developer and what volume really does



What each volume does

Developer is hydrogen peroxide, and its strength is printed as a volume or as a percentage. Ten volume is three percent, twenty is six percent, thirty is nine percent, and forty is twelve percent. The developer opens the cuticle and activates the dye, and the strength decides how fast the chemistry runs and how much natural pigment can be removed. More volume is not more skill. It is more speed, more lift, and more damage, and every step up the scale narrows the margin for error. Choose the lowest volume that reaches the target, and let the strand test confirm the choice before the formula touches the head.

Ten volume, three percent, is a deposit developer. It has no useful lifting power on natural dark hair, and it is the right choice for gloss, toner, and deposit-only colour. It is also the volume for refreshing faded ends when the target is the same level or darker, and for a semi-permanent or demi-permanent line that the brand formulates for low volume. Ten volume is gentle, which makes it the safest choice on porous or previously lightened hair. It is not a weak version of a lifting developer; it is a different job. Using it to lift is like using a brush to hammer a nail.

Twenty volume, six percent, is the working default for permanent colour. It gives roughly one to two levels of lift, it covers grey when the formula has enough natural base, and it is designed for use on the scalp within the brand's directions. Most global colour and most root retouches are built on twenty volume. It is strong enough to open the cuticle and deposit, and mild enough that a routine service does not leave the scalp raw. When a client asks for a stronger developer to make the colour last longer, explain that twenty volume with enough pigment and full development time lasts longer than forty volume with a weak formula.

Thirty volume, nine percent, gives roughly two to three levels of lift and exposes more warmth, which means more toner work at the end. Use it off the scalp where the manufacturer allows, and use it only when the strand test shows the hair tolerates it. Forty volume, twelve percent, is maximum lift and maximum damage. It is not a routine scalp developer for grey coverage or a root retouch, and it is not a shortcut to blonde on a level two base. On a scalp that has any tenderness, forty volume can produce a chemical burn before the colour has developed. There are salon situations where a brand permits forty volume off the scalp; those situations are technical decisions, not habits.

- 1. 10 volume is 3 percent: deposit and tone only, with no useful lift, for gloss and toner.
- 2. 20 volume is 6 percent: the default for permanent colour, grey coverage, and 1 to 2 levels of lift.

- 3. 30 volume is 9 percent: 2 to 3 levels of lift, more warmth exposed, and off the scalp where possible.
- 4. 40 volume is 12 percent: maximum lift and maximum damage, and never a routine scalp developer.
- 5. Do not use 40 volume for a root retouch or for grey coverage, because the scalp risk is not worth the speed.
- 6. Drop the volume on porous, previously lightened ends and shorten the time instead of adding strength.
- 7. Follow the brand's developer range, because some lines allow only 10 and 20 volume for a given shade.
- 8. Choose the lowest volume that reaches the target, and confirm it on a strand before the service.

Salon example

Ritu has a natural level four base, about twenty percent grey, and wants a level six warm brown. She has coloured at home twice with a box kit and her ends are a level five. The lift needed at the root is two levels, and the ends need deposit, not lift. I mix the root formula at 20 volume with a level six natural base and a level six gold, and the ends with 10 volume at the same shade for the last ten minutes, per the brand. The root covers in thirty-five minutes and the grey at the temples needs the full time. If I had used 40 volume to speed the root, the scalp would have tingled within minutes, the root would have lifted past level six into orange, and the ends would have grabbed the gold and gone darker. The client would have left with hot roots and dark ends, which is the opposite of the soft, even result she asked for. She books her retouch at five weeks, and I write the volumes on her card.

CAUTION

Forty volume on the scalp is not a shortcut to a lighter result. It raises the risk of a chemical burn and often lifts past the target into unwanted warmth.

Overlap, banding, and the lightened hair rule

Overlap is product applied over hair that has already been processed. Every colour service leaves the cuticle slightly more open than it was, and lightener leaves it significantly more open. When fresh product goes over that hair, the chemistry runs faster and stronger than it did the first time. The result is extra deposit, extra damage, or both. A client who has overlapping root colour every four weeks for two years ends up with mid-lengths that are darker and duller than the root, even though the formula never changed. The overlap, not the formula, is what the client sees in the mirror.

Banding is the visible line that overlap and uneven application leave behind. It usually appears where a retouch stopped short of the previous colour line, or where the product was dragged down the mid-length on the way to the ends. A band can be darker, lighter, or warmer than the hair above and below it, depending on what was applied. The way to avoid it is mechanical: section finely, apply to the new

growth only, keep the application inside one to two centimetres of regrowth, and do not pull the brush through the old colour to tidy the line. Tidying with the brush is how a soft line becomes a hard band.

The lightened hair rule is absolute in a well-run salon: do not overlap lightener on hair that has already been lightened. That hair has already lost pigment and cuticle integrity, and a second application compounds the damage and creates a patch or a band. On a retouch, lift only the new growth and treat the previously lightened area as off-limits. If the ends need a tone refresh, use a toner or a gloss, not lightener. If the mid-length needs more lift, that is a new service with its own strand test and its own plan, not a touch-up at the end of a root appointment.

Repairing a band is correction work, and correction is staged. Do not lighten the band on the same day you discover it, especially if the surrounding hair is already porous. Assess the band's level and tone, test a softener or a toner on it, and plan two visits. A root smudge can blur a dark band at the top, and a toner can pull a warm band closer to the surrounding colour. If the band is a hard line from overlapping lightener, the honest answer may be to grow it out and cut it. Say that early, because a client who is promised a one-visit fix will blame the salon when the band is still visible.

- 1. Apply a retouch only to the new growth, within 1 to 2 cm, and never drag the brush through the old colour line.
- 2. Do not overlap lightener on previously lightened hair, because it compounds damage and creates a band.
- 3. Keep 40 volume away from the scalp and away from any hair that has already been lightened.
- 4. Refresh lightened ends with a toner or gloss, not with more lightener.
- 5. Section finely so the product reaches the hair underneath, because a thick section processes unevenly.
- 6. If a band appears, assess it, strand test a softener or toner, and correct across 2 visits.
- 7. Offer a root smudge for a soft grow-out only when the band is dark and near the root, not for a mid-length band.
- 8. Record where the old colour line sits, so the next retouch does not repeat the overlap.

Salon example

Meenal has been colouring her roots at home every month for a year with a level five box shade. She comes in because the mid-lengths look darker than her roots and she thinks the colour is fading. In daylight her root is a level five, and there is a distinct darker band about four centimetres down, then a lighter, warmer level six through the ends. The band is overlap, not a fading problem. Lightening the band is not the first move, because the ends are already porous and a lightener pass would make the band lighter at the top and gummy at the bottom. I propose a plan: today, a level six ash gloss over the mid-length and ends to soften the contrast, and a root retouch that stops short of the band. In four weeks, a second gloss to blend, and a trim to remove the oldest ends. She agrees, and I write the band's position on the card so the next retouch stays above it. The fix takes two visits, and the hair stays intact. She also books a gloss at five weeks, because the ends will need tone before the band grows out, and the gloss costs less than a correction.

CAUTION

Do not try to fix a band by lightening it on the same day, especially when the surrounding hair is porous. Two visits is the safe plan.

Mixing and timing discipline

Developer starts working the moment it meets the colour. There is no pause button, and a bowl mixed for an earlier client is not the same product twenty minutes later. Mix fresh for each client, in the ratio the brand prints, and use the bowl size that matches the job. A permanent colour is often one to one, some lines are one to one and a half or one to two, and a lightener is often one to one and a half or one to two to a smooth paste. If the brand says one to one and a half, use one to one and a half. The typical ratios in a textbook are a starting point, not a licence to override the tube.

Timing belongs to the manufacturer. A permanent colour is often thirty to forty-five minutes, resistant grey can go to forty-five within the brand's limit, a toner is five to twenty minutes, a gloss is ten to twenty, and a lightener is checked from twenty minutes and then every five to ten. Those ranges are typical, and the tube is the authority. Do not leave a colour on longer because the client is not covered yet; fix the formula or the application instead. Do not rinse a colour early because the salon is busy. A colour that has not developed fully fades in a week and the client blames the product, the water, or the salon.

Application pace matters as much as the clock. On a long, thick head, mix in two batches so the second batch is fresh when the first is already on the hair. Keep foils saturated and closed, because lightener that dries stops working and the hair underneath stays orange. Do not let product sit in a warm window or on a trolley in direct sun. Use the tools the brand specifies, and keep the bowl and brush clean between clients. A contaminated bowl or a dirty brush can change the way the product behaves, and it is the kind of error that never appears in the strand test.

When the service runs long, remix rather than stretch. Adding water to a thick bowl, or topping up an old bowl with fresh developer, changes the ratio and the strength, and the result becomes unpredictable. If you run out mid-head, wipe your gloves, mix a fresh bowl at the correct ratio, and carry on. Note the actual time each section received, not the time you planned. The card should say thirty-five minutes at the root and ten at the ends, because that is what happened. The next colourist, possibly you in six weeks, needs the truth rather than the plan.

- 1. Mix fresh for every client, because developer begins working on contact and a held bowl is already spent.
- 2. Use the brand's ratio: often 1:1 for permanent colour and 1:1.5 or 1:2 for lightener, never a guess.
- 3. Set the timer for the manufacturer's time, typically 30 to 45 minutes for permanent colour and 5 to 20 for toner.
- 4. Check lightener from 20 minutes, then every 5 to 10, and never leave foils unattended.
- 5. Mix a second fresh batch on long or thick hair instead of stretching the first bowl.
- 6. Never add water or leftover developer to a mixed bowl to make it last longer.

- 7. Keep foils saturated and closed, because dried lightener stops lifting and leaves a band.
- 8. Record the actual development time per zone on the card, not the time you intended.

Salon example

Farida has very long, thick, level three hair and wants a global level five chocolate brown with full grey coverage at the temples. The head is too large for one bowl, so I mix two batches: the first for the roots and the resistant temples, the second for the mid-length and ends. I apply the roots first at 20 volume, set the timer for thirty-five minutes as the brand instructs, and mix the second batch ten minutes before I need it. At thirty minutes the temples are covered and the root is a clean level five. I pull the second batch through the mid-length for ten minutes and the ends for five, then rinse. If I had mixed one large bowl at the start, the second half would have been weak by the time it reached the ends, and the result would have been uneven. The card records the two batches, the volumes, and the actual times, so the next visit can repeat the result. She asks whether the second batch could be mixed at the start to save time, and I explain that a bowl mixed early is a bowl that is already working before it reaches the hair.

CAUTION

Never add water to a thick colour bowl or top it up with fresh developer. Both change the ratio, and the result stops being predictable.

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Grey coverage



Why grey resists

Grey hair is hair without pigment. The strand has a cuticle and a cortex, but the melanin that gives it colour is gone or nearly gone, so there is nothing for a translucent colour to sit against. A fashion shade applied alone to grey looks correct for a few days and then fades into a pale halo, because the colour had no base to hold it. Grey also tends to have a denser, more glassy cuticle in some clients, which resists penetration. The result is a strand that needs pigment put back, and needs enough time for that pigment to enter. The problem is not a lack of developer strength. It is a lack of colour inside the hair.

Raising the developer volume is the wrong first answer, and it is the most common error. Forty volume does not add pigment to grey; it lifts whatever natural pigment remains and opens the cuticle wider, which can make the grey look brighter and the coverage thinner. On resistant grey, a higher volume often produces a hotter, more translucent result that fades faster than a lower volume with a richer formula. The correct levers are the formula's natural base, the development time within the brand's limit, the application order, and the size of the section. Those four levers control coverage. The volume controls speed, and speed is not the problem.

Assess grey before you choose a service. Work in daylight, part the hair in several places, and estimate the percentage across the head rather than at one spot. Under thirty percent is scattered grey that can be woven or blended. Thirty to fifty percent usually needs a global formula with a natural base, or a deliberate blend if the client wants dimension. Over fifty percent, or a client who wants solid coverage, needs a global application with enough natural base to cover the most resistant areas. Note where the grey is densest: the hairline and temples are usually the most resistant, and the crown is often easier. Those notes decide the application order.

Check the scalp as well as the hair. Grey clients are often older, and older scalps are thinner, drier, and more sensitive. Broken skin, flakes, or tenderness changes the plan, because a permanent colour on an inflamed scalp is a risk you do not need to take. Ask about previous colour, because a client who has been covering grey with a box shade may have a build-up that reads darker at the mid-length. Ask about the retouch interval, because grey shows at the root within two to three weeks even when the colour itself is still sound. A grey client is booking a rhythm, not a single appointment, and the consultation should say so.

- 1. Treat grey as hair with no pigment: it needs pigment and time, not a higher developer volume.
- 2. Measure the grey percentage across the whole head in daylight, not from one parting.

- 3. Add a natural base at the target level so the grey has something to hold, per the brand's coverage guidance.
- 4. Use 20 volume for most grey coverage, and never use 40 volume as a coverage shortcut.
- 5. Extend the development time within the brand limit, often up to 45 minutes, for resistant grey.
- 6. Apply the hairline and temples first and check them first, because they resist the longest.
- 7. Do not colour a scalp that is broken, weeping, or inflamed; refer instead.
- 8. Set the retouch rhythm at 4 to 6 weeks before the client books, because grey returns to the root first.

Salon example

Asha is sixty percent grey, with the densest grey at the hairline and temples, and she has been covering it at home with a level three box colour for three years. Her mid-length is a level three, her ends are a level two from build-up, and the grey at the temples is almost white. She wants a level four warm brown. The box colour has left a dark band, and the temples have a pale halo because the home kit never covered them properly. I explain that the halo is a coverage problem, not a colour problem, and that a stronger developer would only make it worse. The plan is a global level four with a natural base at 20 volume, applied to the temples first, developed for the full forty-five minutes the brand allows, with the ends pulled through for the last ten. The temples cover, the halo closes, and the band softens. She books a retouch at five weeks, and I tell her the grey will show at the hairline first, which is normal. She also books a gloss at five weeks, because the mid-length will fade before the next retouch, and the gloss keeps the finish even without adding lift.

CAUTION

A higher developer volume does not cover resistant grey. It lifts the remaining natural pigment and can leave the grey brighter and the coverage thinner.

More pigment, more time

Coverage is built from pigment, and the pigment comes from the formula. A natural base at the target level gives the grey a colour to hold, and the fashion tone on top gives it the direction the client asked for. The usual approach is the target shade mixed with a natural base at the same level, in the proportion the brand recommends for the grey percentage. Some brands publish a specific coverage line, and those lines exist because the pigment load is higher. Use them. A formula built from a sheer fashion shade and a high volume will look right on the day and fade to a halo in ten days, which is the worst outcome for a client who is paying for coverage.

Time is the second lever. Resistant grey, especially at the temples, needs the full development time the brand allows, which is often forty-five minutes for a permanent colour. Do not shorten the time because the rest of the head looks ready. Check the resistant area first, and if it is still translucent at thirty-five minutes, use the remaining time. Do not extend beyond the brand's maximum, because the extra minutes add damage rather than coverage. If the grey is still not covered at the maximum time

with a proper base, the formula is wrong, not the clock, and the next visit needs a different base or a different line.

Some brands provide a pre-soften step for resistant grey, and some provide a specific protocol for the first application. Follow the brand's method exactly if it exists. Do not invent one from household products, and do not substitute a lightener pass for a pre-soften unless the brand says so. A pre-soften that is too strong, or left too long, damages the cuticle before the colour arrives and makes the grey take unevenly. If the brand has no pre-soften method, the safer route is more natural base, a longer development within the limit, a smaller section, and a strand test that proves the result before the whole head is committed.

Application order is the third lever. Grey at the hairline, the temples, and the parting is usually the most resistant, so it goes on first and gets the longest time. The crown and the back, which are often easier, go on second. Work in sections thin enough that the product reaches the scalp, because a thick section leaves the grey underneath untouched. At the rinse, emulsify with a little water and massage the hairline gently so the colour releases evenly, then use the brand's after-colour wash. Check the result in daylight before the client leaves, because salon light flatters coverage and daylight exposes a halo.

- 1. Mix the target shade with a natural base at the same level, following the brand's ratio for the grey percentage.
- 2. Use a dedicated coverage line when the brand publishes one, because the pigment load is designed for grey.
- 3. Develop for the full brand time, often up to 45 minutes, and check the temples first.
- 4. Never exceed the brand's maximum time, because extra minutes add damage rather than coverage.
- 5. Pre-soften only with the brand's own method, never with a household mixture or an improvised lightener pass.
- 6. Apply the hairline, temples, and parting first, then the crown and back.
- 7. Section thinly so the product reaches the scalp, and emulsify at the rinse for an even release.
- 8. Check the finished coverage in daylight, not only under salon lamps, before the client leaves.

Salon example

Suman is about seventy percent grey with very resistant white at both temples, and she wants a level five neutral brown. Her hair is fine and her scalp is sensitive, so a high volume is not an option. I test two formulas on separate nape strands: one with the target shade alone, and one with the target shade plus a natural base at level five, both at 20 volume. At thirty minutes the first strand is translucent at the temple section and the second is nearly solid. At forty-five minutes the second is solid and the first still shows a pale edge. The brand's technical sheet allows a pre-soften for resistant grey, so I follow that method on the temples only, with the timing the sheet specifies, and then apply the base formula. The temples cover, the scalp is calm, and the result is even in daylight. The client's card records both test formulas, the pre-soften, and the forty-five minute development, so the next visit starts from a known result. She books the retouch at five weeks and a gloss at three, because the gold in the formula will fade before the coverage does, and the gloss keeps the surface from dulling.

CAUTION

Do not invent a pre-soften with lemon, baking soda, or a lightener pass. If the brand has no approved method, change the base or the line instead.

Coverage, blending, and refresh

Not every grey client wants solid colour, and the consultation should offer both. Under about thirty percent grey, a weave or a lowlight through the grey can keep dimension, provided the client understands that the grey will still show as highlight. A client with scattered grey who wants a natural, sun-lit look is often happier with a blend than with a flat global shade. The blend needs a formula that deposits on the grey and a placement that distributes it, and it needs a realistic explanation of how it will grow out. If the client wants no visible grey at all, do not sell a blend; sell coverage.

Between thirty and fifty percent grey, the usual answer is a global formula with a natural base, sometimes with a slightly deeper root and a softer mid-length. Over fifty percent, or a client who wants solid coverage, book a global application and plan the retouch rhythm. A global colour on grey is not a one-off service. The root shows in two to three weeks, and a retouch at four to six weeks keeps the coverage clean. If the client stretches to eight or ten weeks, the grey band at the root becomes visible and the mid-length fades, and the correction costs more than the retouch would have.

A fashion shade on grey fades to a halo, and the halo is the most common complaint in a grey coverage client. The fix is not a stronger developer on the next visit. It is a formula with more base, a proper development time, and a smaller retouch interval. If the client wants a cool or red fashion tone, explain that those tones fade fastest on grey and that a gloss at four to six weeks keeps the finish. A tone that is only deposited on the surface, with no base underneath, leaves first. That is chemistry, not a product defect, and saying it early prevents the conversation later.

Refresh is part of the service, not an upsell. A grey client on a four to six week retouch needs a plan for the mid-length and ends, which do not receive fresh colour at every retouch and will fade or dull. A gloss at the midpoint keeps the tone even without adding lift. If the ends are porous, the gloss grabs

darker, so dilute it or shorten the time. Record the retouch date and the gloss date on the card, and book both before the client leaves. A coverage client who leaves with a rhythm is a client who stays for years; a client who leaves with one good colour and no plan is a client who tries a box kit in six weeks.

- 1. Under 30 percent grey, offer a weave or lowlight blend only if the client accepts visible grey as highlight.
- 2. From 30 to 50 percent grey, use a global formula with a natural base and a slightly deeper root if wanted.
- 3. Over 50 percent grey, or a client who wants solid coverage, book a global application and a retouch plan.
- 4. Do not use a fashion shade alone on grey, because it fades to a halo within about 10 days.
- 5. Set the retouch at 4 to 6 weeks, and a gloss at the midpoint to keep the mid-length even.
- 6. Dilute or shorten a gloss on porous ends so they do not grab darker than the root.
- 7. Explain that cool and red tones fade fastest on grey, so the client is not surprised at week three.
- 8. Book the retouch and the gloss before the client leaves, and record both dates on the card.

Salon example

Nirmala is thirty-five percent grey, mostly at the front hairline, and she does not want to look fully coloured. She likes the silver at her temples but wants the rest to read as a warm brown with some lightness. A solid global shade would erase the character she likes, so we agree on a blend: a level five natural base woven through the front and crown, with a few finer pieces left untouched at the temple, and a level six gold gloss over the mid-length for warmth. The grey that remains reads as a deliberate highlight rather than a patch. I explain that this look needs a retouch at five weeks, because the woven grey will grow out faster than a solid colour, and a gloss at three weeks to keep the gold from fading. She books both. If she had wanted zero visible grey, I would have recommended a global coverage instead, because a blend sold as coverage always disappoints. She also asks what happens if she misses the five week mark, and I explain that the grey will show at the hairline first and that the retouch will take longer, but the plan does not change.

CAUTION

A fashion shade alone on grey will fade to a pale halo, usually within two weeks. Sell coverage with a base, or sell a blend honestly.

Lightener, strand test, and toner



The strand test comes first

Lightener is the most aggressive product on the shelf, so it gets the most careful test. Take a hidden one centimetre section at the nape or under the top layer, mix the exact lightener and developer you plan to use, and apply it the way you will apply it on the head. Do not test with a different volume to save time, and do not test on the face-framing hair where a mistake would be visible. Start the clock, and check at ten, twenty, and thirty minutes. Write down the level and the tone at each check, because the speed of this hair is what decides the plan.

The history matters more with lightener than with any other product. Ask about henna, black henna, metallic salts, and every box colour the client has used, including the ones from years ago. Henna and metallic-salt products can react unpredictably with lightener, and the reaction can be immediate and severe. If the client has a henna history, test the strand before anything else and be prepared to refuse the lightening. Do not lighten over a client's denial of history on a first visit when the mid-length looks coated, dull, or unusually warm. The test will tell you more than the client's memory.

Read the strand for lift and for condition, and give condition equal weight. Lift is the level you reached; condition is whether the cuticle survived it. Stretch the wet strand gently. If it stretches and returns, the hair is still working. If it stays stretched, feels gummy, or snaps, the hair has been pushed past its limit and the plan changes. A bond-building additive is in-salon support during a service, not a permission slip to over-process. If the strand fails, no additive makes the whole head safe. The correct response is to stop, change the target, or book a different service.

Record the test on the card: the product, the developer volume, the ratio, the times checked, the level reached, and the condition. That record is what makes the second visit predictable. A lightener test that reached level seven at twenty-five minutes in good condition tells you the next lift will be similar, and how much time to book. A test that reached level six at thirty minutes and felt spongy tells you the hair needs a repair plan before any further lightening. The strand test is not a box to tick before the service. It is the service's first real decision, and it is the cheapest one you will make all day.

- 1. Test a 1 cm hidden section with the exact lightener, developer, and ratio planned for the service.
- 2. Check at 10, 20, and 30 minutes and record the level and tone at each check.
- 3. Ask about henna, black henna, metallic salts, and every previous box colour before you mix.
- 4. Strand test any henna or metallic history, and refuse the lift if the test reacts or the hair fails.
- 5. Judge condition as well as lift: gummy, stretched, or snapping hair means no lightener today.

- 6. Treat a bond builder as support, not as permission to over-process compromised hair.
- 7. Record the formula, times, level, and condition on the card before the service starts.
- 8. If the test fails, change the target, the volume, or the date rather than pushing the product.

Salon example

Zoya wants to go from a level three base to a level eight ash blonde in one visit, and she mentions that she used a henna pack at home eight months ago because a friend recommended it. Her mid-length feels coated and dull, and the colour is uneven. I explain that henna history is a reason for caution, not an automatic no, and I take a strand from the nape. I mix the lightener at the brand ratio with 20 volume and check at ten, twenty, and thirty minutes. At twenty the strand has lifted to level five with a patchy, greenish edge on one side, and at thirty the coating is still visible and the lift has stalled. The strand feels slightly gummy at the tip. I stop the test and tell her the truth: the lightener is not behaving predictably on this hair, and I will not put it on her whole head today. We plan a series of clarifying washes over the next few weeks, per the manufacturer, then a new strand test, and a conservative target of level six. She is disappointed but books the reassessment.

CAUTION

A henna or metallic-salt history is a reason to test and often to refuse. Do not lighten over a coated mid-length on the strength of the client's assurance.

Application and the gummy stop

Lightener application is a race against drying, and the section size decides whether you win. Divide the head into four, then into sections thin enough that the product reaches every strand. A thick section lifts on the outside and stays orange inside, and the client sees the result as patchy. Apply to the mid-length and ends first on a first-time lift, then to the root last, because scalp heat speeds the root and the root would otherwise arrive early. On a retouch, apply only to the new growth and keep the product off the previously lightened hair. Saturation matters more than speed, but a section that is not saturated will not lift evenly.

Work foil by foil or section by section, and keep the product wet. Lightener that dries stops working, and the hair underneath stalls at the level it had reached. On foils, close them properly and do not let the product ooze at the fold. On open-air work, mist or reapply as the brand allows, but do not add fresh lightener over half-processed hair without checking with the manufacturer. Check from twenty minutes, then every five to ten, and open a foil or wipe a patch to see the real colour. Do not judge through the product, and do not judge under warm light. Take the strand to daylight if you can.

Know the stop signs and obey them. Gummy means the protein structure is breaking down; stretched and not returning means the same; a strand that snaps with no stretch means the hair is already compromised. When any of those appear, rinse immediately, before the planned time and before the target. A lighter, slightly warm result on intact hair is a good outcome. A perfect level on gummy hair is a disaster that shows up two weeks later as breakage at the mid-length. No toner, mask, or bond

builder repairs a cuticle that has been dissolved. The rinse is not a failure; it is the professional decision.

Rinse thoroughly, then shampoo and condition as the brand directs. Lightener left in the hair keeps working, so a quick rinse is not enough; work the water through until it runs clear, then use the after-lightener wash. Do not overlap lightener on hair that has already been lightened, and do not go back over a section because it looks slightly warm. Tone it instead. If the result is uneven, note where and why, and plan the correction for a later visit. A second lightener pass on the same day is how a good lift becomes a chemical cut. That is why the record should note the condition of the hair at the rinse, not only the colour that was reached.

- 1. Section into four, then into thin sections, because a thick section stays orange inside.
- 2. On a first lift, apply mid-length and ends first and the root last, because scalp heat accelerates the root.
- 3. On a retouch, apply only to the new growth and keep lightener off previously lightened hair.
- 4. Keep every section saturated and every foil closed, because dry lightener stops lifting.
- 5. Check from 20 minutes, then every 5 to 10, opening a foil or wiping a patch to read the true colour.
- 6. Rinse immediately at the first sign of gummy, stretched, or snapping hair, whatever the clock says.
- 7. Rinse until the water runs clear, then shampoo and condition as the brand directs.
- 8. Never make a second lightener pass on the same day to fix warmth; tone it or rebook.

Salon example

Anjali has a level four base with fine hair and wants a level nine blonde for a festival in two weeks. Her hair has been coloured twice at home and the ends are porous. I strand test and the hair lifts to level seven in twenty-five minutes with a clean stretch, so I book a long appointment and plan a two-stage lift. On the day, I apply the mid-length and ends first, then the root, and check at twenty minutes. At twenty-five the mid-length is level seven, but the ends feel soft and stretch without returning. I rinse the ends immediately, before the planned time, and the rest of the head two minutes later. The result is a level seven with a warm gold cast, and the ends are intact. I tone with a blue-violet, explain that the level nine is still two visits away, and book the second lift after a repair mask programme. If I had pushed the ends to level nine, she would have had breakage within a week. I record the rinse time and the condition of the ends, and I book a repair mask before the next lift, because the strand told me the hair needs a pause.

CAUTION

Gummy hair means stop now, not in five more minutes. A warm result on intact hair can be toned; dissolved cuticle cannot be repaired.

Tone to the level you reached

Toner is chosen for the level you reached, not the level on the mood board. Rinse the lightener, shampoo as the brand directs, and towel dry to a damp finish before you tone. Read the damp strand in daylight: if it is level seven orange-yellow, the toner must be built for level seven; if it is level nine yellow, the toner must be built for level nine. A toner that is too light for the base does nothing, and a toner that is too dark or too strong grabs the porous ends and leaves them grey. The toner's job is to neutralise the warmth that is actually there, and to add the tone the client asked for, in that order.

Application is quick and the check is quick. Apply the toner to the section you can see, starting at the darkest or most resistant area, and check every five minutes. On porous ends, the toner can grab in three to five minutes, so apply the ends last or dilute the toner with clear, per the brand. Keep a towel and the shampoo bowl ready before you begin, because a toner that passes from clean to grey in ninety seconds is common on lightened hair. Do not walk away, do not answer the phone, and do not leave the toner on while you sweep the floor.

Choose the direction from the exposed pigment and the target. Level seven orange-yellow usually takes a blue-violet; level eight yellow-orange takes blue-violet with a careful check; level nine yellow takes violet; level ten pale yellow takes violet or pearl. If the target is a warm blonde, do not neutralise everything; leave some gold so the hair does not read grey. If the target is ash, be prepared to tone slightly warmer than the swatch and let the client live with it, because over-toning ash is harder to correct than under-toning it. The wheel gives the direction, the level gives the strength, and the strand gives the timing.

Finish the service with the brand's after-colour wash and a conditioner, then dry and check in daylight. Toner fades, and it fades fastest on porous hair, so tell the client how long to expect the tone to last and book a gloss at four to six weeks. Record the toner formula, the developer, the time, and the result on the card. If the tone is slightly too cool or too warm, note it, because the next toner can be adjusted by a quarter shade rather than rebuilt. The record is what turns a lucky result into a repeatable one. The note is what makes the next toner a small adjustment instead of a new experiment.

- 1. Rinse the lightener, shampoo as directed, and towel dry to damp before applying toner.
- 2. Read the damp strand in daylight and choose the toner for the level you reached, not the target.
- 3. Match direction to pigment: blue-violet for level 7 orange-yellow, violet for level 9 yellow.
- 4. Check every 5 minutes, and apply the ends last because porous ends can grab in 3 to 5 minutes.
- 5. Dilute a strong toner with clear or use a lower volume on porous hair, per the manufacturer.
- 6. Leave some gold when the target is warm, because full neutralisation reads grey.
- 7. Finish with the brand's after-colour wash, dry, and check the tone in daylight.
- 8. Record the toner, developer, time, and result, and book a gloss at 4 to 6 weeks for cool or red tones.

Salon example

Shreya has been lifted to a level nine with a pale yellow cast, and she wants a cool platinum. Her ends are porous from two previous lightening visits, and the root is denser. I mix a violet toner at level nine with 10 volume, apply to the root and mid-length first, and leave the ends for the last three minutes. At five minutes the root is clean and slightly pearl, and the mid-length is close. The ends, checked at three minutes, are already lilac-grey, so I rinse immediately. The result is a cool platinum with a soft silver edge at the ends, not the flat grey I would have had if I had applied the toner everywhere for ten minutes. I explain that the tone will fade in about four to six washes, book a gloss at four weeks, and record the three minute end timing on the card. The next visit starts from that note instead of from a guess. She books the gloss at four weeks and asks whether she can wash it the next day, and I give her the forty-eight hour slip with the salon number on it.

CAUTION

Do not leave a toner unattended on lightened hair. Porous ends can pass from clean to grey in under two minutes, and the tone cannot be rinsed back.

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Placement: global, gloss, balayage, foilage, root smudge



Global colour and gloss

Global colour is one shade from root to end, and it is the right service when the client wants a uniform result. It fits a first full grey coverage, a client who wants one clean level with no visible dimension, and a refresh when the whole head is already the same level. It does not fit a correction, a dimensional look, or hair with very different porosity at the root and the ends. Global does not mean simple. The application order still matters, the development time still matters, and the ends still need protection from over-deposit. A global colour done carelessly is a global colour with hot roots and dark ends.

Apply the roots first, then the mid-length, then the ends. On porous ends, apply the ends last and pull the colour through for the final ten to fifteen minutes, using fresh formula if the brand allows. Do not drag the original bowl through the ends at full strength, because the ends have already absorbed product and will grab darker. If the ends are significantly lighter than the root, treat them as a separate zone with a lower volume or a diluted formula. If they are significantly darker, the service is a correction, not a global, and the consultation should say so before the bowl is mixed.

Gloss is a translucent tone and shine with little or no lift. It fits dull ends, a tone refresh between visits, a post-lightener finish, and a small tonal shift. It does not fit grey coverage, a level change, or a client who wants the hair noticeably lighter. Gloss is often mixed with a low developer, sometimes ten volume, sometimes a brand-specific activator, and it develops in ten to twenty minutes. It sits on the surface and inside the outer cuticle, so it fades in about four to six washes. Say that before the client pays for it, because a gloss sold as a colour change is a complaint waiting to happen.

The pair works well in sequence. A global colour every four to six weeks keeps the base and the grey covered, and a gloss at the midpoint keeps the tone and the shine without adding lift. On a client with porous ends, the gloss grabs darker, so dilute it or shorten the time and apply it last. On a client with resistant grey, the gloss does not cover; do not use it as a substitute for a retouch. Record which service was done, at what level and tone, and when the next one is due. The card should make the difference between a global and a gloss obvious to anyone who reads it.

- 1. Use global colour for a uniform result, first full grey coverage, or a single-level refresh.
- 2. Apply roots first, then mid-length, then ends, and pull through for the last 10 to 15 minutes on porous ends.
- 3. Do not drag the full-strength bowl through porous ends, because they will grab darker than the root.
- 4. Treat a significantly darker end as a correction, not as part of a global service.

- 5. Use gloss for tone and shine with no lift, and expect it to fade in about 4 to 6 washes.
- 6. Never sell gloss as grey coverage or as a level change, because it does neither.
- 7. Schedule a gloss at the midpoint between global visits for cool, red, or faded tones.
- 8. Record the service type, level, tone, and next date so global and gloss are never confused.

Salon example

Tara has a level five base with about twenty-five percent grey, and she wants one clean chocolate brown with no visible highlights. Her ends are a level six and slightly porous from a summer of sun, and her root is a level five. A global colour is the right service: level five natural base with a level five chocolate, 20 volume at the root, and the same shade at 10 volume pulled through the ends for the last ten minutes. The grey covers at the temples with the full thirty-five minutes, and the ends do not go darker because the lower volume and the short pull-through protect them. I finish with the brand's after-colour wash and a light conditioner. She asks for highlights next time, and I explain that a global plus a gloss at six weeks will keep the shine without changing the plan. She books the retouch, and the card records the two volumes and the pull-through time. She also asks about the grey at the temples, and I show her that the coverage is solid in daylight, not only under the salon lamp, before she leaves.

CAUTION

Do not pull a full-strength global formula through porous ends for the whole development time. The ends will go darker than the root and the result will look like a band.

Balayage and foilyage

Balayage is freehand painting, usually off the scalp, for a soft grow-out. The colour is placed where light would naturally fall: the surface, the face frame, the ends. It fits a low-maintenance client, two to four levels of lift on natural hair, and a dark base going to caramel or honey. It does not fit a client who wants platinum in one visit, a uniform solid colour, or a very dark resistant head with no patience for two sessions. Balayage is a placement method, not a formula, and the result depends on saturation and on how finely the sections are woven. A rushed balayage is a set of horizontal stripes.

Saturation is the whole craft. Paint each section from the mid-length down, with enough product that the strand is visibly coated on both sides, and feather the top edge so the transition is soft. Do not paint in a straight line across the head, because that line becomes a visible band as it grows out. Vary the height, leave some strands out, and build the shape around the client's parting and face. On dark hair, open-air balayage lifts more slowly than foil, so book the time and check from twenty minutes. If the product dries on the surface, the lift stalls, and the client leaves with a warm, uneven result.

Foilyage is balayage placement inside foils, for more lift with a soft grow-out. It fits darker hair that needs more lift than open-air painting, and a client who wants brightness with a blended root. It does not fit a sore or broken scalp, very damaged ends, or a client who insists on zero warmth. Foil near the scalp holds heat, so the root area processes faster than the open air; check sooner than you would on

a balayage. Keep the foils thin, saturate fully, and do not let the product dry at the fold. The foil is a tool for control, not a guarantee of a cool result.

Both services need a plan for the grow-out. Balayage grows out softly because there is no hard line, but the tone still fades, and a gloss at four to six weeks keeps the finish. Foilyage grows out with a slightly more defined edge, and a root smudge can soften it if the client wants a longer interval. Tell the client how many sessions the target needs and what the maintenance looks like before you start. A balayage sold as a one-off will be a balayage the client tries to fix at home with a box kit six weeks later. The service is a relationship with the hair, not a single afternoon.

- 1. Place balayage where light falls: surface, face frame, and ends, not in straight lines across the head.
- 2. Saturate each section on both sides and feather the top edge so the grow-out stays soft.
- 3. Expect 2 to 4 levels of lift on natural hair, and book two sessions for a platinum target.
- 4. Check open-air balayage from 20 minutes, because it lifts more slowly than foil and dries at the surface.
- 5. Use foilyage when the base needs more lift, and check sooner because foil near the scalp holds heat.
- 6. Keep foils thin and saturated, and never let the product dry at the fold.
- 7. Book a gloss at 4 to 6 weeks to maintain the tone, and a root smudge if the client wants a longer interval.
- 8. Quote the session count honestly, because a balayage sold as a one-off becomes a home correction.

Salon example

Ishita has a natural level four base, long wavy hair, and a photo of caramel balayage on a level seven base. She wants to keep her dark root and does not want to visit every month. The target is a soft level seven caramel through the mid-length and ends, with the root left natural. Her hair is dense, so I divide it into five horizontal sections and weave fine diagonal pieces, painting from the mid-length down and leaving the root clean. The first pass lifts to level six after twenty-five minutes with a strong orange cast, so I tone with a blue-violet at level six for five minutes and check the ends at three. The result is a warm caramel, not the cooler tone in the photo, and I say so. She books a gloss at five weeks and a second balayage in three months for the brighter pieces. If I had promised the photo in one visit, she would have needed a lightener correction on porous ends within a month. She also asks whether she can go lighter next time, and I explain that a second session in three months will lift the painted pieces one more level without touching the root.

CAUTION

Balayage is not a guarantee of a cool result. Dark hair lifts warm, and the toner must be planned for the level the balayage actually reaches.

Root smudge and matching the technique to the client

A root smudge is a soft shadow applied at the root after highlights or lightener, to blend the line and cool the brightness. It fits a highlight root that is too light, a low-maintenance grow-out, and a client who wants the root to read as a shadow rather than a stripe. It does not fit a client who wants a light root, and it is not a grey coverage formula. A smudge deposits tone; it does not cover resistant grey at the hairline, and selling it as coverage leads to a visible halo within two weeks. Use it as a finishing technique, not as a substitute for a retouch.

Apply the smudge after the lightener is rinsed, to damp hair, with a low volume, often ten volume, and a shade one to two levels deeper than the target. Work it into the root area with a brush or a comb, feathering downward no more than a few centimetres, and do not drag it through the mid-length. On porous hair, the smudge grabs fast, so check at five minutes and rinse at the first sign of the depth you want. If the client wants a very soft result, dilute the formula or shorten the time. A smudge that is left too long becomes a dark cap, and the correction is another lightening visit.

Match the technique to the client, not to the trend. A client with fine hair and a sensitive scalp is often better served by babylights than by a heavy balayage, because fine weaving gives brightness without bulk. A client with dense coarse hair may find babylights invisible and uneconomic, and a broader balayage will show the work. A client who wants zero visible root line needs a smudge or a soft balayage, not a full highlight. A client who wants solid coverage needs a global or a retouch, not a dimensional service. The consultation is where the technique is chosen, and the choice should be justified out loud.

Name the service in plain English with the target attached: global colour, level five cool brown; balayage, level seven caramel; root smudge, level four. Do not use a brand shade code as the service name, and do not use a technique name as a promise of a result. Write the technique, the placement, the formula, and the timing on the card, because the next visit depends on knowing where the product went as much as on knowing what was in it. A colourist who can repeat a placement can build a client's look over years. A colourist who cannot repeat it starts from zero every visit.

- 1. Apply a root smudge after the lightener is rinsed, to damp hair, at 10 volume and 1 to 2 levels deeper than the target.
- 2. Feather the smudge a few centimetres down from the root and never drag it through the mid-length.
- 3. Check the smudge at 5 minutes on porous hair, because it grabs faster than the root.
- 4. Never sell a root smudge as grey coverage, because it deposits tone but does not cover resistant grey.
- 5. Choose babylights for fine hair that needs subtle brightness, and balayage for dense hair that needs visible lift.
- 6. Choose a global or a retouch when the client wants solid coverage, not a dimensional technique.
- 7. Name the service in English with the level and tone, not with a brand shade code.
- 8. Record the placement, formula, and timing, because the next visit must repeat the shape as well as the colour.

Salon example

Rhea has a level five base with fine highlights that have grown out for four months, and she wants a soft root with no visible line. Her highlights are a level eight at the ends and a level seven near the root, and the contrast is harsh at the parting. A full highlight would add more brightness she does not want, and a global would erase the dimension. The right service is a root smudge: a level four ash at 10 volume, applied to damp hair after a gloss, feathered about three centimetres down and checked at five minutes. The result is a soft shadow that blends the highlight root and lets her go eight weeks between visits. I explain that the smudge will fade in about six washes and that a gloss at four weeks keeps the mid-length from dulling. She books the gloss, and the card records the placement depth, which is the detail that makes the next smudge repeatable. She also asks whether the smudge will cover the grey at her parting, and I explain again that it will not, and that a retouch is the service for that.

CAUTION

A root smudge is not grey coverage. If the client has resistant grey at the hairline, a smudge will leave a visible halo and the client will blame the technique.

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Correction in stages



Assess, then plan the visits

Correction begins with a diagnosis, not a formula. You need four readings: the natural level at the root, the artificial level and tone on the mid-length and ends, the porosity and elasticity of each zone, and the history of every product that has been on the hair. Henna, metallic salts, black box dye, colour remover, and repeated lightener each leave a different signature. Ask for dates, not just products. A black dye applied three weeks ago behaves differently from one applied three years ago, even if the client describes both as black. The diagnosis is the plan, and a plan built on a guess is a plan that fails in the chair.

Correction is a sequence of visits, usually two or three, spaced two to four weeks apart. Removing artificial pigment, repigmenting the exposed warmth, and applying the target shade are three different chemical jobs, and stacking them in one sitting is how hair gets destroyed. Between visits, the hair needs time to settle, and the client needs time to see the intermediate result. Tell the client the number of sittings and the approximate time for each before the first bowl is mixed. A correction quoted as a single appointment is either a small correction or a promise that will not survive the first rinse.

Plan the visits around the client's calendar, not around the salon's empty slots. If the client has an event in two weeks, the honest plan may be to reach a wearable intermediate tone before the event and finish the correction afterwards. Do not compress two stages into one week because the date is close. Hair that has been through a colour remover needs time before lightener, and hair that has been lightened needs time before a repigment, even when the brand does not state a minimum interval. Use the conservative interval and explain why. The client will remember the result, not the wait.

Build refusal into the assessment. If the hair fails the elasticity test, feels gummy when wet, or breaks at the mid-length, the plan starts with a cut and a repair period, not with correction. If the scalp has broken skin or a rash, no colour today. If the client reports a previous reaction to colour, black dye, or black henna, no colour at all, and a referral to a doctor. These are not obstacles to negotiate around. They are the boundary between a service and an injury, and the colourist who holds the boundary is the one the client trusts with the next visit.

- 1. Read four things: natural root level, artificial mid-length and end level, porosity and elasticity, and full product history.
- 2. Ask for dates of every colour, henna, metallic, and remover service, not just product names.

- 3. Plan 2 to 3 sittings, usually 2 to 4 weeks apart, and say the number before you mix.
- 4. Never stack removal, repigment, and the target shade in one sitting on damaged hair.
- 5. Sequence around the client's event: reach a wearable tone first, finish the correction after.
- 6. Stop and rebook if the hair fails elasticity, feels gummy, or breaks at the mid-length.
- 7. Refuse colour on broken skin, a rash, or a reported reaction, and refer to a doctor.
- 8. Write the diagnosis and the staged plan on the card so every visit follows the same map.

Salon example

Lata has been dyeing her hair black at home for six years and wants a level six caramel brown. Her root is a level two, her mid-length is a level one from build-up, and her ends are a level two with a greenish cast under daylight. The hair is coarse, the elasticity is fair, and the porosity is high at the ends but low at the root. The target is four levels away from the artificial colour and requires removing years of build-up. I explain that this is a three visit correction, not a colour service. Visit one removes what the manufacturer's remover can remove and stops at a dark warm brown. Visit two, four weeks later, lightens the mid-length carefully and tones to a level five. Visit three, four weeks after that, lifts the root to match and glazes the whole head to level six. She asks for it in one day for a family function. I say no, and show her the strand from the first test, which is already soft at the tip. She books the three visits.

CAUTION

Do not compress a three-stage correction into one week because of an event. The hair needs the interval, and a rushed correction usually ends in a cut.

Remove what you can, safely

Removal is the first chemical job, and there are two main tools: a colour remover, which shrinks the artificial dye molecules so they can be rinsed out, and lightener, which oxidises pigment. They do different things, and they are not interchangeable. Use the one the manufacturer's instructions and the diagnosis support. Never use both in one sitting, because the combination is unpredictable and the hair has already been stressed by the first process. If the remover leaves the hair at a dark warm level, that is a result, not a failure. The warmth is the natural pigment that was underneath, and it is the next stage's raw material.

Follow the remover's instructions exactly: the mixing, the application time, the rinsing, and any after-treatment. Some removers require a second application, and some require a specific shampoo or a waiting period before colour. Do not shorten the rinse, because residual remover in the hair can react with the next colour. Do not apply a permanent colour immediately after a remover unless the manufacturer says it is safe. The usual sequence is remover, rinse, dry, assess, and then either a colour at the same visit if the brand allows or a return visit. When in doubt, return visit. The rinse is the step most often rushed, and it is the step that decides whether the next colour behaves.

Lightener is the second tool, and it is used when the artificial pigment is already light enough to lift or when the remover has taken the hair as far as it will go. Apply it to the mid-length and ends first, keep

it off the scalp where possible, and check from twenty minutes. Stop at the level the toner can handle, not at the level in the photo. If the hair feels gummy or stretches without returning, rinse immediately. Do not make a second pass on the same day to even out a patch. The patch is a note for the next visit, not a reason to push the cuticle further.

After removal, the hair is more porous than it was, and the colour that follows will grab. That is why the next step is often a repigment rather than the target shade. Assess the hair dry and wet, read the level and tone, and write down what the remover achieved. If the result is patchy, do not try to fix it with more remover on the same day. Plan the correction of the patch for the next visit, with a strand test that includes the patch itself. The client should leave with a truthful explanation of what happened, what the hair can take next, and when.

- 1. Choose either a colour remover or lightener for the first pass, and never both in one sitting.
- 2. Follow the remover's mixing, timing, rinsing, and after-treatment exactly as printed.
- 3. Do not apply a permanent colour straight after a remover unless the manufacturer permits it.
- 4. Rinse until the water runs clear, because residual remover can react with the next colour.
- 5. Apply lightener to mid-length and ends first, keep it off the scalp where possible, and check from 20 minutes.
- 6. Stop at the level the toner can handle, and rinse at the first sign of gummy or stretched hair.
- 7. Do not make a second lightener pass on the same day to even a patch; note it for the next visit.
- 8. Record what the remover or lightener achieved, because the next stage is built on that result.

Salon example

Pooja has a level three base with two years of dark brown box colour on the mid-length and ends, and she wants a level six warm brown. The artificial colour is a level three, the natural root is a level three, and the ends are porous. A colour remover is the first tool, because the artificial pigment is dark and the hair is not strong enough for a full lightener pass on the same day. I mix the remover as the manufacturer instructs, apply to the mid-length and ends, process for the stated time, and rinse until the water runs clear. The result is a level four warm brown with an orange cast at the ends, which is the natural pigment the remover exposed. I dry the hair, assess it, and explain that the next visit will lift the ends one level and tone to level six. I do not apply a permanent colour that day, even though the client asks, because the remover's after-treatment needs to finish and the hair needs to settle. She books the second visit for three weeks later.

CAUTION

Never combine a colour remover and lightener in one sitting. The reaction is unpredictable, and the hair has already been stressed by the first process.

Repigment, refill, and finish

Repigmenting is the step most corrections skip, and skipping it is why corrected hair looks hollow and fades in a week. When you remove artificial pigment, you expose the natural underlying warmth, and

when you lighten, you remove some of that warmth as well. The target shade needs a base to sit on, or it reads thin and cool in a way that looks grey rather than brown. Repigment means applying the missing warm pigment before the target shade, at the level the hair has reached. It is a small, deliberate step, and it is the difference between a colour that lasts and a colour that washes out.

Refill is the same idea applied to porous mid-lengths and ends that have lost tone. A refill formula is usually warmer and slightly deeper than the target, applied to the porous zone for a short time before the target shade. It gives the cuticle something to hold, so the target does not grab unevenly. The refill is not a separate service the client books; it is a step inside the correction, and it should be on the card. If the ends are extremely porous, the refill may need a lower volume and a shorter time, and the target shade may need to be diluted. Test both on the strand before the head.

The finish is the target shade at the target level and tone, followed by a toner or gloss. Apply the target to the repigmented hair, develop for the brand time, rinse, and then tone if the result is warmer or cooler than intended. Do not use the target shade to do the repigmenting job, because a cool target on empty hair will look flat and will not cover the warmth evenly. If the correction is staged, the finish may be a gloss on the intermediate visit and the full target on the final visit. That is normal. The client should hear the word gloss and understand that it is a step, not the final colour.

Record every step, including the repigment formula, the refill, the target, the toner, and the timing. A correction without a record cannot be repeated, and the next colourist will not know what is underneath. The card should read like a recipe with times, because that is what it is. At the end, check the result in daylight, take a photograph for the client's file with permission, and explain the aftercare. Corrected hair is more porous, so it fades faster and needs a gloss sooner. Say that, book the gloss, and give the client a realistic date for the next colour.

- 1. Repigment before the target shade whenever artificial or natural pigment has been removed.
- 2. Match the repigment to the level the hair reached, not to the target level.
- 3. Refill porous mid-lengths and ends with a warmer, slightly deeper formula for a short, timed application.
- 4. Test the refill and the target on the strand, especially on very porous ends.
- 5. Do not use a cool target shade to do the repigmenting job, because it will read flat and hollow.
- 6. Finish with a toner or gloss, and check the result in daylight before the client leaves.
- 7. Record the repigment, refill, target, toner, and times, so the correction can be repeated.
- 8. Book a gloss at 4 to 6 weeks, because corrected hair is more porous and fades faster.

Salon example

Naina has been lightened to a level eight over three visits, and the mid-length is now a pale, hollow blonde that fades to grey within ten days. She wants a level seven honey blonde that holds its tone. The hair is porous at the mid-length and the ends, and the cuticle is rough. The target shade alone would grab at the ends and look thin in the middle. I mix a repigment at level seven with a gold base, apply it to the mid-length and ends for eight minutes, rinse, and then apply the target level seven honey with 10 volume for fifteen minutes. The result is a warm, solid level seven that reads honey in daylight rather than grey. I finish with a gloss at the same level, check the ends at five minutes, and book a gloss at four weeks. The card records the repigment, the target, and the end timing, because without the repigment the next visit would repeat the hollow result. She also asks whether the honey will last through the summer, and I explain that porous hair fades faster, so the four week gloss is part of the plan rather than an extra.

CAUTION

Do not skip the repigment on porous, lightened hair. The target shade will look hollow, fade to grey, and the client will assume the colour was wrong.

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Records, allergy, PPD, and patch tests



Records that protect the client and you

A client record is a clinical document written at the chair, not a memory aid written at the end of the day. It carries the brand and line, the shade or shades, the developer volume, the ratio, the development time, the actual time used, the result, any band or patch, and the plan for the next visit. It also carries the consultation notes: the levels at the root, mid-length, and ends, the grey percentage, the porosity and elasticity, the water at home, and the products already on the hair. Without those fields, the next visit is guesswork, and guesswork is what turns a loyal client into a correction client.

Write the record while the colour develops, not after the client has left. The details that matter are the ones you will forget: which temple was applied first, how long the ends received product, whether the toner was diluted, and how the strand behaved at twenty minutes. A quick note on the card at each stage takes seconds and saves the whole next appointment. If the salon uses software, enter the same fields there. If it uses paper, keep the paper in a locked drawer, because a client record contains personal and health information. A record that is lost or illegible offers no protection to anyone.

Photographs are part of the record, with the client's permission. Take a before photograph in daylight at the same angle each time, and an after photograph under the same light. Do not use a filter, and do not promise the client a result based on a photograph taken under a ring light. Store the images the way the salon stores other client data, and note in the record that consent was given. A photograph is evidence of the starting point and the result, and it is the most useful tool in a disagreement about what the colour looked like on the day.

The record also protects the colourist. If a client reports a reaction, the card shows what was used, how it was tested, and what advice was given. If a client asks for a correction that the hair cannot take, the card shows that the risk was explained and the staged plan was offered. If a client returns with a complaint about fading, the card shows the formula, the time, and the aftercare advice. None of this is defensive paperwork. It is the ordinary evidence of professional work, and it is the reason a well-run salon can resolve a problem in one conversation instead of an argument.

- 1. Record brand, line, shades, developer volume, ratio, and development time at the chair, not from memory.
- 2. Write the starting levels at root, mid-length, and ends, the grey percentage, porosity, and elasticity.
- 3. Note the actual time each zone received and any band, patch, or uneven result.
- 4. Record the strand test formula and result, and any product that failed or behaved unexpectedly.

- 5. Take before and after photographs in daylight with the client's consent, and note the consent.
- 6. Note the aftercare advice given, including the 48 hour wash wait if the brand requires it.
- 7. Write the next visit plan and date on the card before the client leaves.
- 8. Store records securely, because they contain personal and health information.

Salon example

A client returns six weeks after a global colour and says the shade has faded to a dull green at the ends. She is upset and asks whether the product was faulty. I open her card. It shows the brand, the level five natural base and the level five ash, the 20 volume at the root, the 10 volume at the ends, the thirty-five minute root time and the ten minute pull-through, the strand test result, and the note that the ends were porous. It also shows that she was advised to use a colour-safe shampoo and to book a gloss at four weeks, and that she declined the gloss. The green cast is consistent with ash on porous ends and a delayed gloss, not with a faulty product. I explain this without blaming her, offer a gloss to correct the tone, and book it. The record turned a complaint into a plan, and the client left satisfied. She also asks why the card needs the water source, and I explain that the same water will meet the next colour and that the note saves a second diagnosis.

CAUTION

A record written from memory at the end of the day is not a record. Write each stage while the colour is on the hair.

PPD, patch tests, and reaction signs

PPD, paraphenylenediamine, is a dye intermediate used in many permanent hair colours, and it is a common cause of allergic contact dermatitis. An allergy can develop after years of use with no problem, so a client who has coloured for a decade is not automatically safe. The signs include itching, redness, swelling, a rash, blistering, and swelling around the eyes or face. A reaction can appear within hours or over the next two days. If a client reports any of those signs after a colour, do not colour again, do not try a different brand, and refer the client to a doctor or a dermatologist. The next exposure can be worse than the first.

A patch test is for a client with no reaction history, and it is done before the service as the brand instructs, usually forty-eight hours ahead. Apply a small amount of the mixed product to the inner elbow or behind the ear, leave it as directed, and check for a reaction. Record the date, the product, the site, and the result. A negative patch test does not make the service risk-free, and the client should hear that sentence. The test reduces risk; it does not remove it. If the client cannot come in for the test, that is a reason to reschedule, not a reason to skip it.

The eyelash and eyebrow rule is separate, and it is often misunderstood. Hair dye products carry a caution that they must not be used for dyeing eyelashes or eyebrows, because the eye area is different and the risk is severe. Eyelash and eyebrow tint is not the hair-dye patch-test exemption, and a patch test on the arm does not make an eyelash tint acceptable. Do not use a hair colour, a henna

product, or a black dye on lashes or brows. If a client asks for it, explain the legal and safety position and refer to a specialist service that uses products intended for that area. This is not a salon preference; it is a boundary.

The regulatory context is worth knowing because clients ask about it. In the United States, the FDA treats coal-tar hair dyes as a special category with labelling requirements, including a caution about skin irritation and a preliminary test, and it states that these products must not be used for dyeing eyelashes or eyebrows. The FDA also notes that a negative patch test does not guarantee that a reaction will not occur. Those two points are enough to have a calm conversation at the chair: test before use when there is no history, and never put hair dye on the eye area. The salon rule is simpler than the regulation: if there is a reaction history, no colour today.

- 1. Ask every client, every visit, about swelling, burning, itching, or a rash after any colour.
- 2. Ask specifically about black dye and black henna, because both raise the risk of PPD sensitisation.
- 3. If there is a reaction history, do not colour, do not switch brands, and refer to a doctor.
- 4. Patch test a client with no history 48 hours before, on the inner elbow or behind the ear, per the brand.
- 5. Record the patch test date, product, site, and result, and tell the client a negative test is not a guarantee.
- 6. Never use hair dye, henna, or black dye on eyelashes or eyebrows, because the eye area carries a severe risk.
- 7. Treat eyelash and eyebrow tint as a separate service with its own products, not as the hair-dye exemption.
- 8. Refer any client with a reaction, and do not test a small amount on the scalp to see what happens.

Salon example

Shalini has been colouring her hair every six weeks for eight years and has never had a problem. She arrives for a root retouch and mentions that her scalp itched for two days after the last visit and that her eyelid was slightly puffy on the second morning. She assumed it was the weather. The card shows no previous reaction, and the formula has not changed. I do not colour her. I explain that itching and eyelid swelling after a colour are signs of a possible allergic reaction, that the next exposure can be stronger, and that she needs to see a doctor before any further colour. She asks whether a different brand would be safer, and I say no, not without medical advice, because the sensitiser may be in several lines. I give her the date and the formula from the card for the doctor, and I book a consultation for after the medical review. She is annoyed, then grateful. Colouring her that day would have been the easiest ten minutes of my week and the worst decision of her year.

CAUTION

Itching, swelling, or a rash after a colour means no further colour until a doctor clears it. Do not test a small amount on the scalp to see whether it happens again.

When you must refuse

Refusal is part of the craft. Do not colour today when the scalp has broken skin, sores, weeping, or a rash, because a permanent colour on an inflamed scalp can worsen the inflammation and can be absorbed differently. Do not colour when the client reports a previous reaction to colour, black dye, or black henna. Do not colour when the hair fails the elasticity test or feels gummy when wet, because the structure is already compromised and colour will not repair it. Do not promise platinum in one day from a level two base with damaged ends. Do not colour a pregnant or breastfeeding client without a doctor's clearance. Do not lighten a henna or metallic-salt history without a strand test, and often not even then.

Say it plainly and without judgement. A short sentence works: we are not colouring today, because the scalp needs to heal first, and here is the referral. Then offer the alternative: a treatment, a cut, a consultation, a date next month. Do not lecture, do not imply the client has been careless, and do not negotiate the boundary in exchange for a booking. A client who is refused safely often returns; a client who is coloured into a reaction does not. The refusal is a service, and it should be delivered with the same care as the colour you would have applied.

Document the refusal. Write what you saw, what you advised, and what the client chose to do. If the client insists on colour despite the advice, and the salon decides not to proceed, the record should show that the risk was explained. If the client goes elsewhere, that is their choice, and the record protects the salon. If the client is pregnant and has no clearance, note that the decision was theirs and that the doctor's clearance was requested. These notes are not bureaucracy; they are the memory of a professional conversation, and they matter if the same client returns with a problem.

Refusal also applies to the service the client wants but the hair cannot take. A client who wants a five level lift on porous, over-processed hair is asking for breakage, even if she is willing to pay. Offer the staged plan, explain the timeline, and let her choose the first stage. If she refuses the plan and demands the result, the answer is still no, because the hair will not survive the service and the salon will own the damage. The colourist's job is not to satisfy every request. It is to give the client the best result the hair can hold, and sometimes that means saying not today.

- 1. Refuse colour on broken, weeping, inflamed, or rash-covered scalp, and refer to a dermatologist.
- 2. Refuse colour after any reported reaction to colour, black dye, or black henna, without exception.
- 3. Refuse lift when the hair is gummy, stays stretched, or breaks, and plan a cut and repair first.
- 4. Refuse a five level lift in one day on damaged hair, and offer a staged plan instead.
- 5. Refuse colour for a pregnant or breastfeeding client without a doctor's clearance.
- 6. Refuse lightener on a henna or metallic history unless a strand test supports it, and often refuse anyway.
- 7. Say the refusal plainly, offer the alternative, and do not negotiate the boundary for a booking.

- 8. Document what you saw, what you advised, and what the client chose, in the client record.

Salon example

Kiran arrives with a photo of platinum blonde and a story about a box lightener she used two weeks ago. Her hair is a level five at the root, a level seven at the mid-length, and a level eight at the ends, with visible breakage at the crown and a gummy feel when wet. She wants the whole head lifted to level ten before a holiday in ten days. The hair cannot take another lift today, and the ten day window is not enough for a staged plan. I tell her plainly that I will not lighten her hair today, show her the breakage at the crown in the mirror, and explain that another lightener pass would turn the gummy section into a chemical cut. I offer a trim, a repair treatment, and a consultation in six weeks for a conservative tone. She is angry and says another salon will do it. I say that may be true, and I still will not. She leaves, and three weeks later she books the trim. The refusal cost me one appointment and saved her hair.

CAUTION

Do not let a booking, a tip, or a client's insistence override a failed elasticity test. The damage will be visible long after the payment is forgotten.

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Oxidative and non-oxidative colour



Semi, demi, permanent, and gloss

Hair colour falls into two families, and knowing which family a product belongs to prevents most formulation mistakes. Non-oxidative colour is a direct dye: the pigment is already coloured and it sits on or just inside the cuticle without a chemical reaction. Oxidative colour is mixed with a developer, usually hydrogen peroxide, and the reaction inside the cortex produces the colour. Semi-permanent, temporary, and some glosses are non-oxidative. Demi-permanent and permanent are oxidative, and the difference between them is the developer strength and the dye load. The family decides whether the product can lift, how long it lasts, and how much damage it can do.

Semi-permanent colour is a direct dye with no developer and no lift. It coats the outside of the strand and sits in the outer cuticle, and it washes out over roughly six to twelve shampoos, depending on the product and the porosity. It is the right choice for a tone refresh, for adding shine to a client who is not ready for a commitment, and for a first colour on hair with no grey. It is not a grey coverage product: it will stain the grey slightly and then leave a halo. It is also not a gentle permanent. If the client wants a level change or solid grey coverage, a semi will not deliver it, and selling one as if it will is the beginning of a complaint.

Demi-permanent colour is oxidative but low strength. It is mixed with a low developer, often ten volume or a brand-specific activator, and it deposits tone with little or no lift. It lasts longer than a semi, often through twelve to twenty-four washes, and it blends early grey rather than covering it solidly. Demi is the right choice for a client who wants a richer version of their natural colour, for refreshing mid-lengths and ends, and for toning after a lightener. It is a poor choice for resistant grey over fifty percent, and it is not a substitute for a permanent retouch. The brand's own line name will tell you which family you are holding, so read the technical sheet rather than assuming from the word demi.

Permanent colour is oxidative and lifts as well as deposits. It is mixed with a developer, usually twenty volume for grey coverage, and it opens the cuticle, removes some natural pigment, and deposits the new colour inside the cortex. It lasts until it grows out or is removed, and it is the only option for solid grey coverage and a lasting level change. It is also the most commitment: the regrowth is visible in four to six weeks, and the ends accumulate colour over time. A gloss can be either family depending on the brand, so check the instructions. The general rule is to choose the least aggressive product that meets the target, and to move up a family only when the target requires it.

- 1. Non-oxidative colour is a direct dye with no developer, no lift, and a life of roughly 6 to 12 washes.

- 2. Semi-permanent is for tone and shine, not for grey coverage or a level change.
- 3. Demi-permanent is oxidative at low volume, often 10 volume, and deposits with little or no lift.
- 4. Demi blends early grey but does not give solid coverage over 50 percent grey.
- 5. Permanent colour lifts and deposits, and it is the choice for solid grey coverage and a lasting level change.
- 6. Use 20 volume as the working default for permanent colour, and never 40 volume as a routine scalp developer.
- 7. Check whether the brand's gloss is oxidative or direct, because the word gloss does not define the chemistry.
- 8. Choose the least aggressive family that meets the target, and move up only when the target requires it.

Salon example

Mira is thirty-two, has about fifteen percent grey at the front, and wants her natural level four to look richer and less flat. She has never coloured and is nervous about commitment. A permanent colour would cover the grey and last, but it would also start a retouch cycle she does not want yet. A semi-permanent would add shine, but the grey would still show and the tone would be gone in about eight washes. A demi-permanent at 10 volume is the middle path: it deposits a level four chocolate, blends the grey enough that it reads as texture rather than a stripe, and fades gradually without a hard line. I explain that it will last around twenty washes, that the grey will become visible again in about six weeks, and that a permanent retouch is the next step when she is ready. She chooses the demi, and I book a gloss at six weeks to keep the tone. She also asks whether the demi will cover the grey completely, and I say no, it will blend it, and that a permanent retouch is the next step when she wants solid coverage.

CAUTION

A semi-permanent is not a gentle permanent. It cannot cover grey or lift the level, and selling it as either leads to a faded halo and a lost client.

What lifts and what only deposits

Lifting means removing natural pigment, and only an oxidative product with enough developer can do it. The developer oxidises the melanin inside the cortex, and the dye in the tube replaces the colour that is removed. A direct dye has no developer and no oxidation, so it cannot remove pigment at all, no matter how long it stays on the hair. This is the single most useful distinction in colour chemistry. If the target is lighter than the starting level, the product must be oxidative and the developer must be strong enough for the number of levels needed. If the target is the same level or darker, a deposit product may be enough.

The developer scale sets the practical limit. Ten volume, three percent, gives no useful lift and is for deposit and tone. Twenty volume, six percent, gives roughly one to two levels, which covers most grey and most same-level refreshes. Thirty volume, nine percent, gives roughly two to three levels and

exposes more warmth, and it is used off the scalp where possible. Forty volume, twelve percent, is maximum lift and maximum damage, and it is not a routine scalp developer. Even at forty volume, a single application has a ceiling, especially on dense dark hair. If the target is more than three levels away, the plan is two visits, not a stronger bowl.

Deposit is not a lesser service. A demi or a gloss that deposits the right tone on the right base can make hair look richer, shinier, and healthier without opening the cuticle wide. Deposit is also the correct choice for porous ends that would grab a permanent shade unevenly. The mistake is using a permanent when a deposit would do, because the permanent adds lift the client did not ask for, exposes warmth that then needs toning, and commits the hair to a retouch cycle. Match the product to the job: lift only when the target is lighter, deposit when the target is the same or darker, and tone when the job is to neutralise warmth after a lift.

Time does not turn a deposit colour into a lifting colour. Leaving a semi-permanent on for an hour does not remove pigment; it only risks staining the cuticle and drying the hair. Leaving a ten volume permanent on longer does not add levels beyond its chemistry; it adds damage. If the strand test shows the target level was not reached, the answer is a stronger developer within the brand's range, a second visit, or a lower target. It is never more time on the clock with the same formula. The clock controls development, not chemistry, and the chemistry is set by the product and the developer.

- 1. Only oxidative colour with sufficient developer lifts natural pigment; direct dyes cannot lighten.
- 2. 10 volume is deposit only, with no useful lift, and is correct for gloss and toner.
- 3. 20 volume gives about 1 to 2 levels and is the default for permanent grey coverage.
- 4. 30 volume gives about 2 to 3 levels, exposes more warmth, and belongs off the scalp where possible.
- 5. 40 volume is maximum lift and maximum damage, and never a routine scalp developer.
- 6. If the target is more than 3 levels away, book two visits rather than reaching for a stronger bowl.
- 7. Use a deposit product when the target is the same level or darker, and save permanent for when lift is needed.
- 8. Do not extend the time to gain lift, because time develops the chemistry but does not change it.

Salon example

Sneha says she wants her level five brown to be one shade lighter, and she points to a photo of a level six warm brown. Her hair is natural, about ten percent grey, and in good condition. The difference between level five and level six is one level, and a permanent colour at 20 volume would lift it, but it would also expose warmth and commit her to a retouch. A demi-permanent at 10 volume in a level six warm brown would deposit a slightly lighter-looking tone without lifting, and on her porosity it would read as a richer, warmer brown rather than a true level change. I explain the difference in plain words: the demi will make the hair look lighter and warmer, but it will not remove pigment, and it will fade in about twenty washes. She chooses the demi because she wants low commitment. If she had wanted a real level six, the answer would have been a permanent at 20 volume, with a retouch plan attached. She also asks whether a stronger developer would make the demi last longer, and I explain that volume controls lift and speed, not the life of a deposit colour.

CAUTION

More time does not create more lift. If a deposit colour has not changed the level, it never will, and leaving it longer only risks staining and dryness.

Porosity and grab

Porosity is how readily the hair takes in and releases moisture and colour. Low porosity hair has a tight cuticle, so products sit on the surface and can take longer to penetrate. High porosity hair has a raised or damaged cuticle, so it absorbs fast, grabs colour quickly, and loses it quickly too. Porosity is not the same as density or texture. Fine hair can be low porosity, and coarse hair can be highly porous after years of lightener. The mid-length and ends are usually more porous than the root, which is why the same formula can look darker at the ends and lighter at the root. Reading porosity is part of reading the hair, and it changes the formula as much as the level does.

Test porosity simply and consistently. Spray a little water on a clean, dry section at the mid-length and watch how fast it disappears. If the water beads and sits, the cuticle is tight. If it sinks in immediately, the hair is porous. You can also feel it: porous hair feels rough when you run a finger down the strand against the cuticle, and it dries quickly. Compare the root, the mid-length, and the ends, and write down what you see. A strand that is porous at the ends and tight at the root is a two-zone formula, not one bowl applied everywhere.

Formulate for the most porous zone, not the average. On porous ends, drop the developer volume, shorten the time, apply the ends last, and consider diluting the toner with clear. On low porosity hair, the colour may need the full development time and a slightly warmer formula to show, and the client should know that the first wash may release more colour. If the ends grab a cool tone and go grey, the correction is a warmer gloss, not more cool toner. If the root resists and the ends grab, the answer is two formulas, applied in the right order, with the ends checked first.

Porosity also predicts fade. Porous hair loses colour faster because the cuticle is open, so a red or cool tone on porous ends will be gone in three or four washes. Tell the client, book a gloss at four weeks,

and recommend the brand's bonding or moisturising aftercare rather than a harsh shampoo. Record the porosity reading next to the formula. In six weeks, the same ends will behave the same way, and the record saves you from repeating the mistake. Porosity is not a flaw to be scolded; it is a condition to be managed, and the management starts with an honest reading at the consultation.

- 1. Test porosity by spraying water on a clean, dry mid-length and watching how fast it absorbs.
- 2. Compare root, mid-length, and ends, and write three porosity readings rather than one.
- 3. On porous ends, lower the developer volume, shorten the time, and apply the ends last.
- 4. Dilute a toner with clear or use a lower volume on porous hair, per the manufacturer.
- 5. On low porosity hair, allow the full development time and expect slower penetration.
- 6. Do not add more cool toner when porous ends go grey; use a warmer gloss to correct it.
- 7. Tell the client that porous hair fades faster, and book a gloss at about 4 weeks.
- 8. Record the porosity reading beside the formula so the next visit starts from the same evidence.

Salon example

Aditi has a level seven base that was lightened six months ago, and she wants a cool ash blonde. Her root is a level six with low porosity, her mid-length is a level seven with medium porosity, and her ends are a level eight with high porosity and a rough feel. A single ash toner at 10 volume would cool the root and turn the ends slate grey within three minutes. I mix two toners: a level seven ash-violet for the root and mid-length, and the same toner diluted with clear for the ends. I apply the root and mid-length first, check at five minutes, then apply the diluted toner to the ends and check at two. The result is an even cool blonde with no grey ends. I explain that the ends will fade first and book a gloss at four weeks. The card records the two toner mixes and the two minute end check, which is the detail that makes the next visit repeatable. She also asks whether a mask will fix the porosity, and I explain that a mask improves the feel and the shine but does not close a damaged cuticle, so the formula still has to respect it.

CAUTION

Do not apply a full-strength cool toner to highly porous ends. They can grab in two to three minutes and the grey cannot be rinsed back.

Application order



Virgin application versus root retouch

A virgin application is colour on hair that has never been coloured, and it is a different service from a retouch even when the formula is the same. On virgin hair, every strand needs product, from root to end, and each zone processes at a different speed. The general order for a permanent colour is the mid-length and ends first, then the root last, because scalp heat accelerates the root and the ends need a head start. For a first full grey coverage, the resistant hairline and temples go on first within the root zone, then the rest of the root, then the mid-length and ends. The manufacturer's directions win if they specify a different order, and the strand test tells you whether the zones need different timing.

A root retouch is colour on the regrowth only, usually the first one to two centimetres. It is the most common service in a colourist's week, and the one where discipline matters most. Apply to the new growth, keep the product inside the regrowth band, and do not drag the brush through the old colour line to tidy it. The old colour has already been processed; a second application over-deposits it and creates a darker band. Work around the head in a consistent pattern, starting at the most resistant area, usually the temples or the parting, and finish where the hair is easiest. Then check the resistant area first, because it will be the last to cover.

The two services need different formulas as well as different orders. A virgin global may need a slightly warmer or more natural base at the mid-length to avoid a hollow result, and the ends may need a lower volume or a shorter pull-through. A retouch needs the exact target formula at the root, plus a plan for the mid-length and ends that does not involve more permanent colour every visit. That plan might be a gloss, a toner, or nothing at all. The mistake is to treat the retouch as a global and pull the formula through the whole head, which darkens the ends a little more every six weeks until the client has a two-tone result.

The choice between the two is a consultation decision. Ask when the hair was last coloured, what was used, and whether the mid-length and ends have been lightened or coloured repeatedly. If the client has a six week history of a global colour, the service is a retouch, not a global. If the client has never coloured and wants a uniform shade, the service is a virgin application. If the client has a mix of old colour and virgin root, the service is a retouch plus a mid-length plan, and the card should show both. Naming the service correctly at the start prevents the most expensive mistake in the appointment: doing the wrong job well.

- 1. On a virgin permanent application, apply mid-length and ends first, then the root last, because scalp heat speeds the root.

- 2. For first full grey coverage, apply the resistant hairline and temples first within the root zone, then the rest.
- 3. On a root retouch, apply only within the first 1 to 2 cm of regrowth and never drag through the old line.
- 4. Start a retouch at the most resistant area, usually the temples or the parting, and check it first.
- 5. Keep the retouch formula at the target level and do not pull it through the mid-length every visit.
- 6. Plan a gloss or toner for the mid-length instead of adding permanent colour to the ends each time.
- 7. Ask when the hair was last coloured and with what, and name the service before you mix.
- 8. Follow the manufacturer's application order when it differs from the general rule.

Salon example

Roshni has never coloured her hair and wants a global level five warm brown with full coverage of her twenty percent grey. This is a virgin application. I section the hair into four, apply the colour to the resistant hairline and temples first, then the rest of the root, then the mid-length, and finally the ends for the last ten minutes at a lower volume. The temples get forty minutes, the mid-length thirty, and the ends ten. The result is even from root to end. Six weeks later she returns, and the service is now a retouch: the same formula on the one and a half centimetres of regrowth, the temples first, and a gloss on the mid-length for the last ten minutes. I do not pull the permanent formula through the ends. The card records both services separately, because the difference between them is the reason her colour stays even over a year. She also asks why the ends get a lower volume, and I explain that the ends are older and more porous, and that the same strength would over-deposit them while the root was still developing.

CAUTION

Do not treat a six week regrowth as a global. Pulling permanent colour through the ends at every retouch darkens them a little more each visit until the result is two-tone.

Why roots process faster

The root processes faster than the mid-length and ends for two reasons. The first is heat: the scalp is at body temperature, and the product sitting close to it is warmed from below, which speeds the peroxide reaction. The second is condition: the root is newer hair with a tighter, less damaged cuticle, but it is also the zone where the product is applied last in a virgin service, so it needs less time to reach the same point. Add the fact that the root is often the darkest natural hair and the ends are often porous and lighter, and you have a zone that can move a full level ahead of the rest of the head in a few minutes. That is how hot roots appear.

Hot roots are a bright, warm band at the scalp that is lighter than the rest of the hair. They happen when the root is applied at the same time as the mid-length and ends, or when a lightener is applied to the root first, or when the developer is too strong for the root. They also happen when a client's natural root is lighter than the coloured ends, which is common after months of box colour. The fix is

not to tone the hot band darker on the same day, because that creates a second band. The fix is to change the order next time: apply the mid-length and ends first, the root last, and check the root sooner.

On a retouch, the root is the only zone receiving permanent colour, so the speed difference is less of a problem and the overlap is the bigger risk. Apply the product to the regrowth and check it at the manufacturer's time, not earlier, because a retouch that is rinsed early leaves a shadow at the scalp. On resistant grey, the root may actually need more time than the rest, despite the heat, because grey has no pigment to develop. That is why the temples and hairline are checked first and given the full time. The rule is not that roots are always faster; it is that roots behave differently, and the strand test and the check tell you how.

Control the variables you can. Keep the room at a normal temperature, because a cold room slows the ends and a hot room speeds everything. Do not cover a lightener with a plastic cap unless the manufacturer says so, because trapped heat accelerates the root further. Apply in a consistent order so the timing per zone is known, and use two timers if the zones start at different times. Write the actual start and check times for the root, mid-length, and ends. When a client asks why the root is checked first, the answer is simple: it is the warmest part of the head, and the warmest part moves first.

- 1. Expect the root to process faster because of scalp heat, and apply it last on a first lift.
- 2. Do not apply lightener to the root first unless the manufacturer's method says to.
- 3. Check the root before the mid-length and ends, and rinse it first if it reaches the target early.
- 4. Avoid hot rooms, direct sun, and plastic caps on lightener unless the brand permits them.
- 5. On a retouch, give the root the full manufacturer time, because early rinsing leaves a shadow.
- 6. On resistant grey, expect the root to need the full time despite the heat, and check the temples first.
- 7. Use separate timers for zones that start at different times, and write the times on the card.
- 8. If hot roots appear, correct the order and the timing next visit rather than toning the band darker today.

Salon example

Tanya has a level four base with old box colour on the ends, and she wants a level six warm brown. The previous salon applied the root first and the ends last, and she has a bright orange band at the scalp that fades into a darker mid-length. On this visit I do not try to fix the band with a darker toner, because that would leave a second band. I apply the mid-length and ends first at 20 volume, then the root at 20 volume ten minutes later, and check the root at twenty-five minutes. The root reaches level six while the ends are still at level five, so I rinse the root first and then the ends. The result is more even, though the old band is still visible. I explain that the band will soften over two or three visits as the root grows and the ends are refreshed with gloss, and I record the order so it is not repeated. She also asks whether a cool room would slow the root enough to apply everything at once, and I explain that the scalp heat is inside the head, not in the room.

CAUTION

Do not fix hot roots by toning the band darker on the same day. That creates a second band, and the hair has already been through one process.

Section size and the manufacturer's timing

Section size decides whether the product reaches the hair. A section that is too thick holds product on the surface and leaves the inside dry, so the outside lifts or deposits while the inside stays at the starting level. For most colour work, a subsection of about one centimetre is right, and for dense or long hair it may need to be thinner. Divide the head into four quadrants first, then work in horizontal or diagonal sections that you can see and control. Weave or slice according to the service, and keep the sections consistent so the timing is consistent. A neat head is not decoration; it is the only way to know that every strand received the same product for the same time.

Timing comes from the manufacturer, not from habit. A permanent colour is often thirty to forty-five minutes, a demi is often twenty to thirty, a toner is five to twenty, a gloss is ten to twenty, and a lightener is checked from twenty and then every five to ten. Those are typical ranges, and the tube or technical sheet is the authority. If the brand says twenty minutes, do not leave it forty because the client is not covered. If the brand says do not exceed thirty, do not add ten for a resistant patch. The correct response to under-development is a formula change, not a longer clock. The correct response to over-development is a rinse, not a hope.

Long services need a sequence, not a single timer. On a full head of foils, work in a pattern that lets you return to the first foil at a known time, and write the start time of each zone. On a global colour with a pull-through, the root timer and the end timer are separate. On a retouch with a gloss, the retouch develops first and the gloss goes on after the rinse. Mix in batches so the product on the last section is as fresh as the product on the first. If you are running behind, remix rather than stretch, and tell the client what is happening. A client who understands the delay is calmer than a client who is left guessing.

Record the timing per zone. The card should say root thirty-five minutes, mid-length fifteen, ends eight, toner five at the ends and seven at the root. That level of detail is what makes a result repeatable and what makes a complaint answerable. It also protects the client: if a patch appears, the record shows whether that zone received more product or more time. Section size and timing are not glamorous parts of the craft, but they are where even colour is won or lost. A beautiful formula applied in thick sections for a guessed time is a lottery, and the client is the one who buys the ticket.

- 1. Divide into four quadrants, then work in subsections of about 1 cm for even saturation.
- 2. Keep subsection size consistent, because a thick section processes unevenly from the outside in.
- 3. Use the manufacturer's development time, typically 30 to 45 minutes for permanent colour.
- 4. Check lightener from 20 minutes and then every 5 to 10, and never leave foils unattended.
- 5. Use separate timers for zones that start at different times, and write each start time down.
- 6. Mix in batches on long or thick hair so the last section gets fresh product.
- 7. Remix rather than stretch if you run out, and tell the client what is happening.

- 8. Record the time each zone received, so the next visit can repeat the result or explain a patch.

Salon example

Bhavna has long, thick hair that reaches her waist, and she wants a global level four with a copper tone. The head is too large for one application to be even if I work from a single bowl and a single timer. I divide into four quadrants and work in one centimetre horizontal sections, mixing two batches. I start the root at the temples, write the time on the trolley, and work around the head. The root timer runs thirty-five minutes. The mid-length goes on twenty minutes before the end, and the ends get the last eight minutes at a lower volume. I use two timers, one for the root and one for the mid-length, and I check each zone before I move on. The result is even from the scalp to the tips. If I had used one bowl and one timer, the first section would have processed for fifty minutes and the last for twenty, and the copper would have been patchy. She also asks whether the timer can be set from the first section or the last, and I explain that each zone gets its own start time, because the first section is already working while the last is still dry.

CAUTION

Do not guess a development time because the salon is busy. A guessed time is the most common cause of a patchy result and the hardest to explain to a client.

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Aftercare and fade



Sulfate wash, heat, and sun

Colour leaves the hair through three doors: water, heat, and light. Water opens the cuticle and carries dye molecules out, especially when the water is hot and the shampoo is strong. Sulfate shampoos are effective cleaners, and that is exactly the problem for coloured hair, because they lift the cuticle and strip the surface tone. A client who washes daily in hot water with a strong shampoo will lose a red or cool tone in two or three weeks, no matter how good the formula was. The aftercare conversation is not an upsell. It is the second half of the colour service, and the result the client sees in week four depends on it.

Heat is the second door. Hot tools open the cuticle, and repeated heat without protection leaves the hair rough and the colour dull. A flat iron at two hundred degrees Celsius or more, used on damp hair, does damage that shows up as dryness and fade. The practical advice is a heat protectant before every hot tool, a tool temperature under two hundred degrees Celsius, and no hot tool on wet hair. The client does not need a lecture on protein chemistry. The client needs three clear rules and a reminder that the cool setting on the dryer is not a punishment.

Sun is the third door, and it is the one clients forget. Ultraviolet light oxidises the dye and the hair, and it fades warm and red tones first. A client who spends weekends outdoors without a hat will see the ends go lighter and duller while the root stays true. A hat, a UV protection spray, and a leave-in conditioner with UV filters all help, and the brand's own aftercare line is the safest recommendation. Chlorine and salt water are separate problems: they should be rinsed out the same day, because they leave mineral and chemical residue that dulls the tone and dries the cuticle. A swim cap is unfashionable and effective.

Fade is not uniform across tones. Red fades fastest because the dye molecules are larger and sit closer to the surface, and warm gold fades next. Cool and ash tones can fade into dullness rather than disappear, and on porous hair they can turn grey at the ends. Tell the client which tone they have and what to expect in four weeks, six weeks, and eight weeks. A red client should book a gloss at four weeks. An ash client should book a gloss at five or six. A client who understands the fade curve is not surprised by it, and a client who is not surprised does not blame the salon for chemistry.

- 1. Recommend a colour-safe, sulfate-free shampoo, washed less often and in cooler water.
- 2. Avoid daily washing, because water and friction remove surface tone faster than anything else.
- 3. Use a heat protectant before every hot tool and keep the tool under 200 C.
- 4. Never use a hot tool on damp hair, because the water boils inside the strand.

- 5. Recommend a hat and a UV protection spray for long sun exposure.
- 6. Rinse chlorine and salt water out the same day, and use a swim cap where possible.
- 7. Tell the client which tone fades fastest: red first, then gold, then cool tones into dullness.
- 8. Book a gloss at 4 to 6 weeks according to the tone, and say so before the client leaves.

Salon example

Sara has a level six copper red that she loves, and she washes her hair every morning in hot water, then flat irons it on the highest setting without a protectant. She returns at three weeks and says the colour has disappeared. It has not disappeared; it has faded from the mid-length down, and the root is still copper. I show her the difference between the root and the ends under daylight, and explain that the fade is water, heat, and sun, not a weak formula. We agree on a plan: wash every second day in lukewarm water with a colour-safe shampoo, use a heat protectant, drop the iron to one hundred eighty degrees, and wear a hat when she is outside. I gloss the mid-length and ends back to copper, book a gloss at four weeks, and write the aftercare on the card. At the next visit the fade is visibly slower, and she keeps the tone she paid for. She also asks about dry shampoo, and I explain that it is better than a daily hot wash, but that it still needs to be washed out properly and not used as a substitute for cleaning the scalp.

CAUTION

Do not blame the product for fading before you ask about wash frequency, water temperature, and heat tools. The answer is usually in the client's routine.

What the client does for 48 hours

The first forty-eight hours decide how the colour settles. The cuticle is still closing, the dye is still stabilising, and the scalp may be slightly sensitive. If the manufacturer says wait before the first wash, the client waits. That is usually forty-eight hours, sometimes seventy-two for a lightener service. Washing immediately opens the cuticle before the colour has settled and removes surface pigment, especially on porous hair. The client should also avoid a sauna, a steam room, a long hot shower, and a heavy workout that leaves the scalp sweating, because heat and moisture do the same thing as a wash.

Give the client written instructions, not a verbal list that disappears with the salon appointment. The slip should say when to wash, what to use, what to avoid, and what is normal. A little colour in the first rinse is normal, especially with a red or a semi-permanent. A tender scalp for a day is common after a lightener. Itching that gets worse, swelling, a rash, or blisters are not normal, and the client should call the salon and see a doctor. Put the salon number on the slip and say which symptoms are urgent. The client should not have to guess whether a symptom is serious.

Sleep, sweat, and hats matter more than clients expect. A tight hat on the first day can leave a mark and can trap heat, and a swim in a chlorinated pool on day two undoes a tone that took an hour to build. Pillowcases are a minor issue compared with water and heat, but a fresh pillowcase on the first night is a small kindness for a lightened scalp. The client should tie long hair loosely rather than

pulling it tight, because tension on freshly coloured hair at the root can leave a crease. None of this is complicated, but it is easy to forget when the appointment ends and life resumes.

The forty-eight hour advice should also cover what not to do at home. No box colour to touch up the root, no lemon juice to lighten, no baking soda to clarify, and no henna pack from a friend. Each of those can change the chemistry under the salon colour and make the next visit unpredictable. If the client wants a refresh, the salon can gloss it. If the client is unhappy with the tone, call within the first week, because the salon can adjust a fresh colour more easily than a colour that has been through a home experiment. Say that plainly and without condescension, and write it on the slip.

- 1. Wait 48 hours before the first wash when the manufacturer says so, and up to 72 after lightener.
- 2. Avoid saunas, steam rooms, long hot showers, and heavy sweating on the first two days.
- 3. Expect a little colour in the first rinse, especially with red or semi-permanent colour.
- 4. Treat a tender scalp for a day as normal, but report itching, swelling, rash, or blisters immediately.
- 5. Do not use box colour, lemon, baking soda, or henna at home between salon visits.
- 6. Wear a loose hat and tie long hair loosely, to avoid heat and creases at the root.
- 7. Rinse chlorine and salt water out the same day, and keep the first swim after 48 hours.
- 8. Give the client a written slip with the salon number and the warning signs to report.

Salon example

Nidhi has a level five mahogany global colour and washes her hair every morning before work. She calls on day three to say the colour is already fading and asks whether the salon used a cheap product. I ask her to come in, and I can see the fade is even across the mid-length, with the root still true. I explain that the first wash on day one, in hot water, is the likely cause, and that mahogany is one of the fastest-fading tones. We agree on a gloss to restore the tone, and this time I give her the written slip: wait forty-eight hours, wash every second day, use the colour-safe shampoo, and avoid the hot iron for a week. I also tell her that a little colour in the first rinse is normal. She follows the slip, and at six weeks the tone is still visible. The difference was not the product. It was the first forty-eight hours. She also asks whether she can go to the gym on the second day, and I explain that sweat and heat are the same problem as a hot wash, and that a cool rinse afterwards is the compromise.

CAUTION

Do not tell a client to wash immediately after a colour to remove product residue. Rinse at the bowl, then follow the manufacturer's waiting time.

Gloss between colours

A gloss between colours is the cheapest way to keep a colour looking fresh, and it is the service most often skipped. It adds tone and shine without lift, and it takes ten to twenty minutes in the chair. A gloss at four to six weeks refreshes the mid-length and ends, which do not receive fresh colour at a

retouch, and it keeps a cool or red tone from going dull. It does not cover grey, and it does not change the level. It is a maintenance step, and the client should hear that word. A gloss sold as a colour change is a disappointment; a gloss sold as a tone refresh is a habit.

The timing depends on the tone and the porosity. Red and copper fade fastest, so a red client may need a gloss at three to four weeks. Cool and ash tones can go dull, so a gloss at four to six weeks keeps them clean. Porous ends grab a gloss darker, so dilute the formula or shorten the time, and apply the ends last. A gloss on resistant grey will not cover, so do not offer it as a grey solution. If the client is on a six week retouch, a gloss at week three is a good rhythm. If the client stretches to eight weeks, a gloss at week four keeps the finish from collapsing before the retouch.

Some salons offer an at-home gloss or a colour-depositing mask, and those can be useful if they come from the manufacturer and are used as directed. They are not a substitute for a salon gloss, and they should never be mixed from household ingredients. A home gloss that is left on too long, or applied to porous ends without dilution, can leave the ends darker than the root. If the salon recommends one, give the client the exact product, the exact timing, and the warning about porous ends. Do not recommend a product you have not read the instructions for, and do not invent a recipe.

Schedule the gloss at the same time as the retouch, and put both dates on the card. The client should leave with the next two appointments booked, not one. A colour client who books only the retouch will often cancel the gloss when life gets busy, and the tone will fade before the next visit. A colour client who books both has a rhythm, and the rhythm is what keeps the colour looking like the day it was done. The gloss is not an extra; it is the difference between a colour that lasts six weeks and a colour that lasts three.

- 1. Book a gloss at 4 to 6 weeks between permanent colours to refresh tone and shine.
- 2. Book a red or copper gloss at 3 to 4 weeks, because those tones fade fastest.
- 3. Use a gloss for tone and shine only, and never sell it as grey coverage or a level change.
- 4. Dilute the gloss or shorten the time on porous ends, and apply the ends last.
- 5. Recommend only a manufacturer's at-home gloss or mask, used exactly as directed.
- 6. Never suggest a homemade gloss from kitchen ingredients, because the pH and the result are unpredictable.
- 7. Record the gloss formula, timing, and result on the card beside the colour record.
- 8. Book the retouch and the gloss together, so the client leaves with a rhythm rather than one appointment.

Salon example

Tara has a level six cool brown global colour and a retouch every six weeks. At week three she mentions that the mid-length looks dull and slightly green in daylight. The root is still true, so this is not a retouch problem; it is fade on porous mid-lengths. I mix a level six neutral gloss with 10 volume, apply it to the mid-length for eight minutes, and check the ends at four because they are porous. The green cast lifts, the shine returns, and the tone matches the root. I explain that a gloss at week three will keep this from happening, and that it is not a colour change. She books the gloss and the retouch together for the next cycle. Over the next year, her colour looks consistent in photographs, and she never has to ask for a correction. She also asks whether the gloss will cover the grey at her hairline, and I explain that it will not, and that the retouch is the service for coverage, while the gloss is the service for tone. She also asks whether the gloss can be done on the same day as a haircut, and I explain that it can, and that the cut should come first so the gloss finishes the shape.

CAUTION

Do not leave a gloss on porous ends for the full time. The ends can grab two levels darker while the root stays correct, and the result looks like a band.

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Hard water and minerals



How minerals change tone

Hard water carries dissolved minerals, mainly calcium and magnesium, and sometimes iron or copper depending on the pipes and the source. When that water evaporates on the hair, the minerals stay behind as a film. The film makes the cuticle feel rough, stops shampoo from lathering properly, and can interfere with the way colour enters and sits in the strand. A client on borewell or municipal hard water often has dull mid-lengths, a slightly rough surface, and a tone that turns warm or muddy faster than expected. The water is not a cosmetic problem the client can see, but it is a variable the colourist has to read.

The effect on colour is indirect but real. A mineral film can block the cuticle, so a deposit colour sits on the surface and fades quickly, or grabs unevenly where the film is patchy. On lightened hair, minerals can make the lift slower in some areas and faster in others, which shows up as a patch or a band. Iron and copper in water can contribute to unexpected warmth, especially on porous hair, and the warmth returns faster after each wash. None of this means the water is dangerous. It means the hair is carrying a coating that changes how the product behaves, and the strand test is the only reliable way to see it.

Ask about the water at every consultation, not only when the hair looks dull. Questions about the source, a borewell, a municipal supply, a building tank, and about a filter or a softener tell you more than a visual inspection. A client who moved house three months ago and now has brassy ends is telling you something about the new water. A client who travels and notices the colour changes in another city is telling you the same thing. Put the answer on the card, because the next visit will meet the same water and the same behaviour. The strand test is the only reliable way to see the difference before the colour is mixed.

Do not diagnose hard water from one symptom. Dullness can come from heat damage, product build-up, or a faded tone. Brassiness can come from the natural underlying pigment, from a lightener that was not toned, or from the water. Use the pattern: if the roughness is even, the shampoo does not lather, the tone turns warm within two weeks, and the client reports scale on the shower head, the water is a strong suspect. Then confirm with a strand test and a clarifying wash, and record what changed. The diagnosis is a process, not a guess, and the process protects the client from an unnecessary treatment.

- 1. Ask about the water source at every consultation: municipal, borewell, tank, filter, or softener.

- 2. Look for even roughness, poor lather, dull mid-lengths, and fast-returning warmth as a cluster of signs.
- 3. Expect minerals to interfere with deposit, lift, and tone, especially on porous or lightened hair.
- 4. Strand test before drawing a conclusion, because dullness and brassiness have several causes.
- 5. Record the water source on the card beside the formula and the porosity reading.
- 6. Do not promise that a salon treatment will permanently remove minerals from the client's home water.
- 7. Recommend a filter or softener as a home measure, not as a substitute for salon care.
- 8. Recheck the hair at the next visit, because the same water will produce the same pattern.

Salon example

Preeti moved to a new flat four months ago and comes in because her level seven ash blonde has turned warm and dull at the mid-length. She has not changed her shampoo or her heat routine, and the root is still cool. The ends feel rough and the shampoo in the salon does not lather well on the first wash. I ask about the water, and she mentions that the new building uses a borewell supply and that the shower head has white scale. The pattern fits. I clarify the mid-length with the manufacturer's clarifying shampoo, rinse thoroughly, and strand test a small ash toner. The toner takes evenly after the clarify, where it would have grabbed patchily before. I tone the mid-length, explain that the water will do the same thing again in a few weeks, and recommend a shower filter and a weekly clarifying wash per the brand. She books a gloss at four weeks. She also asks whether a filter will fix the colour permanently, and I explain that it reduces the problem but the water still arrives, so the clarifying wash and the gloss remain part of the rhythm.

CAUTION

Do not assume every brassy result is a bad formula. A water source that leaves scale on the shower head is leaving a film on the hair too.

Clarifying in the salon

Clarify in the salon before the colour when the hair feels rough, coated, or unusually resistant. Use a clarifying or chelating shampoo from a professional line, and follow the manufacturer's directions for dilution, dwell time, and rinsing. The point is to remove product residue and mineral film so the colour can reach the cuticle evenly. Clarifying is not a scrub with household detergent, and it is not a substitute for a diagnosis. It is a controlled step with a before and after: you assess the hair, clarify, rinse, assess again, and then decide whether the colour can proceed. If the hair still feels coated after a proper clarify, do not lighten it that day.

The technique is simple but the details matter. Wet the hair thoroughly, apply the clarifying shampoo to the mid-length and ends first, then the scalp, and massage gently with the pads of the fingers. Leave it for the time the manufacturer specifies, then rinse until the water runs clear. Some lines recommend a second application for heavy build-up, and some recommend a chelating product for

mineral removal; follow the line's instructions rather than combining products. Do not scrub an inflamed or broken scalp, and do not use a clarifying shampoo on a scalp that is already tender from a recent colour. If the scalp is irritated, the colour waits.

Do not over-clarify. A clarifying shampoo strips surface tone as well as residue, so using it every week on coloured hair will fade the colour faster than the client's normal wash. It can also dry the scalp and the ends, especially in winter or in a dry climate. The right rhythm is usually once a week at home if the water is hard, or before a colour in the salon, not every day. A client who clarifies daily and then complains that the colour fades has found the cause. Explain the difference between a clarifying wash and a colour-safe wash, and write the recommendation on the slip.

After a clarify, re-moisturise. Use a conditioner or mask on the mid-length and ends as the brand directs, because the cuticle has been opened and the hair needs lubrication before it is coloured. If the plan includes lightener, check with the manufacturer whether a clarify immediately before lightening is recommended, because some lines advise a waiting period. Record what was clarified, which product was used, how long it stayed on, and how the hair responded. That record tells you whether the next visit needs the same step, a stronger one, or none at all. Clarifying is a tool, not a ritual, and the record keeps it a tool.

- 1. Clarify before colour when the hair feels rough, coated, or resistant, or when the client reports hard water.
- 2. Use a professional clarifying or chelating shampoo and follow the manufacturer's dwell time.
- 3. Apply to mid-length and ends first, then the scalp, and massage with the fingertips, not the nails.
- 4. Rinse until the water runs clear, and repeat only if the product's instructions allow a second wash.
- 5. Do not clarify an inflamed, broken, or recently coloured scalp.
- 6. Do not clarify daily or every wash, because it strips tone and dries the ends.
- 7. Condition or mask after clarifying, before the colour, as the brand directs.
- 8. Record the product, dwell time, and result, and recheck the hair before you decide to lighten.

Salon example

Maya has a level six base that has been coloured at home for a year, and she wants a level seven cool brown. Her mid-length feels waxy and the colour she used last time has left a dull film. The shampoo in the salon struggles to lather on the first wash. I clarify with the manufacturer's clarifying shampoo, leave it for the stated time, and rinse until the water runs clear. The hair feels lighter and rougher, which is expected. I apply a light conditioner, rinse, dry, and strand test the target formula. Without the clarify, the test would have sat on the film and gone patchy. With it, the colour takes evenly and the tone is clean. I recommend a weekly clarifying wash at home with the same professional product and a colour-safe shampoo on the other days, and I book her retouch at five weeks. The clarify added ten minutes and saved the colour. She also asks whether she should clarify before every colour, and I explain that the answer depends on the water and the build-up, and that the strand test at each visit is the guide.

CAUTION

Do not use dish soap, baking soda, or a strong household detergent as a clarifier. It damages the cuticle and leaves the hair unpredictable for colour.

Manufacturer products only

Hard water advice attracts home remedies, and most of them are a bad idea. Lemon juice, vinegar, and baking soda are the three most common, and each changes the pH of the hair and the scalp in ways that are hard to predict. Lemon juice is acidic and can lighten or irritate, vinegar can leave a smell and a temporary surface change, and baking soda is alkaline and abrasive. None of them is a chelating treatment, and none of them belongs in a colour service. If a client has been using one of these at home, ask how often and stop it before the next colour, because the hair's behaviour will be different.

Use the manufacturer's product for the job. A professional clarifying shampoo removes product residue, and a chelating shampoo or treatment is formulated to bind minerals. They are not the same product, and the label tells you which one you are holding. Follow the dwell time, the dilution if any, and the rinse instructions exactly. Do not mix a chelating product with a colour or a lightener unless the manufacturer's instructions say so. Do not add a chelating product to a bowl to make the colour work harder. The chemistry is designed as a system, and improvising inside the system is how a predictable service becomes an unpredictable one.

At home, the useful measures are boring and effective. A shower filter reduces some sediment and chlorine, and a water softener treats the whole supply, though neither removes every mineral. A weekly clarifying wash with a professional product, used as directed, keeps the film from building up. A colour-safe shampoo on the other days protects the tone. A client should not expect a filter to make hard water soft, and should not expect a single chelating treatment to last forever. The water keeps arriving, so the maintenance keeps going. Say that plainly, because a client who expects a permanent fix will be disappointed by the truth.

Record the water advice and the products recommended on the card, and recheck at the next visit. If the client bought a filter and the hair behaves differently, note it. If the client ignored the advice, note that too, without judgement. The strand test at the next visit will show whether the water is still interfering. If it is, adjust the formula and the timing rather than promising a different result from the same conditions. The professional position is simple: use the manufacturer's products, follow the instructions, and do not invent a recipe. That position is defensible, repeatable, and safe.

- 1. Do not recommend lemon juice, vinegar, or baking soda as a chelating or clarifying treatment.
- 2. Use a professional clarifying shampoo for residue and a chelating product for minerals, as labelled.
- 3. Follow the manufacturer's dwell time, dilution, and rinse instructions exactly.
- 4. Never mix a chelating product into a colour or lightener bowl unless the manufacturer says so.
- 5. Recommend a shower filter or softener as a home measure, not as a permanent cure.
- 6. Advise a weekly clarifying wash only if the brand's product is designed for that frequency.

- 7. Record the products recommended and the client's water situation on the card.
- 8. Strand test at the next visit, because the water will still be there and the hair will behave the same way.

Salon example

Anita has been rinsing her hair with lemon juice once a week because a friend told her it removes hard water. Her hair is a level five brown with a dry, rough mid-length and a scalp that stings when she applies the lemon. She wants a gloss to fix the dullness. I explain that the lemon is acidic, that it is not a chelating treatment, and that it is likely contributing to the dryness and the scalp irritation. I do not colour her that day, because the scalp is sensitive. I recommend the manufacturer's chelating shampoo, used once a week for four weeks as directed, and a colour-safe shampoo in between. I ask her to stop the lemon immediately. At the next visit the scalp is calm and the hair is less rough, and the gloss takes evenly. The fix was not a stronger product; it was the right product used as instructed. She also asks whether she can use the chelating shampoo on the same day as a colour, and I explain that the label decides, and that the safe answer is to follow the manufacturer rather than invent a schedule.

CAUTION

Do not give a client a homemade chelating recipe. Lemon, vinegar, and baking soda can damage the cuticle and change how the next colour behaves.

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Glossary

Level

The depth of a hair colour on a scale from one, black, to ten, lightest blonde.

Tone

The warmth or coolness within a level, such as gold, ash, or copper.

Undertone

The pigment revealed when natural colour is lifted or when a colour fades.

Developer

Hydrogen peroxide mixed with colour to activate it and open the cuticle.

Volume

The stated strength of a developer, which controls lift and deposit speed.

Lift

The number of levels the natural or artificial pigment is raised.

Deposit

Colour added to the hair without raising the level.

Porosity

How readily the hair absorbs and releases moisture and colour.

Elasticity

How far a wet strand stretches and returns; a sign of structural health.

Patch test

A small skin application used to check for an allergic reaction before colouring.

Strand test

A test on a section of the client's hair to check lift, timing, and tone.

PPD

Paraphenylenediamine, a dye intermediate linked to allergic reactions.

Lightener

A product that removes pigment and raises the level, also called bleach.

Toner

A deposit-only colour used to adjust tone after lightening.

Balayage

Freehand lightening painted where light would naturally fall.

Foilyage

Lightening enclosed in foil for more lift and control than freehand painting.

Root smudge

A deeper shade blended into the regrowth to soften the colour line.

Gloss

A gentle deposit service that adds shine and tone without lift.

Repigment

Replacing warm underlying pigment before applying a target shade.

Refill

Restoring lost tone in faded or porous mid-lengths and ends.

Banding

A visible line or darker band left by uneven or overlapping application.

Overlap

Product applied over hair that has already been processed.

Semi-permanent colour

A direct dye with no developer that adds tone and shine but cannot lift or cover grey solidly.

Demi-permanent colour

A low-volume oxidative colour that deposits tone with little or no lift and fades over many washes.

Oxidative colour

Colour mixed with a developer, which opens the cuticle and can lift as well as deposit.

Chelating shampoo

A shampoo formulated to bind and remove mineral film, used as the manufacturer directs.

Hard water

Water with dissolved minerals, mainly calcium and magnesium, that leaves a film on hair and can affect colour.

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