

NANDU NAI LEARNING

Hair Stylist

Salon textbook

English

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This book teaches the judgement behind a good haircut, not a set of formulas. It follows the order of a real appointment: talk, look, plan, cut, finish and hand over. Every chapter assumes an Indian salon where clients often want to keep length, control frizz and leave with a shape that still works at home.

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Consultation: Hair, Scalp and Daily Life



Density, texture and porosity

Density is the number of hairs growing on one square centimetre of scalp, not the thickness of a single hair. Gather the hair into a ponytail at the crown and measure the circumference: under about five centimetres is sparse, five to eight is medium, and over eight is dense. Then part the hair in three places, at the centre, the side and the nape, and look at how much pale scalp shows. A wide, obvious parting means low density even if the ponytail feels thick, because hair can be coarse and still be thin on the head. Density tells you how much weight you may remove and whether a short layer will expose skin.

Texture is the diameter of one strand. Roll a single dry hair between thumb and forefinger and compare it with a sewing thread. Fine hair disappears against the skin, medium has a little body, and coarse hair feels like thread and springs back when you bend it. Texture decides the tool and the layer length. Fine hair shows every cut line, collapses under stacked graduation and looks thinner after aggressive texturising. Coarse hair carries its own volume, hides small mistakes, and turns into a helmet under a short blunt line. Mixed texture, coarse on top and fine underneath, needs the top cut longer so the heavy layer does not sit like a shelf.

Porosity is the condition of the cuticle, the outer scales of the hair. Spray water on a dry section and watch: if the droplets bead and sit, porosity is low; if the water vanishes in seconds, porosity is high. High porosity hair dries fast, frizzes in humidity and grabs too much product, so it needs sharp shears, no razor and a heavier leave-in on the ends only. Low porosity hair repels water, takes longer to dry and can look greasy under heavy product, so it needs tension in the blow-dry and a light finish. Normal porosity sits between the two and gives you the widest choice of finish.

Run these three checks in one pass, with the hair dry, before you wet a single section. Read density first because it limits weight removal, then texture because it limits the tool, then porosity because it limits the finish. Say the result out loud in plain words: 'Your hair is fine, medium density and a little porous at the ends.' Write all three on the client card with the date. At the next visit, repeat the checks instead of trusting the note, because density and porosity change with season, colour, heat and health. The plan you build from these three numbers is the plan the whole appointment follows.

- Part the hair at the centre, the side and the nape; note how much scalp shows at each line.
- Measure the ponytail: under 5 cm sparse, 5 to 8 cm medium, over 8 cm dense.
- Roll one dry strand root to tip; fine feels invisible, coarse feels like thread.
- Check density again at the temples and the crown, because it is rarely even across the head.

- Spray water on one section: beads mean low porosity, instant soaking means high porosity.
- Write density, texture, porosity and the site of any thin patch on the card before wetting.
- Choose weight removal from the result: a solid perimeter for sparse hair, internal layers for dense hair.
- Repeat the three checks at the next visit and compare, rather than cutting from memory.

Salon example: Ritika's fine hair and the stacked bob

Ritika, a bank clerk in her late twenties, brings a photo of a chin bob with a stacked back and asks for the same shape. Her hair is freshly straightened and looks full in the picture. In the chair, the ponytail measures four and a half centimetres, the centre parting shows a wide strip of scalp, and one strand rolls like silk between my fingers. She has been flat-ironing at 200 C every morning, so the ends are porous and rough. The stacked back in the photo depends on density she does not have. I show her the parting in daylight and explain that graduation at the crown would open a pale gap within a week. We agree on a blunt chin-length bob, a soft point cut on the last two centimetres only, no razor and no thinning. I dry it with a nozzle and a light serum, and the line reads full because it is solid. She books eight weeks ahead and agrees to drop the iron to twice a week. At the follow-up the line still reads full, and she has kept the iron at twice a week.

CAUTION

If the ponytail is under five centimetres, do not cut short face-framing layers above the cheekbone, however well the photo suits the client. Show her the parting in daylight and offer a long layer instead.

Elasticity and growth pattern

Elasticity is the hair's ability to stretch when wet and return to its original length. Take one strand at the nape, hold it between thumb and forefinger and stretch gently. Healthy hair extends about thirty percent and springs back with a slight snap. Hair that stays stretched has weak bonds and will not hold a shape; hair that snaps before it reaches twenty percent is fragile, and hair that feels gummy is already compromised. This check decides whether you are allowed to layer, texturise or use a razor at all. It also decides whether a colour, a relaxer or a straightening service can share the same day. Weak elasticity means dust the ends, cut only what must go and plan repair.

Growth pattern is the direction the hair leaves the scalp, and it is stronger than any shape you draw. At the nape, hair often grows down and out, so a short nape line kicks away from the neck. At the crown, hair may grow forward, so a short crown layer stands up. At the temples, hair may sweep forward, so a face frame flips outward instead of sitting flat. Part the hair against its natural direction and watch how quickly it falls back. The direction that wins is the direction you cut with. Fighting it costs the client three weeks of styling and costs you the repeat visit.

A cowlick is a patch that grows in a different direction, most often at the front hairline, the crown or the nape. If the client has a front cowlick, cut the fringe dry where it sits, leave one to two centimetres

more than the target and check after drying. A whorl is a spiral at the crown; one whorl is easy to cut around, two whorls leave a ridge between them that stands up unless you keep weight there, and a whorl close to the front means a short fringe will separate. Note the number of whorls and the direction of the turn on the card. These are permanent features, not faults, and the client should hear that from you once.

Before you section, wet the nape, the crown and the temples and run the checks in that order. Mark the lengths you plan for each zone on the card: nape, crown, sides and fringe. If the crown has two whorls, keep the crown layer long enough to lie down, even when the client asks for a short top. If the temple growth runs forward, cut the face frame longer and use the flip as part of the design. Tell the client what you found in one sentence, without drama. After the cut is dry, check the same three zones again, because wet hair hides the direction that dry hair reveals.

- Wet one strand at the nape and stretch it slowly to about thirty percent of its length.
- Release it: a spring back is healthy, a strand that stays stretched means no layers and no razor.
- If it snaps before twenty percent, dust the ends only and book no chemical service for the same day.
- Check the nape direction, the crown whorl and the temple growth with the hair dry.
- Part against the growth pattern once, watch the fall, and then cut with the pattern.
- Leave 1 to 2 cm extra on a front cowlick and refine it after the hair is dry.
- Write the planned length for the nape, crown, sides and fringe on the card in centimetres.
- Recheck all three zones after drying, before you call the client to the mirror.

Salon example: Farah's double whorl and a short request

Farah, a physiotherapist in her forties, asks for a short pixie with the crown standing up. She has coloured her hair every eight weeks for three years and the mid-lengths feel rough. The wet strand at her nape stretches and stays stretched, then breaks when I release it gently. At the crown I find two whorls turning in opposite directions, with a narrow ridge between them. A pixie would leave that ridge as a bald-looking line and the weak bonds would not carry short layers. I explain both findings and offer a softer shape: six centimetres left at the crown, a soft side fringe, the sides cut to the jaw and the ends dusted. She accepts because she can see the ridge in the mirror. We skip the colour that day, book a bond repair and a review in six weeks. She returns with stronger hair and takes the shorter shape then. The shorter shape is still on the table for next season, once the bonds have recovered and the crown has grown out a little. She also buys the wide-tooth comb I used, because detangling wet hair gently is half the repair.

CAUTION

If the wet strand stays stretched or snaps before twenty percent, do not book a colour, a relaxer or a razor cut on the same day. Dust the ends, recommend bond repair and rebook the shape.

Lifestyle, expectation and the agreement

A haircut has to work on a Tuesday, not only under salon lights. Ask how many minutes the client spends on the hair before leaving the house, whether a helmet or dupatta flattens it for an hour a day, how often they swim, and whether they work night shifts. A nurse who leaves at six will not use a round brush, and a two-wheeler commuter will not keep volume at the crown under a helmet. Ask about weddings and events in the next two months, because a cut should land ten to fourteen days before a big date, not the day before. These answers decide where weight can sit and how short a fringe may be.

Home habit matters as much as home time. Ask how often the client washes, whether oil is left overnight, which heat tool they own and at what temperature they use it, and whether they own a dryer with a nozzle. Daily washing with a strong shampoo keeps the scalp clean but dries the ends. Weekly washing lets product build up, so the salon blow-dry needs a clarifying wash first. A straightener above 200 C every morning means the mid-lengths are already damaged and should not be texturised. Heavy oil is not a heat protectant and it holds dust, so a client who oils overnight needs two washes before a sleek finish.

Expectation is where most disappointments start. Look at two or three reference photos together and name what can be reproduced and what cannot: the light, the density, the natural texture, the editing, the styling in the picture. Show the planned length with a comb against the shoulder or the jaw, in centimetres, not with a vague gesture. Say what the fringe will do when it dries and how the shape will look after a wash at home. Then ask the client to repeat the plan back in their own words. If the repeat is wrong, the agreement is not finished. Correct it before you pick up the shears.

Close the consultation with one sentence that both of you can remember: 'Collarbone length, long layers, curtain fringe, blow-dry.' Write that sentence on the card, with the products you used, the length you removed in centimetres and the rebook interval. A client who cannot repeat the sentence has not agreed to a shape, only to a mood. If the client wants three changes at once, choose the one that serves the hair and delay the others. The agreement is not paperwork; it is the thing you will be judged against when the hair is dry and the mirror turns around.

- Ask for the morning styling minutes, not for a general preference.
- Ask how many hours a day a helmet, dupatta or tight ponytail presses on the hair.
- Ask the wash interval, the oil habit and the heat tool temperature.
- Ask about weddings or events in the next eight weeks and move the cut 10 to 14 days earlier.
- Show the planned length in centimetres with a comb at the shoulder, jaw or cheekbone.
- Name two things the reference photo cannot promise on this head.
- Ask the client to repeat the plan back in one sentence.
- Write the sentence, the products, the length removed and the rebook weeks on the card.

Salon example: Sneha's eight minutes

Sneha runs a small catering business and has two children under ten. She sits down with coarse, wavy hair that has been oiled the night before and asks for a sleek collarbone cut with a blunt fringe. She washes twice a week, owns no dryer, and spends eight minutes on her hair in the morning. A blunt fringe on coarse wavy hair will lift and part without daily styling, and the sleek finish in her photo needs a round brush she will not use. I wash twice, condition the mid-lengths, and show her the natural wave after blotting. We agree on collarbone length, long invisible layers and a soft U-shaped perimeter, with no fringe. The shape looks deliberate when it dries on its own. She repeats the plan back correctly, and I write 'no fringe, air-dry, 10 weeks' on the card. She rebooks before Ramadan, when her mornings get shorter. She messages after the first wash at home to say the shape fell into place without a brush, and that the ends no longer look dry. That message is the real test of a low-maintenance cut, and it is the reason I write the routine on the card.

CAUTION

If the client has eight minutes and no dryer, do not cut a shape that only looks finished after a round brush. Show the air-dried version before the first cut or change the plan.

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Hair and Scalp: What You Can See



At the basin: a calm, close look

The basin is the only place where you see the scalp at working distance, in good light, with the hair parted section by section. Before the cape goes on, sit the client facing the mirror and part the hair into four: centre, left, right and nape. Use a fine comb and your fingers, not a brush, because a brush drags loose hair across the part and hides what you need to see. Look at the scalp colour, the density at each part, the hairline, the crown, the ears and the nape. This takes about sixty seconds and it changes what you are willing to do with the cut.

Note what is normal for this head before you note what is wrong. A pale scalp with visible fine vessels is normal, and so is a slightly red line where the hair has been tied tightly. What matters is change: a patch that is redder than the rest, a ring of scale around the hairline, a thinning spot at the crown, broken hairs along the front, or a hairline that has moved back since the last visit. Compare left with right and front with back. One-sided redness or one-sided thinning is a reason to slow down and ask questions, because it points to a habit, a tool or a condition rather than to the haircut.

What you see changes the cut in practical ways. If the hairline is inflamed, do not cut a tight fringe or pull the hair back for sectioning; leave softness at the edge and keep tension low. If the crown is thin, do not cut short layers there or the scalp will show under the salon light and in daylight. If the nape has broken hairs from a chain or a collar, leave length at the nape and avoid a clipper line that ends on the breakage. If the part is widening, keep the perimeter solid and move weight to the ends. The cut can hide a lot, but it cannot hide an angry scalp, and it should not try.

Do the close look with the client's consent and with clean hands. Say what you are doing: 'I am going to part your hair in four and look at the scalp before we wash.' If you find something, describe the appearance, not a diagnosis. Use words like redness, scale, a thin patch or broken hairs, and ask how long it has been there. Write the location and the appearance on the card with the date. If the client is embarrassed, keep your voice low, keep your hands gentle and move on to the service only when the scalp allows it. A calm basin check is a professional habit, not an inspection.

- Ask permission, then part the dry hair into four sections with a fine comb.
- Look at the scalp colour at each part and compare left with right.
- Check the front hairline, the temples, the crown, behind the ears and the nape.
- Note broken hairs, a widening part, a thin patch, scale, redness or tenderness.
- Ask how long the change has been there and whether it itches, hurts or bleeds.

- Describe what you see in plain words and avoid naming a condition.
- Write the location, appearance and date on the client card.
- Adjust tension, fringe length and crown layers before you wet the hair.

Salon example: Anita's widened part

Anita, a school principal in her fifties, comes for her usual shoulder-length cut and a root touch-up. She has been tying her hair into a tight bun for years because of the school dress code. At the basin I part the hair in four and see that the centre part is almost two centimetres wide, with fine broken hairs along the front hairline and mild redness at the temples. The rest of the scalp looks calm and the density at the nape is normal. I show her the part in the mirror and ask how long it has been widening. She says about a year, and that the bun feels tighter lately. I do not colour that day. I cut a soft face frame that covers the temples, keep the perimeter solid at the ends, and show her a loose low tie with a covered band. I write the measurements on the card and suggest a dermatologist if the widening continues. She returns in eight weeks with less breakage and a part that has not widened further. She also moves her parting a centimetre to the left, away from the thin line.

CAUTION

If you see a sudden thin patch, a part that has widened quickly, or a scalp that is red and tender, do not design a cut to cover it and do not colour. Refer to a dermatologist and record the date.

Flaking, itching and tenderness

Flaking is common and most of it is ordinary. Small white flakes that appear in winter, worsen with a missed wash and improve after shampooing usually point to a dry or mildly irritated scalp. Flakes that are thick, yellow, greasy and stuck to the scalp, or patches of silvery scale with redness, are a different picture. So is itching that comes with redness, a burning feeling, weeping spots, or hair coming out in clumps. You are not there to name the condition. You are there to notice the pattern, ask three questions and decide whether the service can go ahead. The pattern, not the word, is your guide.

Three questions do most of the work. First: how long has it been like this, and is it getting worse? Second: does it itch, hurt, bleed or weep? Third: has the client used anything new, including a medicated shampoo, a home remedy, a colour or an oil? A flake that has been stable for years and improves with washing is one situation. A scalp that has become red, warm and tender over a week is another. If the client has been scratching, look for broken skin and small scabs, because shampoo and colour will sting and the cut will be uncomfortable. Do not pick at a flake to see what is underneath.

The service changes as soon as the scalp is tender. No hot towel, no scalp massage, no scrub, no strong shampoo and no chemical service. Keep water lukewarm, apply shampoo with fingertips only and rinse quickly. Do not pull the hair tight for sectioning, and do not cut a fringe that sits on an inflamed forehead. If the tenderness is at the hairline, leave soft hair around it and avoid a clipper line that ends on the redness. If the scalp is weeping or has open spots, stop. A haircut can wait a week; an

infection does not. The client may push for the appointment because of an event, and your answer is still the same.

Say what you see without alarm. 'There is redness and some scale near your hairline, and it looks sore. I can cut the length today, but I will not shampoo or scrub the scalp, and I would like you to show this to a dermatologist.' Then offer a clear next step: a dry cut, a rebook date, and a note on the card. Do not recommend a medicated product by name, do not promise a cure, and do not suggest a home acid mix. If the client refuses to see a doctor, you may still cut the hair, but only if there is no weeping, no open skin and no sign of something spreading. Record what you advised.

- Look at the flakes under good light and note the colour, thickness and where they sit.
- Ask how long it has been present and whether it is improving or spreading.
- Ask about itch, pain, bleeding and weeping, not only about appearance.
- Check for broken skin or scabs from scratching at the hairline and behind the ears.
- Stop the service if the scalp is weeping, open or too tender to touch.
- Skip hot towels, scrub, strong shampoo, massage and colour on a tender scalp.
- Refer to a dermatologist in plain words and write the advice on the card.
- Clean the basin, tools, towels and cape before the next client.

Salon example: Imran's sore hairline

Imran, a delivery supervisor, comes in on a Saturday for a short fade before his cousin's wedding. He mentions that his scalp has been itchy for two weeks and that he scratched it in his sleep. Under the light I see a band of redness along the front hairline, greasy yellow flakes near the temples, and two small scabs where he has scratched. The scalp is warm and tender when I part it. I stop before the cape and explain what I see. He asks me to cut anyway because the wedding is on Sunday. I offer a dry scissor cut of two centimetres off the length, with no clipper line at the hairline and no shampoo. He accepts. I keep the front soft, avoid the scabs and finish with a cool dry. I write the referral on the card and ask him to see a dermatologist before the next cut. He returns three weeks later with a calmer scalp and takes the fade then. The wedding photos show no clipper line and no redness, and he keeps the referral slip in his wallet. He says the itching stopped in the first week of treatment.

CAUTION

If the flakes are thick and yellow, or the scalp is red, warm, weeping or tender, do not scrub, do not apply a strong shampoo and do not cut with a clipper at the hairline. Refer and record.

Referral, record and hygiene

A referral is a service, not a rejection. Learn four sentences and use them in the same order: what you see, what you will not do today, who can help, and when you will be ready to continue. 'I see a red, scaly patch at your crown. I am not going to colour or scrub today because the skin is inflamed. A dermatologist can tell you what it is. Come back when they say it is fine, and I will finish the shape.'

Say it once, slowly, and give the client time to ask. Do not add a diagnosis, a product name or a warning about hair loss. The goal is a calm client who knows exactly what happens next.

The record protects the client and the salon. Write the date, the location, the appearance, what you advised and what service you did or declined. Use neutral words: redness, scale, thin patch, broken hairs, tenderness. Note the products used and any reaction, the length removed and the plan. If the client declines the referral, write that too, in their words if possible. A card that says 'client declined referral' is honest; a card that says 'scalp bad' is not. Keep the card where the client's other records are kept, and read it before the next service. The next stylist should not have to guess.

Hygiene starts with hands and continues through every surface the head has touched. Wash hands before and after the basin check and before and after the cut. Use a fresh towel for each client, a clean cape, and a basin that has been rinsed and disinfected. Combs, clips and shears go into the disinfectant after every client, not at the end of the day. Clipper blades are cleaned and oiled, and guards are washed. If you see flaking, do not share a brush, and do not put the salon brush back into the drawer. If you suspect lice or a fungal infection, seal the towel and cape separately and follow the salon's cleaning rule before the next client.

Know when to stop completely. Active scalp infection, ringworm, impetigo, lice, weeping patches or a scalp that is too sore to touch are all reasons to refuse the service and refer. Name what you see plainly, give the referral in writing if the client is reading it, and offer a date after clearance. Clean the station and the tools before you seat anyone else. Do not cut around a suspicious patch to save the appointment, and do not let a colleague use the same clipper. A refused appointment costs one slot. A spread infection costs the salon its reputation and a client her hair. The rule is simple: when in doubt, do not cut.

- Use four sentences: what you see, what you will not do, who can help, when to return.
- Give the referral without naming a condition or a medicated product.
- Write the date, location, appearance, advice and the service you declined.
- Record any product reaction and the products used in the service.
- Wash hands before and after the basin check and the cut.
- Use a fresh towel and cape, and disinfect the basin after every client.
- Put combs, clips and shears in disinfectant after each client, not at closing.
- Seal and wash towels and capes separately if lice or a fungal infection is suspected.

Salon example: the walk-in with a patch

A walk-in client, Mr Rao, asks for a head shave on a Sunday afternoon. He has a round, scaly patch at the back of his head that he has been covering with longer hair. The patch has a raised edge, the skin inside looks pink and a few hairs are broken at the surface. I do not touch it with a comb. I tell him what I see, that I will not shave over it, and that a doctor should look at it before anyone puts a blade on that skin. He is embarrassed and a little angry because he has a family function. I offer a dry trim of the length around the patch with scissors, keeping two centimetres away from the edge, and no clipper. He accepts. I write the referral and the service on his card. Two weeks later he calls to say the doctor has treated it and asks when he can come back. I book him after the course is finished, and I use fresh towels and a disinfected clipper. I keep a note that the clipper was disinfected and the linen bagged, in case the doctor asks.

CAUTION

If you suspect ringworm, impetigo, lice or an active infection, refuse the service, refer, and disinfect every surface and tool the client touched before the next person sits down.

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Shampoo, Scalp and Conditioner



Shampoo choice by scalp

Shampoo is for the scalp; conditioner is for the lengths. That one sentence prevents most of the confusion at the basin. The scalp produces oil, collects dust, holds sweat and carries the residue of styling products, so it is the part that needs cleansing. The ends are older hair with a worn cuticle and no oil supply of their own, so they need conditioning and gentle handling. Choose the shampoo by what the scalp is doing, not by the label on the front of the bottle. A dry scalp and an oily scalp need different products even when both clients have the same hair length and the same haircut.

Read the scalp at the basin before you choose. Oily scalp: the roots look dark and separated, the client washes daily, and the hair smells of oil by evening. Dry scalp: fine white flakes, tightness after washing, and roots that feel rough rather than slick. Product-heavy scalp: a waxy film at the roots, often from oil, gel or dry shampoo used for several days. Sensitive scalp: redness or tenderness, which means no fragrance-heavy product, no scrub and no hot water. Normal scalp: no film, no flakes, comfortable between washes. Match the product to that picture and use the mildest option that cleans the scalp without stripping it.

The choice changes the cut more than it seems. A clean scalp lets you see density, the parting, breakage and the hairline, so the consultation is accurate. Residue makes hair look thicker than it is and hides split ends until the first cut section opens. Over-cleansing makes the ends rough, so the shears drag and the line looks dry; the blow-dry then needs more heat and the finish looks dull. A scalp that has not been washed for a week needs a clarifying wash before a blow-dry, or the brush will slide on oil and the set will collapse. If the scalp is sensitive, the whole service gets gentler: lukewarm water, no massage, no strong product.

Run the basin in a fixed order. Ask when the client last washed and whether oil was applied. Look at the roots under the light. Choose the shampoo and say the reason out loud. Wet the hair for twenty to thirty seconds, then apply shampoo to the scalp only, work it with fingertips for about sixty seconds, and rinse for thirty seconds longer than feels necessary. Shampoo a second time only if the roots still feel coated. Blot the hair, apply conditioner from mid-lengths to ends, comb it through with a wide-tooth comb and rinse cool. Write the shampoo and conditioner used on the card, with any reaction, so the next visit starts from knowledge rather than from scratch.

- Ask when the client last washed the hair and whether oil was left overnight.
- Look at the roots under the basin light for film, flakes, redness or oil.
- Choose the shampoo by scalp condition: oily, dry, product-heavy, sensitive or normal.

- Wet the hair for 20 to 30 seconds before applying any shampoo.
- Apply shampoo to the scalp only and work it with fingertips for about 60 seconds.
- Rinse for 30 seconds longer than you think is needed, until the water runs clear.
- Shampoo a second time only when the roots still feel coated after the first rinse.
- Record the shampoo, conditioner and any reaction on the client card.

Salon example: Nisha's oily roots and dry ends

Nisha, a wedding photographer, washes her hair every day because her scalp feels oily by evening, and she oils the ends twice a week. She wants a blunt collarbone cut and a smooth finish for a shoot on Friday. At the basin the roots are dark and separated, the mid-lengths are rough, and there is a faint oil smell. The scalp itself is calm, with no redness or flakes. I choose a shampoo for oily scalp, use it on the scalp only, and rinse for an extra thirty seconds. The first wash lifts the oil; the second is not needed. I apply a light conditioner from the ears down, comb it through, and rinse cool. The cut takes fifty minutes because the hair is dense. The blow-dry holds because the roots are clean and the ends are not overloaded. She repeats the wash routine at home, and I write 'oily scalp, light conditioner, no oil on the scalp' on her card. Two weeks later she sends a picture from the shoot: the cut still has a clean line and the roots are not shiny. She has stopped oiling the scalp and uses the light conditioner only from the ears down.

CAUTION

If the scalp is tender, broken, weeping or covered in thick yellow scale, do not shampoo it, do not scrub it and do not apply a medicated product you were not trained to use. Stop at the basin and refer.

Water temperature, conditioner and hard water

Water temperature is a tool. The comfortable temperature for a scalp is about 37 to 38 C, close to body heat, warm enough to soften oil and open the cuticle slightly without stripping the skin. Hot water feels good in winter and does damage quietly: it removes oil faster than the scalp can replace it, lifts the cuticle, increases frizz and fades colour. Cold water does not clean oil well, but a ten-second cool rinse at the end helps the cuticle lie flat and makes the hair easier to comb. Test the water on the inside of your wrist, not with your hand under the running tap, because the hand adapts faster than the scalp.

Conditioner belongs on the mid-lengths and ends, not on the scalp, unless the product label says otherwise. After shampooing, squeeze the excess water out, apply a small amount from the ears down, and leave it for two to three minutes. Comb it through with a wide-tooth comb while it is still on, so the distribution is even and the tangles release without pulling. Rinse with cooler water until the water no longer feels slippery. Conditioner reduces the friction that breaks wet hair, which makes the cut cleaner and the blow-dry faster. Too much conditioner on low porosity hair leaves a film, makes the roots limp and makes the hair slow to dry, which changes the tension you can build with the brush.

Hard water is common in many Indian cities and it changes how the hair feels. Calcium and magnesium in the water leave a mineral film on the cuticle, so shampoo does not lather well, the hair feels rough or stiff after rinsing, and colour can shift. At the basin, notice whether the shampoo forms a poor lather, whether the hair still feels coated after rinsing, and whether the basin or the tap has white scale. You can confirm the feel with the client: 'Does your hair feel rough even after you wash it at home?' Do not test the water with a laboratory kit in the salon; the feel on the hair is enough for a service decision.

The service response is simple. Use a clarifying shampoo once at the start, not every visit, to remove the mineral and product film. Keep the water lukewarm, because hot water makes the film feel worse. Condition the lengths, then rinse cool. For the blow-dry, use a leave-in or a light serum on the ends and keep the nozzle pointed down the shaft so the cuticle closes. At home, suggest a clarifying wash every two weeks if the water is hard, and a filter on the shower head if the client wants one. Do not recommend a home acid rinse or a strong daily clarifier; both can irritate the scalp. If the hair still feels rough and the scalp itches, refer rather than sell another product.

- Test the water on your inner wrist and keep it at about 37 to 38 C.
- Wet the hair thoroughly for 20 to 30 seconds before shampooing.
- Shampoo the scalp, rinse for 30 seconds, and check the root feel before a second wash.
- Squeeze excess water out before applying conditioner from the ears down.
- Leave the conditioner for 2 to 3 minutes and comb it through with a wide-tooth comb.
- Rinse cool for about 10 seconds at the end to help the cuticle lie flat.
- Use a clarifying shampoo once when the water is hard or the hair is heavily coated.
- Blot with a towel instead of rubbing, and detangle before the first cut.

Salon example: Rohit's new flat and stiff hair

Rohit has moved into a new flat and complains that his hair feels stiff and dull after every wash, even though he uses the same shampoo as before. He wants a short back and sides and a slightly longer top. At the basin the shampoo lathers poorly, the water leaves a faint white ring on the steel, and his hair feels rough after rinsing. The scalp is calm, with no flakes or redness. I use a clarifying shampoo once, rinse for longer than usual, and condition the top only. The difference is immediate: the hair feels softer and the comb passes through without dragging. The men's cut takes thirty-five minutes, and I use scissor-over-comb at the sides rather than a razor, because the ends are still dry. I explain that the water is hard and suggest a clarifying wash every two weeks. He books four weeks ahead and says he will ask his building about a filter. He buys a shower filter the next month and says the difference is small but real. I note the clarifying wash interval on his card so the next stylist does not repeat it too soon.

CAUTION

Do not recommend a daily strong clarifier or a home acid rinse for hard water. If the hair feels rough after every wash and the scalp also itches, refer to a dermatologist instead of selling another product.

When flaking means refer, not scrub

Ordinary flaking is small, dry and white. It sits loosely on the scalp, appears more in winter, gets worse when washing is skipped and improves after a normal shampoo. It does not come with redness, pain, weeping or hair loss. The other picture is different: thick yellow or greasy flakes stuck to the scalp, silvery scale on red patches, a rash that spreads beyond the hairline, tenderness, burning, bleeding from scratching, or hair coming out in small round patches. You do not need to know the name of the condition to see that the second picture is not a shampoo problem. The difference is in the colour, the thickness, the spread and the symptoms.

A tender scalp changes every step of the service. No scrub, no scalp massage, no hot towel, no steamer and no strong shampoo. Water stays lukewarm and the fingers stay flat. Do not pull the hair tight for sectioning, because tension on inflamed skin hurts and can break the hair at the root. Do not cut a fringe that rests on a red forehead, and do not run a clipper line through a patch of scale. Skip colour, bleach and relaxing on the same day. If the client is booked for a chemical service, move it after the scalp has been seen by a doctor. The haircut itself may still be possible, but only with low tension and clean tools.

Stop the service when the scalp is weeping, has open sores, feels hot, or the flakes are thick and spreading. Say what you see and what you will not do. 'There is a red, scaly area at your crown and it looks sore. I am not going to scrub or colour today. Please show it to a dermatologist, and come back when they say it is settled.' Offer a dry trim if the client needs to look tidy for work, keeping the shears away from the affected area. Do not pick at the scale, do not apply a medicated cream and do not cover the patch with a tight style. Write the advice and the date on the card.

The way you speak matters as much as the decision. Clients with scalp problems are often embarrassed and have been told to just wash more. Keep your voice low, describe the skin rather than the person, and avoid words that sound like a verdict. Do not promise that a shampoo will fix it and do not suggest a home remedy with lemon, vinegar or toothpaste. Give one clear next step: see a dermatologist, then rebook. After the client leaves, clean the basin, change the towel and cape, disinfect the comb and clips, and wash your hands. If you suspect lice or a fungal infection, bag the linen and follow the salon's cleaning rule before the next client.

- Look at the flakes under good light and note colour, thickness and whether they sit on red skin.
- Ask how long it has been there and whether it is spreading.
- Ask about itch, pain, burning, bleeding and hair loss, not only about appearance.
- Stop if the scalp is weeping, hot, open or too tender to touch.
- Skip scrub, massage, hot towel, steamer, strong shampoo and colour on a tender scalp.
- Refer to a dermatologist in one clear sentence and avoid naming a condition.
- Offer a dry trim away from the affected area only if the client needs it.
- Disinfect tools, basin and linen, and wash your hands before the next client.

Salon example: Priya's wedding-week flaking

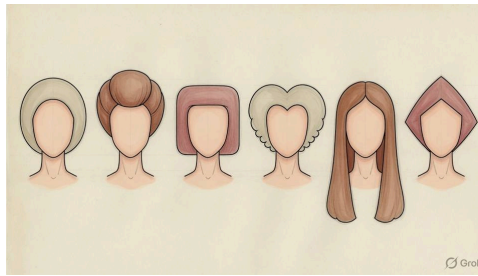
Priya books a wash, blow-dry and trim four days before her sister's wedding. She has been using a medicated shampoo from the pharmacy for a week because the flakes have become worse. At the basin I see thick yellow flakes at the crown, a red patch that extends past the hairline, and a small raw spot where she has scratched. The scalp is warm to the touch and she flinches when I part the hair. I stop before the wash. She is close to tears because of the wedding photos. I explain that I can cut two centimetres off the length dry, with low tension, and blow-dry only the mid-lengths and ends on cool, but I will not wash, scrub or colour the scalp. She accepts. The style looks neat and the scalp is not touched. I write the referral on her card and ask her to see a doctor before the next appointment. She messages two weeks later to say the dermatologist has given her a course and the scalp is calmer. She sends a photo from the wedding with her hair pinned away from the crown, and the scalp is not visible in any of them.

CAUTION

If the flakes are thick, yellow or greasy, or the scalp is red, warm, weeping or tender, do not scrub, do not shampoo with a strong product and do not cut. Refer to a dermatologist and note the date.

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Face Shape and Haircut Design



Proportion before labels

Face shape names are shortcuts, not instructions. Oval, round, square, heart, oblong and diamond describe the outline in a photograph, but a living face changes with weight, age, expression and the angle of the jaw. Two clients with the same label can need different cuts because one has a long neck and the other has a short one, or because one has a wide forehead and the other has a narrow chin. Start with proportion: the width of the forehead, the width of the cheekbones, the width of the jaw and the total length of the face. Compare those four numbers with your fingers or a comb, in the mirror, with the hair tied back.

The useful question is where the face is wider and where it is narrower. If the jaw is the widest point, a cut that ends exactly at the jaw adds a second horizontal line at the widest place. If the forehead is the widest point, volume at the temples makes the top heavier. If the face is long, a centre part with no fringe lengthens it further. If the face is short, a heavy fringe and a blunt chin line shorten it. You are not correcting a fault; you are choosing where the eye should stop and where the silhouette should widen or narrow.

Labels fail at the edges. A round face with a strong jaw is closer to square than to round. A heart-shaped face with a wide jaw is closer to oval. An oblong face with a wide cheekbone is a diamond with length. Use the label only after you have measured, and use it to talk to the client, not to choose the cut. Say 'your jaw is the widest part' instead of 'you have a round face'. The first sentence gives the client something to work with; the second sounds like a verdict and invites an argument about a photograph from ten years ago.

The stylist's procedure is short and repeatable. Tie the hair back, look at the face from the front, the side and a slight three-quarter angle. Measure forehead, cheekbone and jaw width against each other, then measure face length from hairline to chin. Look at the neck, the shoulders and the hairline, because a short neck changes a bob as much as a wide jaw does. Note the result in one line on the card: 'jaw widest, long neck, fine hair.' Then design from that line. The label, if you need one, comes last and never overrides the measurements. A stylist who measures first can defend the plan in the chair; a stylist who labels first argues with the mirror.

- Tie the hair back and look at the face from the front, the side and three-quarter.
- Compare forehead, cheekbone and jaw width with your fingers or a comb.
- Measure face length from the hairline to the chin.
- Note the neck length, shoulder width and hairline shape.

- Find the widest point and the narrowest point before choosing a length.
- Write one line on the card: widest point, face length, neck and hair texture.
- Choose the cut to move weight away from the widest point or to balance it.
- Use a shape label only to explain the plan, never to replace the measurements.

Salon example: Divya's jaw and the chin bob

Divya, a software tester in her early thirties, asks for a chin-length blunt bob because it looks sharp on a colleague. Her hair is medium density and straight, so the cut is possible. With the hair tied back, I measure: her jaw is the widest part of her face, her forehead is narrower, and her face is short rather than long. A blunt line at the chin would sit exactly on the widest point and make the lower face look wider. I show her the line with a comb, then move the length two centimetres below the jaw and soften the front with a long layer that starts at the cheekbone. The back stays solid so the shape still reads as a bob. She is unsure until I hold the comb at both lengths in the mirror. She chooses the longer one. The finished cut narrows the jaw instead of framing it, and she books eight weeks ahead. She also takes a photo of the back, and we put it beside the picture she brought, so the difference in the jaw line is visible to her rather than only to me.

CAUTION

Do not choose a length from a face-shape chart before you have measured the jaw, cheekbone and forehead in the mirror. If the client insists on the chart, show both lengths with a comb and let her see the difference.

Lines, weight and focus

Every haircut is a set of lines. A horizontal line stops the eye: a blunt fringe, a chin-length bob, a straight jaw line. A vertical line carries the eye down: a centre part, long layers, a face frame that falls past the shoulder. A diagonal line moves the eye across the face and softens a corner. The perimeter is the strongest line because it is the edge of the shape, and the layers inside either support it or fight it. Before you cut, decide which line the client will notice first. That line is the focus, and there should be only one.

Weight is where the hair looks and feels heavier. A blunt perimeter puts weight at the ends. Graduation builds weight just above the perimeter. Layers above ninety degrees move weight upward and make the ends lighter. Internal layers remove weight without changing the outline, which is how you keep a solid edge on dense hair. The position of the weight decides whether the shape looks bottom-heavy, top-heavy or balanced. On a jaw that is wide, weight at the jaw doubles the width. On a narrow chin, weight at the chin fills it. On a long face, weight at the cheek adds the width the outline needs.

Focus works with the client's features, not against them. If the eyes are the strongest feature, a fringe or a face frame that ends near the cheekbone brings the eye there. If the mouth is the strongest, a line that stops at the jaw or below lets the eye travel down. If the nose is prominent, a heavy centre

fringe can make it look shorter, while a side-swept fringe moves the eye away. Glasses change the calculation because the frame is already a horizontal line at the eye; a fringe that ends exactly on the frame looks crowded. Look at the client with the glasses on before you decide.

The procedure is to choose one focus, place the weight to support it and check the result from three angles. First, decide the focus with the client in plain words: 'I want the eye to go to your eyes, so the fringe will be soft and the length will fall below the jaw.' Second, mark the perimeter and the shortest layer before cutting. Third, cut the perimeter, then the layers, then the detail. Fourth, dry the hair and look from the front, the side and the back, with the client standing, because a seated mirror hides the back and the nape. If two lines compete, remove one.

- Choose one focus for the cut before you pick up the shears.
- Decide whether the perimeter line will be horizontal, vertical or diagonal.
- Mark the perimeter length in centimetres with a comb.
- Place the weight at the perimeter, above it, or inside the shape.
- Keep the shortest layer away from the widest part of the face.
- Check the fringe and the face frame with the client's glasses on.
- Dry the hair and look from the front, the side and the back.
- Remove one line if two lines compete for attention.

Salon example: Neha's two strong lines

Neha, a news anchor, wants a sharp jaw-length bob with a heavy straight fringe. She has dense, straight hair that holds a line well, so both are technically possible. In the mirror, her jaw is narrow, her cheekbones are wide and her glasses sit low on her nose. A heavy fringe would end on the glasses frame, and the jaw-length line would sit at the narrowest part of her face, leaving the cheekbones as the only strong horizontal. That is two competing lines and a shape that reads wider at the middle. I suggest keeping the blunt line but moving it two centimetres below the jaw, and cutting a softer fringe that stops above the glasses and opens at the centre. She can still pin it for the camera. We dry it and check from the front and the side. The eye now travels down the face instead of stopping at the frame. She takes the softer fringe. She also asks for a small side part instead of the centre part in the photo, because the side part gives the root lift her glasses need. I write both changes on the card.

CAUTION

Do not cut a heavy fringe that ends exactly on the glasses frame or on a strong eyebrow line. Move the line up or down by at least a centimetre, or change the fringe direction.

Fringe, parting and the client's features

A fringe is the most visible part of most haircuts and the part the client touches most. Its width matters as much as its length. A fringe that is too narrow leaves two gaps at the temples; a fringe that is too wide reaches the recession and exposes it. Take the width from the outer corner of one eyebrow

to the outer corner of the other, then add a finger on each side. On a receding hairline, keep the fringe narrower and leave the temple corners soft. On a wide forehead, a wider fringe balances the top. On a small forehead, a heavy fringe crowds the eyes and makes the face look short.

The parting is a design decision, not a habit. A centre part suits a symmetrical face and a strong jaw, but it also draws a vertical line down the nose and can make a long face longer. A side part adds asymmetry and volume at the root, which helps a round face and a fine hairline. A deep side part moves weight to one side and can cover a thin temple. If the client has a cowlick at the front, the part has to sit where the hair wants to fall, or the fringe will lift. Test the part with wet fingers and again after drying; the hair will tell you which side it prefers.

Features decide the details. A short forehead needs a fringe with an opening or a side sweep, not a solid block. A long forehead carries a fuller fringe. A prominent nose is softened by a side-swept fringe that ends near the cheekbone, not by a heavy curtain that frames the nose on both sides. A narrow chin is balanced by a fringe that adds width at the top and a face frame that ends at the jaw. Glasses need a fringe that either sits above the frame or falls well below it. Do not design a fringe from a photo without looking at the client's forehead, brows, glasses and hairline in the mirror.

Cut the fringe last, and cut it dry when the hair is straight or wavy. Wet the fringe only if the hair is very straight and you need a clean line, then leave a two to three millimetre margin, dry it and refine. For curly hair, cut dry, curl by curl, and leave more length than looks right, because the spring will lift it. Show the client the shortest point with a mirror before you take it short, and show how to style it with two fingers and a dryer. A fringe grows about one centimetre a month, so book a trim in three to four weeks and write that on the card.

- Measure the fringe width from the outer brow to the outer brow, plus a finger each side.
- Keep the fringe narrower at a receding hairline and leave the temple corners soft.
- Test the parting wet and again dry, and follow the side the hair prefers.
- Decide where the fringe ends relative to the brows, glasses and cheekbones.
- Cut the fringe after the rest of the shape is finished and dry.
- Leave a 2 to 3 mm margin on straight hair, dry it, then refine.
- Cut curly fringes dry, curl by curl, with extra length for the spring.
- Show the shortest point in the mirror and book a trim in 3 to 4 weeks.

Salon example: Alok's receding temples

Alok, a bank manager in his forties, wants a fringe to cover his forehead because he is self-conscious about his hairline. His hair is medium density with a slight wave, and the temples have receded about two centimetres on each side. A wide, solid fringe would cover the forehead but leave the recession visible at the corners, and the wave would make it part in the middle. I measure from brow to brow and keep the fringe narrower than his natural hairline, with soft diagonal ends that fall toward the temples. I cut it dry, starting two centimetres longer than the target, and check the spring after each pass. He sees the shortest point in the mirror before I refine it. The fringe covers the forehead without pretending the temples are full, and the wave sits as a soft side sweep. I show him how to dry it forward with a small brush and book a trim in four weeks. He also asks about colouring the temples later, and I say the fringe is the cheaper way to cover them for now. He laughs and books the trim.

CAUTION

Do not cut a fringe across a receding temple or a strong front cowlick on the first visit. Cut it dry, keep it longer than the target, and show the client the fall before you refine.

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Tools, Sectioning and Elevation



Shears, comb and clips

The shears are the most important tool in the salon and the one most often used badly. A cutting shear is usually five and a half to six inches long, with a convex or bevel edge. Convex blades slice cleanly through wet or dry hair and suit slide cutting and point cutting. Bevel blades are stronger and suit blunt lines and coarse hair. The tip of the blade is for detail; the whole blade is for lines. A stylist who cuts everything with the tips gets soft perimeters that never look sharp. A stylist who cuts everything with the whole blade cannot point cut. Know which part of the blade you are using before you close your hand.

Keep the shears sharp and clean. A dull blade crushes the hair instead of cutting it, and crushed ends split within a week. Oil the pivot every few days, wipe the blades after every client, and store them closed in a case, not loose in a drawer with combs. Never cut paper, tape, thread or a colleague's hair with your cutting shears; paper dulls the edge faster than hair. If the shears pull rather than glide, they need sharpening. Thinning shears are a separate tool with a separate rule: one pass, then dry and look. They remove more hair than the eye can see and they cannot be undone.

The comb does three jobs: sectioning, tension and control. A fine tail comb parts clean lines and lifts small sections. A cutting comb with fine and wide teeth holds the hair under tension and lets you cut over it. A wide-tooth comb detangles wet, conditioned hair without pulling. Use the comb that matches the job, not the one in your hand. Clips hold the sections without creasing the hair; metal clips with flat jaws are gentler than tight spring clips, and they should never be clamped so hard that they leave a dent in wet hair. A dent becomes a bend in the finished shape, especially on fine hair.

Set the station before the client sits down. Shears closed and on the trolley, comb facing the same way, clips in a clean dish, water spray within reach, towel and cape ready. Wipe the trolley between clients. Put the shears down when you turn to pick up the dryer, and never hold them open while you talk with your hands. A tool that is always in the same place saves minutes across a day and prevents the small accidents that happen when a stylist reaches across a client for a comb. The station is part of the cut: a tidy station produces a tidier line.

- Use a 5.5 to 6 inch cutting shear with a convex or bevel edge for wet and dry cutting.
- Cut lines with the whole blade and detail with the tips, not the other way round.
- Oil the pivot every few days and wipe the blades after every client.
- Store shears closed in a case, never loose in a drawer with combs.
- Never cut paper, tape or thread with cutting shears.

- Use a tail comb for parting, a cutting comb for tension and a wide-tooth comb for wet detangling.
- Clip sections loosely enough to hold without leaving a dent in the hair.
- Set the trolley before the client sits and wipe it between clients.

Salon example: the blunt line that would not sit

A new client, Sana, comes in with a collarbone bob that was cut two weeks earlier at another salon. The line looks soft and uneven at the left side, and the ends feel crushed rather than cut. She says the stylist used thinning shears all over the ends because the hair felt heavy. Her hair is medium density and wavy, so the thinning opened the perimeter and the wave lifted the soft ends. I check my shears on a test strand: they glide. Then I show her the difference between a cut end and a crushed end under the light. I re-cut the perimeter with the whole blade, taking three millimetres, and point cut only the last centimetre at the front. I do not use the thinning shears. The line closes and the wave sits under it. She books eight weeks ahead. I write 'no thinning at the perimeter' on her card so the next stylist does not repeat the mistake. Before she leaves, I show her how to check the line herself with a hand mirror against the back mirror, so she can see the difference at home.

CAUTION

If the shears pull, crush or bend the hair instead of cutting it, stop and sharpen them. Do not finish a client with a dull blade and do not lend your cutting shears to the floor.

Section size, tension and the guide

A section is the group of hair you cut in one go. Its size decides how accurate the cut can be. A section wider than two fingers is too wide for a precise line, because the hair at the back of the section is longer than the hair at the front and the cut averages the two. A section that is too thin wastes time and makes the cut patchy. For most cutting, take subsections about one to two centimetres thick, and keep the base clean with a straight parting. A clean parting gives a clean line; a ragged parting gives a ragged line even with a sharp blade.

Tension is how hard you pull the hair before you cut. Too little tension and the hair moves under the blade, so the line is soft and the two sides do not match. Too much tension and the hair stretches, so the cut is short when it relaxes. On wet hair, use firm, even tension and keep the hair flat against your fingers. On dry hair, use lighter tension because dry hair has less stretch. The tension must be the same on both sides of the head, or one side will be longer. Check by taking the same section on each side and comparing the lengths between your fingers.

The guide is the first section you cut, and every later section follows it. Choose the guide deliberately: the perimeter for a blunt line, the shortest layer for a graduated shape, the centre back for a symmetrical cut. Cut the guide, comb it flat, check it against the plan, and only then take the next section to it. If the guide is wrong, stop and re-cut it before you continue. A mistake in the guide travels around the whole head; a mistake in a later section affects one area. This is why the first cut is the slowest and the most important.

The procedure is the same for most shapes. Part the hair with the natural parting and a clean cross section. Clip the top and the sides out of the way. Start at the back, cut the guide, then work section by section, taking each new section to the guide. Keep the subsection size even and the tension constant. Cross-check both sides by taking the same section on each side, not by trusting the mirror. Dry the hair, check the balance from three angles, then detail. If the client has a strong part, cut with it rather than against it. If the hair is very dense, take smaller sections and more of them; density slows the cut, not the tension.

- Part with the client's natural parting and a clean cross section.
- Clip the top and sides away so only the working section is loose.
- Take subsections 1 to 2 cm thick, no wider than two fingers.
- Keep firm, even tension on wet hair and lighter tension on dry hair.
- Cut the guide first, comb it flat and check it against the plan.
- Take every later section to the guide instead of guessing the length.
- Cross-check both sides with the same section on each side, not with the mirror.
- Dry, check from three angles, then detail the ends.

Salon example: Meena's uneven bob

Meena comes in with a bob that sits higher on the right side. She has dense, straight hair and a strong side part, and the previous cut was done in wide sections. I part the hair where she wears it, clip the top away and start at the nape. The first subsection is two centimetres thick. I cut the guide at collarbone length, comb it flat and check it against the mirror. Then I take each section to the guide with the same tension, moving from the nape to the ears. On the right side, the hair is denser, so I take narrower subsections rather than pulling harder. When I reach the front, I cross-check by taking the same section on both sides and holding the ends together. The right side is four millimetres short. I correct it at the perimeter, not by lifting the layers. The finished line is level, and the part still falls where she wears it. She books eight weeks ahead. She says the bob has never sat this level, and books her daughter for the same day next month.

CAUTION

Do not cut a wide section and average the length with your fingers. If a section is wider than two fingers, re-part it thinner before the blade touches the hair.

Elevation, overdirection and safety

Elevation is the angle at which you hold the hair away from the head before you cut. Zero elevation means the hair is flat against the skin; the cut leaves a solid line. Forty-five degrees builds graduation and weight just above the perimeter. Ninety degrees is horizontal to the head and creates uniform layers. Above ninety degrees, up to one hundred and eighty, removes weight from the ends and creates shorter layers on top. The angle is not a style choice on its own: it decides where the weight sits and how long the top layers will be. Change the angle and you change the shape, even with the same section size.

Overdirection is pulling the hair away from its natural fall before cutting. If you comb the hair from the side to the centre back and cut it there, the section gains length when it falls back into place.

Overdirecting toward the face shortens the back and lengthens the front; overdirecting toward the back does the opposite. Overdirection is useful for keeping length at the front while tightening the back, and for blending a short side into a longer top. It is also the easiest way to make a cut uneven, because the amount of pull is invisible in the finished shape. Use it deliberately and write the direction on the card.

In plain words, elevation is how high you lift, and overdirection is where you pull. Lift the hair flat and you keep weight; lift it up and you remove weight. Pull it forward and the front gets longer; pull it back and the back gets longer. The client does not need the vocabulary, but the client does need the result, so translate: 'I am keeping the weight at the ends and taking the heaviness out from underneath.' When you teach an apprentice, use the same plain words before the technical ones. A stylist who can say what the angle does can correct it on the head.

Safety is part of the technique. Carry shears closed and pointing down, never open in your hand. Do not walk with the tips forward or put shears in a pocket. If a shear falls, let it fall; do not try to catch it. Keep the blade away from the client's ear and neck when you change your grip, and never cut toward your own fingers. Disinfect shears and combs between clients, and keep a separate set for a client with a scalp condition. When you use a clipper, check the guard is locked before you start and keep the cord away from the chair wheels. A cut takes forty-five to seventy-five minutes; a hand injury takes weeks.

- Use zero elevation for a solid perimeter and 45 degrees for graduation.
- Use 90 degrees for uniform layers and above 90 to remove weight from the ends.
- Decide the elevation before you lift the section, not after the cut.
- Overdirect toward the face to keep the front longer and tighten the back.
- Keep the pull consistent across the section, because uneven pull makes an uneven line.
- Say the effect in plain words to the client before you cut.
- Carry shears closed and pointing down, and let a falling shear fall.
- Lock the clipper guard and keep the cord clear of the chair before you start.

Salon example: Ritu's long front, short back

Ritu wants a bob that is short at the back and long enough at the front to tuck behind her ears. Her hair is medium density and straight, with a slight cowlick at the right temple. If I cut every section at zero elevation, the front will be the same length as the back and will not tuck. I section the hair from the centre back, cut the guide at the nape at zero elevation, and then overdirect the side sections toward the face before cutting. That keeps the front about three centimetres longer than the back. I use forty-five degrees at the back to build a little weight above the perimeter. On the right side, the cowlick lifts the temple hair, so I leave that section a centimetre longer and check it dry. The finished shape is short at the nape, longer at the jaw, and tucks cleanly. I write the elevation and the overdirection on the card so the next cut can repeat it. She says she will try the same tuck at home after her next wash.

CAUTION

Never carry open shears across the floor or cut toward your own fingers. If a shear drops, step back and let it fall, then pick it up by the handle with the blade closed.

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Cutting: The Five Core Skills



Blunt cutting: the stable line

A blunt cut is one length with zero elevation and a clean perimeter. The hair is combed flat against the skin, held under even tension, and cut with the whole blade on a straight line. The result is a solid edge that makes fine hair look thicker and gives dense hair a strong outline. Blunt does not mean heavy: a blunt line on fine hair can look full, while the same line on coarse hair can look like a helmet if the hair is cut too short. The line is the foundation of most bobs, one-length cuts and men's perimeters. If the line is soft or uneven, every layer above it looks wrong.

The line changes the cut because it controls the silhouette. A blunt perimeter keeps the widest part of the shape at the ends, so it adds weight low on the face. On a narrow jaw, that weight fills the outline. On a wide jaw, it doubles the width. On fine hair, it makes the ends look denser. On curly hair, a blunt line cut wet will spring up unevenly, so the same length has to be cut in the curl shape rather than on a flat line. The decision is not 'blunt or layered'; it is where the blunt line should sit and whether the hair can carry it.

The technique is simple but unforgiving. Comb the hair down with the natural fall, keep the head upright, and hold the section flat between two fingers. Cut with the whole blade, not the tips, and keep the tension the same from the nape to the front. Do not lift the section to 'see better', because lifting changes the length. Check the line with the comb after every few sections, and cross-check the two sides by bringing them together under the chin. If one side is longer, correct the perimeter before you move on. A blunt line that is two millimetres off is visible in a photo and in the mirror.

Use blunt cutting when the hair is straight or gently wavy, when density is low to medium, and when the client wants a strong shape that survives a wash. Avoid a hard blunt line on very curly hair, on hair with weak elasticity, and on a nape that grows out, because the line will kick. On those heads, cut the same length in the natural fall or leave a soft edge. Finish the line with a light point cut only if the client wants softness; otherwise leave it clean. The blunt line is the reference for the rest of the cut, so protect it while you work and check it again after drying.

- Comb the hair into its natural fall with zero elevation and the head upright.
- Hold the section flat between two fingers with even tension.
- Cut with the whole blade on a straight line, not with the tips.
- Keep the tension the same from the nape to the front.
- Check the line with the comb every few sections.

- Cross-check both sides under the chin before you continue.
- Correct the perimeter before cutting any layers above it.
- Dry the hair and recheck the line from the front and the back.

Salon example: Pooja's one-length cut

Pooja has fine, straight hair that reaches the middle of her back, and she wants a one-length cut at the collarbone. She has been losing hair after an illness and the ends look thin. A layered cut would make the ends look thinner, so a blunt line is the right choice. I part the hair down the centre, comb it flat and cut the back section at zero elevation, using the whole blade. I check the line with the comb, then bring both sides forward under her chin and even them. The hair is delicate, so I use light tension and sharp shears. The cut takes fifty minutes because I work in thin sections. When I dry it, the line looks solid and the ends read fuller than they did wet. I point cut only the last five millimetres at the front so the line is not harsh. She books eight weeks ahead and agrees to a dusting in between. She also asks for a photo of the back line, so her sister can check the length between visits. I send it to her the same evening.

CAUTION

Do not cut a hard blunt line on very curly hair or on a nape that grows outward. Cut the same length in the natural fall, or leave a soft edge, and check it dry before you finish.

Layers and graduation: moving weight

A layer is hair cut at an elevation above zero, so the ends sit at different lengths inside the shape. Graduation is a low elevation, usually forty-five degrees or less, that builds weight just above the perimeter. The two are often confused because both add movement, but they do different jobs. Layers remove weight from the ends and create movement; graduation adds weight at a line and creates volume near the perimeter. A graduated bob feels fuller at the back, while a layered cut feels lighter at the ends. The angle and the section decide which one you get, and the difference is visible from the side, not from the front.

Weight placement is the whole decision. On dense hair, internal layers remove bulk without changing the outline, so the perimeter stays solid and the head feels lighter. On fine hair, short layers remove the little weight there is and make the ends look thin, so keep the layers long and few. On coarse hair, long layers break up the volume, but short layers create a mushroom. On a round face, layers that start at the cheekbone add width where the face is already wide; layers that start below the jaw move the eye down. The shortest layer is the most powerful line in the cut, so place it where you want the eye to go.

The procedure starts with the perimeter, not the layers. Cut the outline first, then decide the elevation for the first layer, then work from the guide. For a graduated shape, cut the perimeter at zero, then take sections at forty-five degrees and build the line gradually. For a layered shape, take the guide at the shortest point and work outward. Keep the sections clean and the tension even. Do not texturise

before the shape is complete, because texturising hides mistakes and removes hair you may need. Dry the hair after the main cut and look at the balance before you detail anything.

Check the balance from the front, the side and the back. A layered cut can look even wet and collapse on one side when dry, especially on wavy hair. If one side is heavier, take a small section and re-cut it to the guide rather than thinning the heavy side. If the crown is too flat, the shortest layer may be too long; if the crown is too round, it may be too short. On fine hair, one extra layer can change the whole shape, so add layers one at a time. On dense hair, remove weight inside the shape and leave the perimeter alone. The test is whether the client can reproduce the shape at home with the routine you gave.

- Cut the perimeter before you cut any layer.
- Choose 45 degrees or lower for graduation and above 90 for movement.
- Place the shortest layer where you want the eye to stop.
- Keep layers long and few on fine hair; remove weight inside on dense hair.
- Work from a clean guide and keep the subsection size even.
- Do not texturise until the shape is complete and dry.
- Re-cut a heavy side to the guide instead of thinning it.
- Dry and check the balance from the front, the side and the back.

Salon example: Ayesha's heavy crown

Ayesha has dense, coarse hair that grows straight down from the crown, and she says her head feels heavy by the end of the day. She wants to keep her shoulder length but lose the bulk. A short layer at the crown would make the top stand up and the ends look thin, so I keep the perimeter solid at the shoulder and cut long internal layers starting at the jaw. I cut the perimeter first at zero elevation, then take sections at ninety degrees inside the shape, removing weight from the inner hair rather than the outline. The sections are two centimetres thick and the tension is firm. After the main cut, I dry the hair and look from the side. The crown still has a flat spot, so I re-cut one section at the back to the guide rather than thinning the top. The shape moves without losing the line, and the head feels lighter. I write 'internal layers only, no thinning at the perimeter' on her card. She shakes her head from side to side, and the shape moves without the crown lifting.

CAUTION

Do not cut short layers at the crown of fine hair or hair with a double whorl. The scalp will show and the shape will collapse within a week; keep the crown layer long enough to lie down.

Point cutting, texturising and the razor rule

Point cutting is cutting small triangles into the ends with the tips of the shears. The blade enters the hair at a slight angle and closes on the ends, not across the section. It softens a hard line, blends two lengths and removes a little weight from the last centimetre. Point cutting is a finish, not a foundation.

If you point cut high into the shape, you create holes that grow out as split ends and make the ends look sparse. The correct depth is the last one to two centimetres on straight hair, and less on fine or damaged hair. The cut should look like a soft edge, not like a series of notches.

Slide cutting uses the length of the blade while the hair is held under tension. The shears open slightly and move down the section, cutting as they travel. It softens weight and blends a line on healthy, medium to coarse hair. On fine, dry or compromised hair, slide cutting removes more than you can see and leaves the ends thin. Thinning shears remove a proportion of the hair in one pass, and the eye cannot judge how much until the hair is dry. The rule for all three tools is the same: one pass, then dry and look. You can always take more; you cannot put it back.

The razor is the least forgiving tool. A razor cuts the hair at an angle and opens the cuticle, which gives a soft, textured edge on coarse, healthy hair. On frizz-prone, fine, porous or curly hair, it raises the surface and turns the ends into a fuzzy halo, especially in humidity. A razor should never be used on hair that is already dry, damaged or gummy, and never close to the scalp. If the client wants a soft edge, point cutting with sharp shears gives most of the effect without the frizz. If you do use a razor, use it on damp hair, with light pressure, and only on the ends.

Texturising is the last step, and it should be the smallest. Dry the shape, look at it from three angles, and decide which area is too heavy. Take one section at a time, point cut or slide cut a small amount, and dry it again. Do not texturise the perimeter of a bob, the crown of fine hair, or the hairline of a client with a cowlick. Do not thin thick, frizz-prone hair with a razor or an aggressive thinner; remove weight with a longer internal layer instead. Keep the perimeter line solid and take the bulk from inside. The client should leave with a shape that still looks intentional after a wash, not with a shape that only works in the salon.

- Point cut only the last 1 to 2 cm of the ends, at a slight angle.
- Use the tips of the shears and close them on the ends, not across the section.
- Do not point cut high into the shape; holes grow out as split ends.
- Slide cut only healthy, medium to coarse hair, with light tension.
- Make one pass with thinning shears, then dry and look before a second.
- Keep the razor off frizz-prone, fine, porous, curly or damaged hair.
- Remove bulk with a longer internal layer, not a hole in the perimeter.
- Finish the detail, dry again, and check from the front, the side and the back.

Salon example: Tanvi's fuzzy ends

Tanvi has thick, wavy hair that she straightens twice a week, and she wants a soft, textured collarbone cut. Her ends are porous and the surface frizzes in humidity. A razor would give the soft edge she likes for a day and a fuzzy halo for a month, so I do not use one. I cut the perimeter blunt at zero elevation, then point cut the last centimetre at the front and sides, working with the wave rather than against it. I use thinning shears on one internal section at the back, one pass, then dry the hair. The ends look softer but still full. I check from the side and decide the left side is slightly heavier, so I point cut two small sections rather than thinning the whole side. The finished shape has movement and no halo. I show her the difference between a cut end and a frayed end, and write 'no razor, point cut only' on her card. She buys the light serum I used on the ends, and I tell her to keep it away from the roots.

CAUTION

Do not use a razor or aggressive thinning shears on frizz-prone, fine, porous or curly hair. The frizz appears within days and cannot be cut out without losing length.

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Fringe: Cutting the Line the Client Sees



Wet then dry: straight hair

On straight hair, a fringe is cut wet for the line and refined dry for the length. Wet hair sits flat and holds tension, so you can see the edge clearly and cut a clean horizontal or diagonal line. Dry hair lifts, separates and changes direction, so a fringe cut exactly to the target while wet ends up a few millimetres short once it dries. The working rule is to leave a two to three millimetre margin, dry the fringe completely, and then refine the line with the tips of the shears. The wet cut gives you accuracy; the dry check gives you the truth.

The fringe changes the whole cut because it is the line closest to the eyes. A fringe that is two millimetres short looks severe; a fringe that is one centimetre long looks unfinished. On a long face, a fringe shortens the outline. On a round face, a straight-across fringe widens it. On a square face, a soft, slightly uneven fringe breaks the jaw line without repeating it. The length and the density of the fringe also change how the rest of the shape reads: a heavy fringe makes the back look longer, and a light fringe makes the sides look wider.

Start with the hair dry and see where the fringe naturally falls. Part it the way the client wears it, and check the cowlick at the front hairline. If the hair lifts at one side, cut that side longer and let it fall. Section the fringe into a triangle from the outer corners of the brows to the centre of the crown, and clip the rest of the hair away. Wet the triangle, comb it straight down with light tension, and cut the line two to three millimetres below the target. Dry it with a small brush, moving the hair forward and then back into place, and refine only after it is completely dry.

Use the same procedure for a curtain fringe, a side fringe and a full fringe, but change the angle. A curtain fringe is cut shorter in the centre and longer at the sides, with the shortest point at the nose. A side fringe is cut on a diagonal from the parting to the opposite brow. A full fringe is cut straight across, with the corners softened so they do not cut into the temples. In every case, cut the perimeter of the fringe first, then point cut the ends if the client wants softness, then dry and check. A fringe trim takes ten to fifteen minutes, including the dry check, and it is worth booking as its own slot.

- Look at the dry fringe first and note the natural fall and any cowlick.
- Section a triangle from the outer brow corners to the crown and clip the rest away.
- Wet the triangle and comb it straight down with light, even tension.
- Cut 2 to 3 mm below the target length, not at the target.
- Dry the fringe completely with a small brush before you refine it.

- Refine with the tips of the shears, following the natural fall.
- Point cut the corners if the client wants a softer edge.
- Show the client the dry result in the mirror and book a trim in 3 to 4 weeks.

Salon example: Isha's first full fringe

Isha, a college student, wants a full fringe for the first time. Her hair is straight, medium density, and she has a small cowlick at the left side of her hairline. She wears her hair in a ponytail most days, so the fringe will be visible on its own. I section the triangle, wet it and comb it down. The cowlick lifts the left corner, so I cut that side three millimetres longer than the right. I cut the centre two millimetres below the brow and leave the corners slightly longer. Then I dry it with a small round brush, moving the hair forward and then letting it fall. The left corner still lifts a little, so I refine only that section, taking one millimetre. I show her the dry fringe before I take any more. She sees that the line is even when the hair falls, even though the left side is technically longer. I show her how to dry it forward with two fingers. She also buys a small brush for the fringe, because she has been using a wide comb that stretches the line.

CAUTION

Do not cut a wet fringe to the final length and send the client out without drying it. Leave 2 to 3 mm, dry it completely, and refine only after you see where it falls.

Dry cutting for curls

Curly hair is cut dry because the curl is the shape. Wet curly hair looks long and straight, and a line cut wet springs into a different shape as it dries. The spring can shorten the visible length by thirty to fifty percent on 3C to 4C hair, and by ten to thirty percent on 2C to 3A hair. If you cut to the wet length, the client loses more length than she agreed to. Cutting dry, curl by curl, lets you see the final shape after every cut. It is slower, and a curly cut takes sixty to ninety minutes, but it is the only way to keep the shape honest.

Work in the defined state, not brushed out. Ask the client to come with her hair washed and styled as she wears it, or wash it in the salon, apply leave-in and dry it before you cut. Take a small section, follow one curl clump from root to end, and cut the end where the curl naturally stops. Do not pull the curl straight to cut it unless you are checking a length; cut it in the shape it sits. Check the spring after each pass. On tight coils, cut less than you think and check twice, because the difference between one centimetre and two is a visible change in the silhouette.

The shape is built from the outside in. Start at the perimeter and decide the outline first, then remove weight inside the shape. Do not thin the perimeter with a razor or a thinning shear; it opens the curl and creates frizz. If the hair is dense, remove weight with a few long internal layers, cut in the curl shape, and check the volume from the front and the side. Leave the crown long enough to sit, and keep the face frame shorter than the back only if the client wants the curl to frame the face. On wavy hair, cut damp or dry, keep the layers long, and avoid short layers that turn into flips.

Before you cut, stretch one curl and show the client the difference between the stretched length and the spring. Agree the dry target in plain words: 'At the shoulder when dry, shorter at the back, longer at the front.' Then cut to that target, not to the stretched number. If the client wants a big change, show the result with a mirror before you make the final cut. After the cut, apply leave-in to soaking wet hair, scrunch, and diffuse on low heat and low speed, or let it air-dry. Do not towel-rub. The finished shape should look like the shape you agreed, not like a wet line that will change tomorrow.

- Ask the client to arrive with the hair washed and styled in its natural curl.
- Cut dry, in small sections, following each curl clump from root to end.
- Stretch one curl and show the client the stretched length next to the spring.
- Leave 30 to 50 percent extra on 3C to 4C hair for shrinkage, and 10 to 30 percent on 2C to 3A.
- Decide the perimeter first, then remove weight inside the shape.
- Never razor or thin the perimeter of a curl; it opens the clump and creates frizz.
- Check the spring after each pass and show the mirror before a big change.
- Finish with leave-in on soaking wet hair, scrunch and diffuse on low heat.

Salon example: Zoya's first curly cut

Zoya has 3B curls that reach the middle of her back when stretched and sit just below her shoulders when dry. She asks for a cut that makes the curls spring up and frames her face. She has had two previous cuts done wet, and both times the hair ended shorter than she wanted. I wash it, apply leave-in and diffuse it before I cut, so the curl is defined. I stretch one curl at the front and show her the difference: fifteen centimetres between the stretched end and the spring. She decides on a dry target just below the collarbone. I cut the back perimeter first, one clump at a time, then the sides, then the face frame, checking the spring after each pass. The shape takes seventy minutes. I remove weight inside with two long layers and leave the perimeter alone. She sees the finished shape in the mirror before I take the last centimetre, and she asks me to stop there. She also asks how to refresh the curls on day two, and I show her the water-and-leave-in trick on one section.

CAUTION

Do not cut a big change into curly hair wet and send the client home without a dry check. Cut dry, or cut stretched and dry it before the final line, and show the mirror before the last cut.

Growth room, cowlicks and the mirror check

A fringe grows about one centimetre a month, and the client lives with it every day. That number decides how often you book the trim and how much room you leave. A fringe cut exactly at the brow looks good for ten days and then covers the eyes. A fringe cut one centimetre above the brow gives three weeks before it needs attention. The right length depends on the client's tolerance and the style: a curtain fringe can grow longer without looking untidy, while a blunt micro fringe looks wrong after five days. Ask when the client wants to return and cut for that interval, not for the mirror today.

Growth room is not the same as leaving a fringe too long. The line still has to sit where you agreed. The room comes from the shape: a slightly diagonal line, a soft corner, a point-cut end or a fringe that can be pushed to the side. These details let the fringe grow for a week or two without a hard edge crossing the brow. On straight hair, leave a small margin and refine dry. On curly hair, leave more because the spring will move the line. On a client who wears glasses, keep the line above the frame and leave enough room for the fringe to sit on the frame without covering the lenses.

Cowlicks and whorls decide whether a fringe is possible at all. A strong cowlick at the front hairline will split a short fringe, no matter how carefully it is cut. A whorl close to the front will make the fringe stand up at the centre. A double crown can lift the hair behind the fringe and push it forward. Look at the dry hair, part it against the growth and watch the fall. If the cowlick is strong, cut a longer fringe, a side-swept fringe or a curtain fringe that uses the direction. If the client insists on a short, straight fringe, show the lift in the mirror before you cut and let her choose with her eyes open.

The mirror check is the last step and the most important. Before you take the final length, dry the fringe, comb it into place and hand the client a hand mirror. Show her the shortest point and how it sits when she moves her head. Ask her to push it to the side, tuck it behind her ear and shake her head, because those are the movements she will make at home. If she is unhappy, you still have hair to remove. If she is happy, take the last millimetres and show her again. Never cut a fringe for the first time on the day of an event; do it a week before, so there is time to adjust.

- Book the fringe trim every 3 to 4 weeks, because hair grows about 1 cm a month.
- Leave room for growth in the shape, not by cutting the line too long.
- Keep the line above the glasses frame and clear of the lenses.
- Check the front cowlick and the whorl with the hair dry before you section.
- Cut a longer or side-swept fringe when the cowlick is strong.
- Dry the fringe and show the shortest point in a hand mirror.
- Ask the client to push, tuck and shake the fringe before the final cut.
- Do not cut a first fringe on the day of an event; do it a week before.

Salon example: Kabir's cowlick decision

Kabir, a college lecturer, wants a short, straight fringe because he likes the look in a film. His hair is straight and medium density, but he has a strong cowlick at the centre of his hairline that turns to the right. Wet, the fringe lies flat. Dry, the centre lifts into a wave and the right side separates. I show him this before I cut anything: I wet the fringe, comb it down, then dry it with a small brush and let him watch the lift in the mirror. He sees that a short fringe will stand up in the middle. We agree on a longer fringe that sits just above the brow and sweeps to the right, following the cowlick. I cut it dry, leaving the centre two millimetres longer, and point cut the right corner. The fringe now looks intentional, and the cowlick is part of the shape rather than a fault. He books a trim in four weeks and says he will stop fighting it with gel. He also asks whether the fringe will behave the same after a haircut next month, and I say yes if we keep the centre longer.

CAUTION

Do not cut a short fringe across a strong front cowlick or whorl on the first visit. Show the dry lift in the mirror, then cut a longer or side-swept fringe that follows the growth.

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Curly and Wavy Hair



Shrinkage and true length

Shrinkage is the difference between the length of a curl when it is stretched and the length you see when it springs back. It is not a defect and it is not a styling problem; it is how curly hair behaves. On 2C to 3A hair, shrinkage is often ten to thirty percent. On 3B to 3C, it is thirty to forty percent. On 4A to 4C, it can be fifty percent or more. A client with mid-back length when stretched may have a shoulder-length shape when dry. If you cut to the stretched length, you remove hair the client can see, and the result looks short even though the numbers were correct.

Shrinkage changes the cut because the dry shape is the product. A wet curly cut is a line drawn on straight hair that will disappear when the hair dries. The perimeter you cut wet is not the perimeter the client sees. The layers you cut wet sit at a different place once the curl clumps. The face frame you cut wet may spring above the cheekbone instead of below it. For this reason, curly hair is cut dry, or cut stretched and then checked dry, and the final line is decided in the curl shape. The wet check is still useful for tension and for the true length, but it is not the final decision.

The procedure is to measure both lengths and agree on the dry target. Take one curl at the crown, one at the side and one at the front. Stretch each gently and hold the end where it reaches; then release it and let the client see where it sits. Say the difference in centimetres, not in percentages, because centimetres are what the client feels. Ask for the dry target: 'Just below the shoulder at the back, cheekbone at the front.' Write it on the card. Then cut to that target in the defined state, checking the spring after each section. If the client wants a big change, cut in stages and show the mirror between stages.

Do not promise a length you cannot deliver. If the client says 'take off five centimetres' and the hair shrinks by ten, five centimetres of dry length is not five centimetres of stretched hair. Clarify which number you are using and show it with your fingers on the dry curl. If the client wants the stretched length to stay below the shoulder, the dry shape may sit at the collarbone. Say that before the first cut. A curly client who is told the truth about shrinkage becomes a regular; a curly client who is surprised by the result does not come back, however good the cut is.

- Take one curl at the crown, one at the side and one at the front.
- Stretch each curl gently, mark the stretched end, then release and mark the spring.
- Measure the difference in centimetres and say it to the client.
- Agree the dry target at the back, the side and the front before cutting.
- Cut to the dry target in the curl shape, not to the stretched length.

- Check the spring after each section and show the mirror between stages.
- Write the dry target in centimetres on the client card.
- Explain that 3C to 4C hair can shrink by 30 to 50 percent before you quote a length.

Salon example: Nandini's five centimetres

Nandini has 4A coils that reach her mid-back when stretched and sit at her shoulders when dry. She asks for five centimetres off because her ends are dry. I stretch a coil at the back and show her where it reaches; then I let it spring and show her where it sits. The difference is about twenty centimetres. I explain that five centimetres of dry length is not the same as five centimetres of stretched hair, and that cutting five centimetres from the stretched length would take her to the collarbone dry. She thinks for a moment and says she wants the dry shape to stay at the shoulder. I cut dry, coil by coil, checking the spring after every few sections. The cut takes eighty minutes. She sees the shape in the mirror before I finish the front, and asks for the face frame to stay longer. The final shape sits at the shoulder, with the ends healthier and the length she can see. She also asks for a simple night routine, and I show her the loose pineapple and the satin scarf she already owns.

CAUTION

Do not quote a curly cut in stretched centimetres and then cut the same number in the dry shape. State which length you mean and show the spring with your fingers before the first cut.

Cutting in the curl shape

Cutting in the curl shape means following the direction of each curl rather than pulling it into a straight line. Hold the curl clump between two fingers, follow it from root to end, and cut where the natural end sits. The blade enters at the same angle as the curl, so the cut end blends into the pattern instead of creating a blunt step. This is slower than cutting a straight line, and it is the only way to keep the shape after the hair dries. On wavy hair, the same idea applies with a looser hand: cut damp or dry, keep the layers long, and follow the wave instead of forcing a straight edge.

The pattern decides the detail. On 2A to 2C wavy hair, cut damp or dry, keep the layers long, and avoid short layers at the crown, because a short layer on a loose wave becomes a flip. On 3A to 3C curly hair, cut dry, section by section, and remove weight inside the shape, never at the perimeter with a razor. On 4A to 4C coily hair, cut dry and in the defined state, do not brush the section out before cutting, and work in small sections. On transitioning or heat-damaged curls, cut the straight ends gradually over two or three visits instead of cutting to the root curl in one sitting, unless the client asks for a big chop.

Weight removal is the hardest part. Curly hair looks full but can be dense underneath, and a shape that is too heavy collapses at the root. Remove weight with long internal layers, cut in the curl shape, and leave the perimeter supported. Do not use a razor, and do not use thinning shears on the perimeter or the crown. If the hair is very dense, take a few vertical sections inside the shape and

shorten them by two to three centimetres, then check the volume dry. One section at a time. The goal is a shape that holds its volume without a heavy product, and that still looks like the client's own hair.

Finish the cut in the state the client will wear. Apply leave-in to soaking wet hair, scrunch upward, and diffuse on low heat and low speed, or let it air-dry. Do not towel-rub, because it breaks the clumps and creates frizz. Check the shape from the front, the side and the back, and look at the root volume. If one side is flatter, re-cut that side in the curl shape rather than adding product. If the face frame is too short, leave it and plan to adjust at the next visit, because cutting more will not fix it. The cut is finished when the dry shape matches the dry target, not when the wet line looks even.

- Cut dry, in small sections, following each curl clump from root to end.
- Enter the blade at the angle of the curl, not across it.
- Keep layers long on 2A to 2C hair and avoid short crown layers.
- Remove weight inside the shape on 3A to 3C hair, never at the perimeter with a razor.
- Cut 4A to 4C hair in the defined state and do not brush the section out.
- Cut heat-damaged ends gradually over two or three visits.
- Check the root volume dry and re-cut a flat side in the curl shape.
- Finish with leave-in on soaking wet hair, scrunch and diffuse on low heat.

Salon example: Farida's flat crown

Farida has 3C curls, medium density, and she says her crown goes flat by the second day. She wants a shape with more volume at the top. Her previous cut was done with a razor at the perimeter, and the ends look frayed. I cut dry, following the curls, and leave the perimeter alone. At the crown, the hair is dense underneath and light on top, so I take two vertical sections inside the shape and shorten them by two centimetres in the curl shape. I check the volume after each section and stop when the crown lifts without looking hollow. I do not use the razor. I finish with leave-in on soaking wet hair, scrunch and diffuse on low heat. The crown holds, and the frayed ends are gone because I cut the last centimetre in the curl direction. Farida books eight weeks ahead and asks for the same stylist, because the shape still works on day three. She also asks whether she can wear a tight ponytail for the gym, and I show her a loose high tie that leaves the hairline alone.

CAUTION

Do not razor or thin the perimeter or the crown of curly hair. Remove weight with long internal layers cut in the curl shape, one section at a time, and check the volume dry.

Washing, styling and protecting the cut

A curly cut only works if the washing and styling routine supports it. Shampoo the scalp, not the lengths, and use a conditioner that gives enough slip to detangle without pulling. Wash frequency depends on the scalp: once or twice a week suits many curly clients, but a client who exercises daily may need to rinse and condition more often. Hot water opens the cuticle and increases frizz, so keep

the water lukewarm and finish with a cool rinse. Do not brush the hair dry. Detangle in the shower with conditioner and a wide-tooth comb, working from the ends upward, and scrunch the water out instead of rubbing with a towel.

Styling starts with water. Apply leave-in or a curl cream to soaking wet hair, section by section, and scrunch upward to encourage the clump. Do not apply product to damp hair and then scrunch, because the hair is already half-dried and the clumps will break. Use a cotton T-shirt or a microfibre towel to blot, not a terry towel, and never rub. If the client uses a diffuser, set it to low heat and low speed, hover at the root first, then cup the ends. Move the diffuser, do not park it. If the client air-dries, keep the hands off until the hair is dry, because touching breaks the cast and creates frizz.

The finish in the salon should be the routine the client can repeat. Show the products, the amount and the order: leave-in first, then cream or gel, then diffuse or air-dry. Show how to refresh on day two or three with water and a little leave-in, not with a brush. Show how to sleep: a loose pineapple on top of the head, a silk or satin pillowcase if the client has one, or a loose scarf. A cut that looks good only on wash day will be tied back by Wednesday. The client should leave knowing three things: how much product, where it goes, and what not to do.

Protect the cut between visits. A curly cut grows out in shape, so the silhouette stays longer than a straight cut, but the perimeter and the face frame still need a trim. Book six to ten weeks depending on the pattern and the client's patience. At home, avoid tight ponytails at the hairline, because they pull the curl straight and can break the hair. Avoid dry brushing, hot tools without protectant, and sleeping on wet hair. If the client colours or straightens, plan the services apart from the cut and keep the cut simple until the chemical service has settled. The next visit should start with a dry look at the shape, not with a wash.

- Shampoo the scalp and condition the lengths, then detangle with a wide-tooth comb in the shower.
- Keep the water lukewarm and finish with a cool rinse.
- Apply leave-in or curl cream to soaking wet hair, section by section.
- Scrunch upward to form clumps and blot with a cotton T-shirt or microfibre towel.
- Diffuse on low heat and low speed, moving the diffuser instead of parking it.
- Keep the hands off the hair while it air-dries.
- Refresh on day two or three with water and a little leave-in, not with a brush.
- Book the next curly cut in 6 to 10 weeks and check the shape dry first.

Salon example: Leela's day-three hair

Leela has 3A curls and a busy job, and she says she can never make her hair look the same on day two. She washes every day and brushes it dry before work, which is why the curl breaks and the surface frizzes. I cut dry, keeping the layers long and the perimeter soft. Then I wash it in the salon and show her the routine step by step: shampoo on the scalp, conditioner on the lengths, comb in the shower, leave-in on soaking wet hair, scrunch, blot with a cotton T-shirt, diffuse on low heat. I make her do the scrunch herself while I hold the mirror. She is surprised by how much water the hair holds before the product goes in. I write the routine on a card with three lines: soak, scrunch, hover. She comes back eight weeks later with day-three curls that still hold, and says she has stopped brushing altogether. She also asks what to do on a rainy day, and I show her how to diffuse only the roots and let the ends air-dry. She writes the three lines on her phone.

CAUTION

Do not send a curly client home with a routine that needs a brush, a hot tool or a towel rub. If the client cannot repeat the finish, simplify the cut or the routine before she leaves.

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Blow-Dry and Finish



Prep, sections and tension

A blow-dry starts before the dryer is switched on. The hair should be clean, conditioned and detangled, with the excess water blotted out. Apply heat protectant to the mid-lengths and ends, not the roots, because the roots are the part you will rough-dry first and the part that needs volume rather than weight. A heat protectant is not optional on hair that has been coloured, straightened or chemically treated. It is also not the same as oil: oil does not protect against heat, and heavy oil on the roots prevents the hair from drying and makes the set collapse. Use a light spray or a cream, according to the hair's porosity.

Rough-dry the roots to about eighty percent before you pick up a brush. Point the nozzle at the root and move the dryer with the hair, lifting the root with your fingers or a vent brush. Do not rough-dry to one hundred percent, because the brush needs some moisture to build tension and shape the hair. On dense hair, rough-dry in sections; on fine hair, keep the heat low and the dryer moving. If the roots are still damp when you finish, the hair will frizz within ten minutes, especially in humidity. Dry the roots first, then the lengths, then the ends.

Section the hair into four: two at the front, two at the back. Take sections no wider than the brush, and clip the rest away. A section that is too wide cannot be tensioned evenly, and the middle of the section stays damp while the outside over-dries. Use a round brush for volume and bend, a paddle brush for smoothness, and a vent brush for rough-drying or for curly hair. The brush size should match the length: a small brush for a short cut or a fringe, a medium brush for a bob, a large brush for long hair. The brush should grip the hair, not drag through it.

Tension is what makes a blow-dry last. Keep the hair under tension from root to end, with the brush following the nozzle. Do not pull so hard that the client's head moves; pull evenly and keep the angle consistent. Work from the back to the front, and from the underside to the top, so the sections you have finished are not disturbed. Keep the nozzle pointed down the hair shaft, from root to end, to smooth the cuticle. If the hair starts to feel dry or the brush starts to drag, stop, mist the section lightly and lower the heat. A blow-dry takes thirty to forty-five minutes on most hair; rushing the roots is what makes it fail.

- Shampoo, condition and detangle, then blot the excess water out.
- Apply heat protectant to the mid-lengths and ends, not the roots.
- Rough-dry the roots to about 80 percent with the nozzle at the root.
- Section the hair into four and clip the unused sections away.

- Take sections no wider than the brush and match the brush size to the length.
- Keep even tension from root to end and work from the back to the front.
- Point the nozzle down the hair shaft, from root to end.
- Stop and mist the section if the hair feels dry or the brush drags.

Salon example: Rhea's humid-day blow-dry

Rhea has a wedding to attend in the evening and wants a smooth blow-dry that will survive an hour outdoors. Her hair is medium density, wavy, and coloured, so the mid-lengths are porous. I wash and condition, blot, and apply a light heat protectant from the ears down. I rough-dry the roots to about eighty percent, lifting them with a vent brush, then section the hair into four. I use a medium round brush and keep the tension firm, working from the back to the front. The nozzle points down the shaft. Each section gets a five-second cool shot before I release it. At the front, I use a smaller brush for the face frame and a little bend away from the face. The roots are completely dry, which is the part that matters in humidity. She walks out with the shape holding, and I tell her to keep the cool shot at home. She also asks how to keep the shape if she dances, and I tell her to lift the root with her fingers and use cool air, not hairspray. She books a blow-dry for the next wedding.

CAUTION

Do not rough-dry the roots to one hundred percent or leave them damp under a finished style. Damp roots frizz within ten minutes in humidity, and no serum will fix it.

Heat, brushes and direction

Heat is a range, not a setting. Fine hair dries at 120 to 140 C with low heat and more tension; medium hair sits at 150 to 170 C; coarse or very dense hair needs 175 to 190 C. Never go above 200 C on hair. The number on the dryer is not the temperature at the scalp, because distance and airflow change it, so keep the dryer moving and test the air on your wrist. On coloured or porous hair, use the lower end of the range and a heat protectant. On hair that has been straightened daily, the mid-lengths are already damaged; lower the heat further and do not park the nozzle on one spot.

Direction matters as much as temperature. Point the nozzle down the hair shaft, from root to end, so the cuticle scales lie flat and the surface reflects light. Pointing the nozzle up the shaft lifts the cuticle and creates frizz, even at a low temperature. For volume at the root, point the nozzle at the root and lift the hair against its natural fall, then smooth the length downward. For a bend, wrap the section around the brush and hold it until the hair cools. For a straight finish, keep the brush under the section and pull the hair taut, following with the nozzle. Change direction deliberately; do not let the dryer wander.

Brushes shape the hair. A round brush builds volume and a soft bend; the smaller the barrel, the tighter the bend. A paddle brush smooths and is easier on long hair, but it gives less root lift. A vent brush is for rough-drying and for distributing air, not for tension. A Denman-style brush is useful on curly hair when the client wants a smooth finish, but it can break clumps if used on wet curls. Use the

brush that matches the finish the client can repeat at home. If the client owns only a paddle brush, do not build a finish that depends on a round brush and a cool shot.

Set each section with a cool shot of five to ten seconds before you release it. The cool air closes the cuticle and fixes the shape; without it, the section falls while you work on the next one. Keep the cool shot on the section, not on your hand. Work systematically: back, sides, front, then the crown. Check the root lift with your fingers and the mirror. If a section falls, re-mist it and re-dry it rather than spraying hairspray over a soft shape. Hairspray holds what is already there; it does not build the shape. The finish should feel light and move when the client shakes her head.

- Set fine hair at 120 to 140 C, medium at 150 to 170 C and coarse at 175 to 190 C.
- Never go above 200 C on hair, and keep the dryer moving.
- Point the nozzle down the shaft from root to end to smooth the cuticle.
- Lift the root against the natural fall for volume, then smooth the length down.
- Match the brush to the finish: round for bend, paddle for smooth, vent for rough-dry.
- Hold each section until it is dry and cool before you release it.
- Give each section a 5 to 10 second cool shot to set the shape.
- Re-mist and re-dry a fallen section instead of spraying over it.

Salon example: Dev's coarse hair and a low setting

Dev has coarse, dense hair that takes a long time to dry, and he complains that his blow-dry is always frizzy at the sides. He has been using the highest heat and a small brush, which over-dries the surface while the inside stays damp. I wash and condition, apply heat protectant, and rough-dry the roots at medium heat with a vent brush. Then I section the hair and use a medium round brush at 180 C, keeping the nozzle down the shaft. The sides are the densest part, so I take narrower sections there and give each one a ten-second cool shot. I do not go above 190 C. The surface stays smooth because the cuticle is closed by the cool air, and the inside is dry because the sections are thin. He feels the difference at the back, where the hair usually stays damp. I write 'medium heat, thin sections, cool shot' on his card. He also asks whether a smaller brush would give more lift, and I say yes at the crown but not at the sides, where the density is highest. He books four weeks ahead.

CAUTION

Do not exceed 200 C on any hair, and do not hold the dryer on one spot to speed up a thick section. Split the section thinner and lower the heat instead.

The finish and the handover

The finish is the last ten percent of the appointment and the part the client remembers. Apply a light serum or oil to the ends only, not the roots, and use less than you think. On fine hair, one drop warmed between the palms is enough; on coarse hair, two or three drops. A heavy serum makes the roots greasy by evening and collapses the volume you just built. If the hair is porous, seal the ends

with a cream or a light oil. If the hair is low porosity, skip the heavy product and use a light mist. Brush the product through with your fingers or a wide-tooth comb, then shake the hair into place.

Check the finished shape from the front, the side and the back. Look at the root lift, the perimeter, the face frame and the ends. Run your fingers through the hair to check for damp spots, especially at the nape and behind the ears. If you find one, dry it now; it will frizz later. Look at the silhouette against the client's shoulders and neck. A blow-dry that looks good in the chair but collapses at the door is a failed blow-dry. If the client is going into humidity, use a light finishing spray at arm's length, not a heavy lacquer, and tell her what will happen.

The handover is where the client learns to repeat the result. Turn the chair, hand her a mirror and show her the back. Name the three things that made the finish: the heat protectant, the nozzle direction and the cool shot. Show her how much product you used and where it went. If she has a dryer at home, show her the angle on her own hair, with her hand following yours. If she does not, do not pretend she can repeat a round-brush finish, and give her a simpler routine: rough-dry the roots, smooth the ends with a paddle brush, finish cool. Write the routine on the card in three lines.

Close the appointment with the next step, not with a compliment. Say when to return, what to do at home, and what to watch for. 'Eight weeks for the cut, a trim on the fringe in four, and keep the iron below 180 C.' If the client has a wedding or an event, book the next appointment before she leaves. If the hair is damaged, plan a repair course and a review. If the client is happy, ask for a photo from the back with permission, and keep it with the card as the record of the shape. The next stylist should be able to look at the photo and the notes and repeat the finish.

- Apply serum or oil to the ends only, using one drop for fine hair and two or three for coarse.
- Brush the product through with your fingers or a wide-tooth comb.
- Check the roots, nape and behind the ears for damp spots before you finish.
- Look at the silhouette from the front, the side and the back.
- Use a light finishing spray at arm's length, not a heavy lacquer.
- Show the client the back with a mirror and name the three steps that made the finish.
- Write the home routine on the card in three lines.
- Book the next cut and the fringe trim before the client leaves.

Salon example: Mrs Bhatt's anniversary dinner

Mrs Bhatt, a retired teacher in her sixties, comes in for a blow-dry before her anniversary dinner. Her hair is fine, shoulder length and coloured, with a soft wave. She usually wears it in a low bun and wants it down for the evening. I wash and condition, apply a light heat protectant, rough-dry the roots, and use a small round brush at 140 C for the face frame. I keep the tension light because her hair is fine and porous. At the finish, I use one drop of serum on the ends and a light spray at arm's length. I check the nape, find a damp spot, and dry it. Then I turn the chair and show her the back. She is pleased but worried about the humidity outside. I show her how to lift the root with her fingers and use the cool shot when she gets home. I write 'light serum, cool shot, no heavy spray' on her card and book her next cut in seven weeks. She also asks for a photo of the back, so her daughter can help her with the cool shot at home.

CAUTION

Do not finish a blow-dry with a heavy serum on the roots or a damp nape. Check the nape and behind the ears, dry them, and use product on the ends only.

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Men's Cuts



Guards as a guide

A guard is a plastic or metal attachment that sets a nominal cutting length on clippers. The common numbers are 0.5 guard at about 1.5 millimetres, 1 guard at about 3 millimetres, 2 guard at about 6 millimetres, 3 guard at about 10 millimetres and 4 guard at about 13 millimetres. These numbers describe the guard, not the result. The same guard on fine hair looks shorter because the scalp shows through, and on coarse hair looks longer because each strand stands up. Density changes the read as much as length. Treat the number as a starting point and check the result on the head.

Guards change the cut because they set the base for the blend. A number one on the sides with a number three on top gives a clear contrast; a number two with a number three gives a soft, close shape. On a client with a receding hairline, a very short guard at the temple exposes the recession, so keep more length at the corner or leave the hairline soft. On a client with a double crown, a short guard at the crown shows the whorl as a gap, so leave weight there. On a client with coarse hair, the guard may leave a bristly surface that needs scissor-over-comb to soften. The guard is the foundation; the blend is the finish.

The procedure starts with the consultation and the guard chart. Ask for the last photo or the date of the last cut. Repeat the client's usual cut, then change one thing, not three. Set the guideline at the nape or the sideburn with the longest guard you plan to use on the sides, then work up. Check both sides in the mirror before you blend the top. Keep the clipper flat against the head and move it in overlapping strokes, against the direction of growth first if the hair is long, then with the growth for the finish. Do not push the corner of the blade into the head; the corner is what cuts a line where you did not want one.

A men's cut takes twenty to forty minutes, and the guard work is only part of it. Leave time for the blend, the neckline, the beard line and the top. If the client wants a skin fade, the work starts at the nape and moves up in stages, and the difference between the stages is what makes the fade look gradual. If the client wants a longer top, cut the top first or last, but keep enough length for the client's own styling. A top that needs product every morning will fail for a client who washes and leaves. Ask how the client styles the top before you decide the length. The guard number is the easy part; the shape is the judgement.

- Ask for the last photo or the last cut date before you choose a guard.
- Use 0.5 guard at about 1.5 mm, 1 at 3 mm, 2 at 6 mm, 3 at 10 mm and 4 at 13 mm.
- Check the guard on fine and coarse hair, because the same number reads differently.

- Set the guideline at the nape or the sideburn with the longest side guard.
- Work up in overlapping strokes and keep the clipper flat against the head.
- Check both sides in the mirror before you blend the top.
- Keep weight at a receding temple and at a double crown.
- Leave enough top length for the client's own styling routine.

Salon example: Sameer's first skin fade

Sameer, a sales executive, wants a skin fade for a wedding. He has thick, coarse hair that grows straight out at the sides and a small double crown. I ask for the last photo and see that he usually wears a number two on the sides and a number four on top. A skin fade would expose the double crown at the back if I took the top too short. I start at the nape with the clipper and work up in stages, keeping the crown at about ten millimetres. On the sides, I use a number one at the bottom and blend to a number three at the temple, leaving the temple corner longer because his hairline is receding slightly. I check both sides in the mirror before I touch the top. The top is cut with scissors to about four centimetres, enough for him to push back with a little cream. The fade takes thirty-five minutes and looks sharp without showing the crown. He also asks how often to come back, and I say every three to four weeks to keep the fade clean.

CAUTION

Do not use a short guard on a receding temple or a double crown without showing the client the result in the mirror first. Leave weight at the corner and at the crown, or the scalp will show.

Scissor-over-comb and blending

Scissor-over-comb is cutting only the hair that stands through the teeth of a comb. The comb lifts the hair away from the head at a consistent angle, and the shears cut the hair above the comb. It is the softest way to blend short sides, necklines and the transition into a fade. The comb angle is the key: hold it at the same angle through the section, and move it in small steps. If the angle changes, the blend line changes. Scissor-over-comb removes small amounts, so it is slower than a clipper, but it leaves a softer surface and it is easier to correct. On coarse hair, it is the difference between a cut that looks barbered and a cut that looks clipped.

Clipper-over-comb does the heavier removal. The comb lifts the hair and the clipper takes the length above it. Use it when the hair is long enough to comb up and you need to remove bulk quickly, then finish with scissors for softness. Do not gouge the blend line by pushing the clipper into the comb; let the comb control the length. Keep the comb clean, because hair caught in the teeth changes the angle. On the neckline, work from the centre out and check both sides. On the sides, work from the bottom up, following the shape of the head, and keep the blade flat as you reach the curve above the ear.

Blending is the art of making two lengths look like one. The blend line is the place where the short side meets the longer top, and it should be invisible from a normal distance. Start with the shorter length, then bring the longer length down to it in small steps. Check the blend with the head tilted,

because the mirror hides the flat spot at the back. Use a hand mirror to look at the back of the head, and ask the client to tilt the chin down and then up. If you can see a step, take a small amount from the longer side, not the shorter side. A blend that is cut too low cannot be repaired without removing more length from the top.

The procedure is the same for a classic short back and sides and for a fade. Set the guideline, remove the bulk with the clipper, then blend with scissor-over-comb or clipper-over-comb, then check the neckline and the sides. Keep the comb angle consistent and the sections small. Do not cross the blend line with a guard that is too short. Finish with a light trim of the neckline and the ears, and check the shape from the front, the side and the back. If the client has a cowlick at the nape, leave a little more length there so the hair does not kick out. A men's cut is finished when the blend disappears, not when the clipper stops.

- Set the guideline first and remove the bulk with the clipper.
- Hold the comb at a consistent angle and cut only the hair above the teeth.
- Move the comb in small steps and keep the teeth clean.
- Use scissor-over-comb for softness and clipper-over-comb for heavier removal.
- Work the neckline from the centre out and the sides from the bottom up.
- Check the blend with the head tilted and a hand mirror at the back.
- Take more from the longer side if a step shows, never from the shorter side.
- Leave a little length at a nape cowlick so the hair does not kick out.

Salon example: Vikram's hard blend line

Vikram comes in with a short back and sides that has a visible line where the clipper stopped. The sides are a number one and the top is about five centimetres, and the line sits two centimetres above the ear. He says the previous cut looked fine for three days and then the line appeared. I set a new guideline lower and blend upward with scissor-over-comb, using a cutting comb at a consistent angle. I take small amounts and check with the hand mirror after every few passes. The line softens but does not disappear, because the top is not long enough to reach the short side without removing more length. I explain that the next cut should start the blend lower and keep the top slightly longer. I finish the neckline and the ears, and the shape looks even from the front and the side. He books four weeks ahead, and I write 'blend from the ear up, keep top 5 cm' on his card. He also asks whether he can stretch the cut to six weeks, and I say yes if he keeps the neckline tidy at home.

CAUTION

Do not cross the blend line with a shorter guard to hide a step. It removes the length you need to blend and leaves a hard line lower down; take small amounts from the longer side instead.

Beard line and the final shape

The beard line follows the jaw, not a ruler. A natural line runs along the jaw and softens toward the ear; a cleaned line is sharper but still follows the bone. Do not draw a straight line across the cheek, because the jaw is a curve and a straight line looks pasted on. On a round face, a slightly higher line at the side can lengthen the face; on a long face, a lower line adds width. The neckline should sit just above the Adam's apple, following the natural curve, not a deep squared scoop unless the client asks for one. Ask the client to tilt the head back and swallow to find the natural line before you cut.

The beard changes the haircut because it frames the same face. A short beard with a sharp line makes a short haircut look sharper; a full beard with a soft line balances a longer top. If the client has a patchy beard, do not cut a hard line through the patch; leave the length and blend the edge. If the client has a strong jaw, a lower neckline softens it; if the jaw is narrow, a slightly fuller beard adds width. The sideburn connects the beard to the haircut, so decide its length with the haircut, not after it. Sideburns end at the middle of the ear unless the client asks for another length.

The top is the last decision. Cut it with enough length for the client's own styling, and show the client how to put the product in. If the client does not style, do not leave a top that needs product every morning. A short textured top can be worn with a matte cream; a longer top needs a brush or a dryer. On fine hair, a short top exposes the scalp; on coarse hair, a short top stands up. Check the top against the sides from the front and the side, and make sure the silhouette is balanced. A good men's cut looks intentional without looking styled.

Finish with the details: the neckline, the ears, the sideburns and the beard line. Use a small trimmer or a razor for the edges, and keep the line clean without taking it too high. Wipe the neck and the ears, brush off the loose hair, and show the client the back with a hand mirror. Tell the client the rebook interval: three to four weeks for a short back and sides, because men's hair grows about one and a quarter centimetres a month. Write the guard numbers, the top length and the beard line on the card. The next visit should start from those notes, not from a guess.

- Ask the client to tilt the head back and swallow to find the natural neckline.
- Follow the jaw curve for the beard line and avoid a straight line across the cheek.
- Keep the neckline just above the Adam's apple, following the natural curve.
- End the sideburns at the middle of the ear unless the client asks otherwise.
- Decide the sideburn length together with the haircut, not after it.
- Leave enough top length for the client's own styling routine.
- Check the top against the sides from the front and the side.
- Book a short back and sides in 3 to 4 weeks and write the guard numbers on the card.

Salon example: Arif's beard and narrow jaw

Arif, a restaurant manager, has a patchy beard on the cheeks and a narrow jaw. He wants a short haircut and a sharp beard line for a family photograph. A high, hard cheek line would expose the patch and make the jaw look narrower. I trim the beard to about eight millimetres, follow the jaw curve with the trimmer, and leave the cheeks softer, blending the patch instead of cutting through it. The neckline sits just above the Adam's apple, and the sideburns end at the middle of the ear. For the haircut, I use a number two on the sides and leave four centimetres on top, enough for him to push back with a matte cream. I check the silhouette from the front and the side, and the beard adds width at the jaw instead of narrowing it. He sees the photograph on his phone and asks for the same next time. I write the lengths and the soft cheek line on his card. He also asks for a softer cheek line next time, and I note that beside the photograph.

CAUTION

Do not cut a hard cheek line through a patchy beard or take the neckline above the jaw curve. Leave length over the patch, follow the bone, and show the client the line before you finish.

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Salon Judgement



Humidity, frizz and honest promises

Humidity is the normal condition of most Indian salon work, not an exception. Hair that looks smooth in an air-conditioned salon can lift at the door within minutes, especially if the cuticle is porous or the perimeter is soft. Frizz is not a styling failure; it is the hair taking moisture from the air. The cut can reduce it by keeping a clean perimeter, removing weight inside the shape and avoiding a razor on the surface. The finish can reduce it with a heat protectant, a nozzle pointed down the shaft and a cool shot. What the cut cannot do is make porous hair behave like low-porosity hair in the rain.

The cut changes frizz in two ways. First, the perimeter: a ragged or thinned edge has more ends that curl in different directions, so the outline looks fuzzy. A solid perimeter with weight removed inside keeps the outline clean. Second, the surface: a razor or an aggressive thinner opens the cuticle and creates a halo that grows out as the hair grows. On frizz-prone hair, use sharp shears, point cut only the ends and remove bulk with internal layers. Do not promise a sleek finish that depends on a daily blow-dry the client will not do. Promise a shape that looks intentional when it dries on its own.

The honest promise is specific. Say what the cut will do, what the finish will do and what the client must do at home. 'The shape will hold its line after a wash. The smooth finish will last until the next wash in this humidity. At home, use a heat protectant and point the dryer down the shaft.' Do not say 'this will stop frizz' or 'this will last all week'. A client who is told the truth about the weather trusts you when you say the cut will work. A client who is promised a miracle and gets a halo does not come back, and tells three friends why.

The procedure is to plan for the weather before the client sits down. Ask whether the salon is air-conditioned, how the client travels and whether the event is indoors or outdoors. If the client is going outdoors, keep the perimeter clean, use a light serum on the ends and avoid a heavy spray that will collapse in the heat. If the client is going to a wedding, book the cut ten to fourteen days before and the blow-dry on the day. If the hair is very porous, plan a repair course rather than a stronger finish. Write the weather plan on the card so the next appointment starts from the same understanding.

- Ask whether the event is indoors or outdoors and how the client will travel.
- Keep a clean perimeter and remove weight inside on frizz-prone hair.
- Avoid a razor and aggressive thinning on porous or curly hair.
- Use sharp shears and point cut only the last 1 to 2 cm.
- Promise a shape that works air-dried, not a finish that needs a daily blow-dry.

- Use a heat protectant, a downward nozzle and a cool shot for the finish.
- Book the cut 10 to 14 days before a wedding and the blow-dry on the day.
- Write the weather plan and the home routine on the card.

Salon example: Shalini's outdoor wedding

Shalini is attending an outdoor wedding in September and wants a sleek blow-dry that will last through the ceremony. Her hair is medium density, wavy and coloured, and the mid-lengths are porous. She has booked the cut for the day before the wedding. I explain that a cut the day before leaves no time to adjust and that the humidity will lift the surface by the time she reaches the venue. She moves the cut to ten days before and keeps the blow-dry for the morning of the wedding. I cut a collarbone shape with a clean perimeter and long internal layers, no razor. On the day, I use a heat protectant, dry the roots fully, point the nozzle down the shaft and finish with a cool shot. I tell her the finish will hold indoors and soften outdoors, and I give her a light serum for the ends. She appreciates the honesty and books her next cut for eight weeks later. She also asks what to do if the hair lifts at the venue, and I show her how to smooth the surface with a light serum on the ends.

CAUTION

Do not promise a frizz-free finish in humidity or a blow-dry that will last a week. Say what the cut will do, what the finish will do, and what the weather will do to both.

Keeping length while changing shape

Most clients who ask for a change do not want to lose length. They want the shape to feel different: lighter, softer, more shaped around the face, less heavy at the back. The mistake is to remove fifteen centimetres to make the shape easier to cut. The better approach is to keep the perimeter and change what happens inside it. Internal layers remove weight without shortening the outline. A face frame changes the front without touching the back. A change of parting changes the volume at the root. A fringe changes the whole face without removing length. These are real changes, and the client can see them.

Show the length before you cut it. Hold the comb at the current length and at the planned length, in centimetres, against the shoulder or the collarbone. Say the number out loud. If the client says 'just a trim', take one to two centimetres and show the comb again before the second cut. If the client says 'take off the damage', ask how much damage they can see and show where the healthy hair starts. A client who sees the number is far less likely to feel robbed when the hair is dry. A client who hears 'I took off a little' and sees ten centimetres gone will not trust the next appointment.

The technique for keeping length is to cut the perimeter last or not at all. Start with the internal layers, dry the hair and check the volume, then decide whether the perimeter needs a dusting. On dense hair, remove weight with long internal layers that start below the jaw. On fine hair, keep the layers long and few, and use a face frame to create movement. On wavy hair, cut the layers in the wave shape and

leave the perimeter soft. On curly hair, the shape can change completely with a dry cut inside the perimeter and no change to the visible length. The perimeter is the promise; the inside is the design.

Close with a review. Dry the hair, show the client the back and the front, and ask what feels different. If the client wanted less volume and the shape is still heavy, remove a little more from inside, not from the ends. If the client wanted more movement and the hair is still flat, add a long layer, not a short one. If the client is happy, write the exact lengths and the internal layer plan on the card. The next visit should not start with 'what did we do last time?' The card should answer that in one line: 'perimeter kept, internal layers from the jaw, face frame at the cheekbone.'

- Ask what the client wants to feel different, not only what to remove.
- Show the current length and the planned length in centimetres with a comb.
- Keep the perimeter and change the weight inside it with long internal layers.
- Use a face frame or a fringe to change the front without shortening the back.
- Cut the perimeter last, or only dust it, when the client wants to keep length.
- Dry the hair and check the volume before you decide on more cutting.
- Remove more from inside, not from the ends, if the shape is still heavy.
- Write the exact lengths and the internal layer plan on the card.

Salon example: Preeti's long hair

Preeti has thick, straight hair to her waist and wants a change for a new job. She is afraid of losing length because her hair has taken years to grow. I ask what she wants to feel different, and she says the hair feels heavy and flat at the top. I show her the current length at the waist and a planned two-centimetre dusting, and she agrees. I keep the perimeter and cut long internal layers starting at the jaw, removing weight from the inside rather than the ends. I add a face frame at the cheekbone and change her parting slightly to lift the root. The cut takes seventy minutes because the hair is dense. When I dry it, the top has movement and the ends still reach her waist. She sees the back in the mirror and says it feels lighter without looking shorter. I write 'waist length kept, internal layers from jaw, face frame at cheekbone' on her card. She also asks whether the layer will grow out badly, and I show her the line at the jaw so she knows what to expect in eight weeks.

CAUTION

Do not remove more than the client agreed to in order to make the shape easier to cut. Show the length in centimetres with a comb and stop at that number.

When to refuse the cut

Refusing a service is part of professional judgement, not a failure of hospitality. Refuse when the scalp has an active infection, ringworm, impetigo, lice, weeping patches or open wounds. Refuse when the hair is gummy, stretches and does not return, or snaps when wet, because a cut will remove more than the client can afford. Refuse when the client wants a major change on the day of an event, or

when the client will not allow a consultation and a wet check. Refuse when there is sudden patchy hair loss with no clear cause, and refer first. In each case, the reason is safety or honesty, and both are more important than the slot.

The refusal has to be clear and kind. Name what you see, say what you will not do, and offer the next step. 'I can see a red, scaly patch on your scalp. I am not going to cut or colour today because the skin is inflamed. Please see a dermatologist, and come back when they say it is settled.' Do not apologise for the decision, do not offer a discount instead, and do not let the client talk you into a smaller version of the same unsafe service. If the client is angry, stay calm and repeat the same three sentences. The decision is not personal, and the client should hear that in your voice.

Offer an alternative when one exists. If the scalp is inflamed but the ends are healthy, offer a dry dusting away from the patch. If the hair is gummy, offer a trim of the very ends and a repair plan. If the client wants a big change before an event, offer the smallest version now and the full change after. If the client refuses the consultation, do not cut; offer a consultation appointment instead. An alternative shows that you are trying to help, not refusing for the sake of it. It also keeps the relationship alive for the next visit, when the hair may be ready.

Record the refusal and the advice. Write the date, what you saw, what you declined, what you offered and what the client said. If the client declined the referral, write that in their words. Clean the station, the tools and the linen, and wash your hands. If the client has an infection that may spread, follow the salon's cleaning rule before the next client. Tell the salon owner or the senior stylist if a client needs medical care, so the team gives the same advice. A refusal that is documented and explained is a professional act; a refusal that is whispered and forgotten is a risk.

- Refuse if the scalp has an active infection, lice, weeping patches or open wounds.
- Refuse a full cut if the hair is gummy or snaps when wet; dust the ends only.
- Refuse a major change on the day of an event, or offer the smallest version.
- Refuse to cut if the client will not allow a consultation and a wet check.
- Refer sudden patchy hair loss before you design a shape around it.
- Say what you see, what you will not do and what the client should do next.
- Offer a safe alternative: a dry dusting, a repair plan or a later date.
- Record the refusal, the advice and the client's response, then clean the station.

Salon example: the client who wanted it all

A client, Ms Joseph, comes in on a Friday evening for a full head of highlights and a short cut before a Saturday wedding. Her hair is gummy at the ends and snaps when I stretch a wet strand. She has also scratched her scalp, and there are two small scabs at the crown. I explain that I will not colour or cut short today because the hair is too fragile and the scalp is broken. She is upset and says she will go elsewhere. I offer a dry dusting of one centimetre, a leave-in treatment and a simple blow-dry, with no colour and no short layers. She accepts the dusting but refuses the blow-dry. I do the dusting away from the scabs, dry the ends and show her the mirror. I write the refusal, the advice and her response on the card, and I clean the station. She returns three months later with healthier hair and books the colour then. She also asks whether the dusting will make the ends look thin, and I show her the mirror before and after so she can see the line is still full.

CAUTION

Do not cut or colour over an active scalp infection, open wounds, lice or weeping patches, and do not let a client talk you into a smaller version of the same unsafe service. Refer and record.

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Home Care and the Next Visit



Saying it in service English

Use the service names the client can repeat at the desk. A haircut is a haircut, a fringe trim is a fringe trim, a blow-dry is a blow-dry, a curly cut is a curly cut and a men's haircut is a men's haircut. Do not invent names that sound fashionable but mean nothing, and do not use three words where one will do. Add the length and the finish in plain language: 'Haircut, shoulder length, long layers, blow-dry.' That sentence tells the desk what to book, tells the next stylist what to expect and tells the client what she paid for. A clear name prevents the most common salon argument, which is about what was actually agreed.

The handover is a short lesson, not a speech. Stand beside the client, not behind her, and use the mirror. Say what you did in one sentence, then give three instructions at most. 'I kept the length at the collarbone, removed weight inside and left the fringe soft. At home, use heat protectant, point the dryer down, and trim the fringe in four weeks.' Ask the client to repeat one instruction back. If she cannot, the handover is not finished. Keep the language simple and avoid technical words unless the client uses them first. The client does not need to know about elevation; she needs to know where to point the dryer.

Write the same words on the client slip or the card. The slip is the record the client takes home and the card is the record the salon keeps. Use the same sentence on both, so there is no gap between what was said and what was written. If the client is reading in Hindi, give the service name in English and the explanation in Hindi; if she is reading in English, use English throughout. Do not write a private code that only the stylist understands, because the next stylist may not be the same person. A good note is readable by a colleague, by the client and by the owner.

Service English is also about honesty. If the finish depends on a blow-dry, say so. If the fringe will need a trim in three weeks, say so. If the colour will need a root touch-up in six weeks, say so. Do not hide the maintenance in the hope of a bigger tip. A client who is told the maintenance schedule can decide whether she wants the service; a client who discovers it later feels tricked. The sentence 'this cut needs a trim every eight weeks to keep the line' is a service, not a sales pitch. It keeps the shape looking good and keeps the client coming back for the right reason.

- Use the standard service names: haircut, fringe trim, blow-dry, curly cut, men's haircut.
- Add the length and finish in plain words: 'Haircut, shoulder length, long layers, blow-dry.'
- Give the handover beside the client in the mirror, not from behind.
- Say what you did in one sentence and give no more than three instructions.

- Ask the client to repeat one instruction back to you.
- Write the same sentence on the client slip and the salon card.
- State the maintenance interval honestly, including the fringe and root touch-up.
- Avoid private codes that the next stylist cannot read.

Salon example: the slip that prevented an argument

A client, Mrs D'Souza, comes back two weeks after a cut and says the layers are wrong. She asked for a trim and expected the length to stay at her waist, but the previous stylist removed eight centimetres and cut short layers at the crown. The card from that visit says only 'cut and blow-dry'. There is no length, no layer plan and no service name. I look at the hair, which is now at the mid-back with short crown layers that stand up. I cannot restore the length, but I can soften the crown and even the perimeter. I do that, and then I write the full sentence on the card and on her slip: 'Haircut, mid-back length, long layers from the jaw, no short crown layers, blow-dry.' I read it aloud and ask her to repeat it. She does. At the next visit, the note is there and the cut is predictable. The argument did not happen because the words were written down. She also asks for the same note to be sent to her phone, and the desk does that before she leaves.

CAUTION

Do not write a private code or a single word like 'trim' on the card. If the next stylist cannot repeat the cut from your note, the note is not finished.

Trim timing and the heat limit at home

Trim timing depends on the shape, the growth rate and the client's tolerance. A short men's cut needs a rebook in three to four weeks, because men's hair grows about one and a quarter centimetres a month and the shape changes quickly. A fringe needs a trim in three to four weeks. A curly cut can last six to ten weeks because the shape grows out in the curl. A women's cut with a strong perimeter usually needs eight weeks to keep the line, and a long layered shape can go ten to twelve weeks if the ends are healthy. These are starting points, not rules. Ask the client how the shape feels at week six and adjust the interval.

The heat limit at home is the number the client should remember. Fine hair: 120 to 140 C. Medium hair: 150 to 170 C. Coarse or very dense hair: 175 to 190 C. Never above 200 C. A heat protectant goes on the mid-lengths and ends before the tool, and the tool keeps moving. A straightener parked on one section for ten seconds does more damage than a higher temperature passed through quickly. Tell the client to use the lowest setting that works, to keep the tool moving, and to stop when the hair smells hot or the ends look dry. Oil is not a heat protectant, and a heavy oil before straightening makes the hair smoke.

Wash and conditioner habits belong in the same conversation. Wash the scalp, condition the lengths, and rinse cool. Use a clarifying wash once every two weeks if the water is hard, not every day. Do not brush curly hair dry. Do not sleep on wet hair if the hair is fine or porous. Do not tie the hair tightly at the hairline every day. These are small habits, and together they decide whether the cut still looks

good at week six. A client who changes one habit, such as lowering the iron from 200 C to 170 C, often sees a visible difference in the ends by the next visit.

Write the trim date and the heat number on the card before the client leaves. If the client books the next appointment at the desk, the interval is already decided. If the client does not book, give a date range: 'Come back in seven to nine weeks, or sooner if the fringe reaches your eyes.' For a client with a wedding or a big event, work backward from the date and book the cut ten to fourteen days before. For a client with damaged ends, book a dusting in four weeks and a shape review in eight. The card should answer the question 'when do I come back?' without a phone call.

- Book a men's short cut in 3 to 4 weeks and a fringe trim in 3 to 4 weeks.
- Book a curly cut in 6 to 10 weeks and a women's cut in 8 to 12 weeks.
- Set the home heat at 120 to 140 C for fine, 150 to 170 C for medium and 175 to 190 C for coarse.
- Never go above 200 C, and keep the tool moving on every section.
- Apply heat protectant to the mid-lengths and ends before the tool.
- Clarify once every two weeks in hard water, not every day.
- Write the trim date and the heat number on the card before the client leaves.
- Book 10 to 14 days before a wedding and work backward from the event.

Salon example: Anjali's eight-week diary

Anjali has a collarbone bob with a blunt perimeter and fine, porous hair. She straightens it every morning at 200 C and wonders why the ends look thin by week six. I cut two centimetres off the perimeter, point cut the ends and keep the shape simple. Then I show her the heat dial on her own straightener and set it to 160 C. I explain that the lower setting will take an extra minute but will leave the ends intact, and that the protectant goes on before the tool. She writes the number on her phone. We agree on a trim in eight weeks, with a fringe trim in four, because her fringe grows fast. She books both at the desk. When she returns, the ends are visibly stronger and the perimeter is still level. She says the lower heat feels slower but the hair looks better on day two. I write the interval and the temperature on her card. She also asks whether the lower heat will make her late for work, and I show her how to rough-dry the roots while she gets ready.

CAUTION

Do not tell a client to use the highest heat for speed or to skip the heat protectant on coloured hair. Set the number by texture and keep it below 200 C.

The next-visit note on the card

A client card is a working document, not a receipt. It should tell the next stylist four things in under a minute: the shape and the lengths, the products used, any reaction or scalp note, and the next appointment date. Write in centimetres and in plain words: 'Perimeter collarbone, layers from jaw, face frame at cheekbone, no short crown layers.' Add the service name and the finish: 'Haircut, collarbone, long layers, blow-dry.' If you used a particular elevation or overdirection, write that too,

because the same shape can be cut two ways and look different. A card that says only 'cut' wastes the consultation next time.

The note should also record what not to do. If the client reacted to a product, write the product and the reaction. If the scalp had a patch, write the location and the referral date. If the hair was gummy, write 'no colour, no razor, dust only' and the date. If the client refused a service, write that. These negative notes are often more useful than the positive ones, because they prevent a repeat mistake. They also protect the salon if a client later says she was not warned. Write them neutrally, without blame, and keep them factual. A note that is specific is also fairer to the client than a vague warning she cannot act on.

Take a photo if the client agrees. A back view and a side view, in the same light, on the same phone, stored with the client's record. The photo settles questions about length and shape faster than three sentences. Do not post it without written permission, and do not keep it on a personal phone if the salon has a shared system. If the client declines, respect that and rely on the written note. A photo is a tool, not a trophy. The purpose is to repeat a good result, not to advertise the salon without consent. Store the file where the team can find it, and delete it if the client asks.

Close the visit with the card in your hand, not in a drawer. Read the next appointment date aloud, confirm the service name and give the client the slip. If the client is not booking today, write the date range on the slip and ask her to call. Update the card after the service, not at the end of the day, because the details fade. If a colleague will cut the client next time, tell her the one thing that matters most: the cowlick, the sensitive scalp, the no-razor rule. A good card is a handover between professionals, and the client feels the difference at the next visit.

- Write the perimeter and layer lengths in centimetres, in plain words.
- Write the service name, the finish and any elevation or overdirection used.
- Record the products used and any reaction, with the date.
- Record scalp findings, referrals and the advice you gave.
- Record what not to do: no colour, no razor, no short crown layers.
- Take a back and side photo only with the client's permission.
- Read the next appointment date aloud and give the client the slip.
- Update the card before the client leaves, not at the end of the day.

Salon example: the card that saved a colour

A client, Meghna, returns after four months and asks for the same colour as last time. She has moved to another city and cannot remember the formula. The card from her last visit has the shade, the developer, the timing and a note that her scalp reacted to the ammonia-based product with redness for two days. It also has a note: 'patch test before every colour; client prefers ammonia-free.' The new stylist reads the card, does a patch test, and chooses the ammonia-free line. Meghna is relieved because she had forgotten the reaction. The cut note says 'perimeter at collarbone, long layers, no short crown layers, cowlick at right temple.' The stylist cuts to the same plan and leaves the temple longer. The result matches the photo in the file. The card did the work that memory could not, and the client books her next visit before she leaves. The note also says that the fringe was cut dry with a 2 mm margin, and the stylist follows it. Meghna leaves with the same shape and the same colour, and says the visit felt shorter because nobody had to ask her to remember.

CAUTION

Do not leave the card blank until closing time or record only the service name. If a reaction, a scalp note or a no-razor rule is missing, the next stylist may repeat the harm.

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Glossary

Density

The number of hairs on the scalp in a given area.

Texture

The diameter of an individual hair strand: fine, medium or coarse.

Porosity

How easily hair absorbs and holds moisture, linked to the condition of the cuticle.

Elasticity

The ability of wet hair to stretch and return to its original length.

Growth pattern

The natural direction in which hair leaves the scalp, including cowlicks and whorls.

Cowlick

A small section of hair that grows in a different direction from the hair around it.

Whorl

A circular growth pattern, usually at the crown.

Cuticle

The outer layer of the hair shaft, made of overlapping scales.

Zero elevation

Cutting hair flat against the skin with no lift, used for a solid perimeter.

Elevation

The angle at which hair is held away from the head before it is cut.

Guide

The first cut section that sets the length for the sections that follow.

Graduation

Cutting at a low elevation so lengths build weight, often at the back of a bob.

Point cutting

Cutting small triangles into the ends with the scissor tips to soften a line.

Slide cutting

Cutting with the length of the blade while the hair is held under tension.

Shrinkage

The difference between the stretched length of curly hair and its visible length.

Curl clump

A group of curls that naturally sits together as one unit.

Diffuser

A dryer attachment that spreads air to dry curls without blowing them apart.

Scissor-over-comb

Cutting only the hair that stands through the teeth of a comb to blend lengths.

Guard

A attachment on clippers that sets a nominal cutting length.

Fade

A gradual change from short to longer hair, usually on the sides and back.

Patch test

A small skin test done before a chemical service to check for a reaction.

Dusting

Removing a very small amount from the ends to keep the shape without changing length.

Perimeter

The outer edge or outline of a haircut.

Silhouette

The overall outline of the finished shape.

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