

THE ONLINE HAIR ACADEMY

Hairdresser's Starter Guide

Your practical starting point for building confidence, professional habits and salon-ready skills.

Learn	Practise	Progress
Foundations	Salon skills	Career pathway

Created for aspiring hairdressers, apprentices and anyone beginning their salon journey.

Use this guide as a starting point alongside hands-on training, qualified supervision, manufacturer instructions and the requirements of your course or workplace.

Contents

1. Your Hairdressing Journey
2. Professional Standards & Salon Etiquette
3. Health, Safety & Hygiene
4. Consultation Essentials
5. Hair & Scalp Basics
6. Cutting Foundations
7. Colour Foundations
8. Blow-Drying & Styling
9. Client Experience
10. Retail & Rebooking
11. Your Practice Checklist
12. Career Development Plan

1. Your Hairdressing Journey

The pathway

Hairdressing is a practical profession. Your confidence grows through a combination of knowledge, observation, repetition, feedback and real client experience. A typical pathway can include work experience → apprenticeship or training → stylist → educator/teacher → management → salon ownership.

What to focus on first

Build strong foundations before trying to master advanced techniques. Concentrate on communication, hygiene, sectioning, product control, safe tool use, timing, finishing and understanding why a technique works.

Your learning mindset

Keep a training record. Photograph appropriate practice work, write down what you learned, record feedback and identify one skill to improve next time.

2. Professional Standards & Salon Etiquette

Professional habits

Arrive prepared and on time, wear suitable salon clothing and footwear, keep your workstation organised, maintain personal presentation and communicate respectfully with clients and colleagues.

The professional standard

A good hairdresser is not only technically capable. They are reliable, observant, hygienic, calm under pressure and able to explain services clearly. Never guess when you are unsure—ask a qualified colleague or trainer.

Your workstation checklist

Clean and disinfect appropriate tools and surfaces; prepare towels and gowns; check products and equipment; keep cables tidy; dispose of waste correctly; and reset the station between clients.

3. Health, Safety & Hygiene

Golden rules

Follow your salon's risk assessments, training and manufacturer's instructions. Use appropriate PPE where required. Carry out patch tests and other required tests according to the product manufacturer's instructions and salon policy. Check allergies, sensitivities and relevant contraindications during consultation.

Chemical services

Handle colour, lightener, peroxide and other chemicals carefully. Follow the exact manufacturer's mixing, application, development and storage instructions. Never improvise ratios, processing times or applications.

Electrical tools

Check cords, plugs and equipment before use. Keep electrical equipment away from water, use it as instructed, and report damaged equipment immediately.

Emergency awareness

Know where the first-aid kit, fire exits, emergency procedures and incident-reporting process are located. If a chemical gets into the eyes or onto skin, follow the product's safety instructions and your workplace emergency procedure immediately.

4. Consultation Essentials

A strong consultation

A consultation is where you discover the client's goals and decide whether the requested service is suitable. Discuss the desired result, previous colour or chemical history, hair condition, maintenance, lifestyle, budget and realistic expectations.

Questions to ask

What would you like to achieve? What do you like or dislike about your current hair? What colour or chemical services have you had before? What products do you use? How much time do you want to spend styling it? How often are you prepared to return for maintenance?

Before you begin

Confirm the agreed service, price where applicable, expected result and aftercare. Record relevant information according to your salon's consultation and record-keeping system.

5. Hair & Scalp Basics

Hair structure

Hair is primarily made of keratin. The visible hair fibre has three commonly described layers: cuticle, cortex and medulla (the medulla may be absent or discontinuous in some hair types). The cortex contributes strongly to strength, shape and colour.

What affects the hair

Porosity, density, texture, elasticity, previous chemical services, heat exposure and mechanical damage can all affect how hair behaves during a service.

Scalp observation

Look for visible redness, irritation, broken skin or other concerns. If something falls outside your training or salon policy, stop and refer to a qualified professional rather than diagnosing a condition yourself.

6. Cutting Foundations

Core principles

Learn clean sectioning, control of tension, body position, elevation, guideline management and consistent cutting angles. Understand how length, weight and shape are created before progressing to advanced techniques.

Practice routine

Start with a clear target shape. Section neatly, establish a guideline, work systematically and check balance throughout. Cross-check the finished shape and refine only where necessary.

Client safety

Keep scissors and razors controlled, maintain awareness of the client's position and never rush around the ears, neck or other sensitive areas.

7. Colour Foundations

Before colouring

Complete the required consultation and testing process, review colour history and assess the hair's condition. Confirm the desired result and explain what is achievable.

Key concepts

Develop your understanding of levels, tone, underlying pigment, colour theory, formulation, developer choice, sectioning, saturation and development. Always follow the specific colour brand's technical instructions.

Highlighting practice

Learn consistent sectioning and foil placement. Practise clean weaves/slices as appropriate to the technique, controlled saturation, neat folding and secure placement. Work methodically rather than chasing speed.

After the service

Check the result, rinse thoroughly as directed, tone where appropriate, condition according to the service, style and explain aftercare. Record the formula and relevant service details according to salon policy.

8. Blow-Drying & Styling

The basics

Prepare the hair correctly, remove excess moisture safely, choose appropriate products and use controlled airflow and heat. Work in sections and create the intended shape rather than simply drying the hair.

Heat protection

Use suitable heat protection and follow product instructions. Avoid excessive heat or prolonged contact with one area of hair.

Finishing

Check the overall shape from different angles, refine the finish and make sure the client can maintain the result at home.

9. Client Experience

Make the client feel looked after

Greet the client, use their name, explain what you are doing, check comfort and invite questions. Small details—clean towels, a tidy station, clear communication and a calm manner—make a big difference.

During the service

Check water temperature, cape comfort, heat and pressure. If something changes from the agreed plan, explain it before proceeding where possible.

At the end

Show the client the finished result, explain styling and aftercare, recommend suitable products without pressure and confirm their next maintenance appointment if they wish to rebook.

10. Retail & Rebooking

Retail with purpose

Recommend products because they support the client's hair goals. Explain what the product does, how much to use and how to apply it. Avoid overwhelming the client with too many recommendations.

Rebooking

Explain when the client may need maintenance and why. For colour, cuts and treatments, the ideal return time depends on the service, hair and client's goals.

Build trust

Your recommendations should be consistent with what you observed and what you actually believe will help the client's hair. Trust is more valuable than a one-off sale.

11. Your Practice Checklist

Before every practice session

■ Set up safely ■ Read the technique/service brief ■ Prepare tools and products ■ Plan your sections ■ Identify your learning goal

During practice

■ Maintain clean sectioning ■ Control product/tool use ■ Work safely ■ Check your progress ■ Ask for feedback when needed

After practice

■ Photograph the result where appropriate ■ Note what went well ■ Record what needs improvement ■ Clean and reset ■ Choose your next practice goal

12. Career Development Plan

My 30-day goals

Skill I want to improve: _____

How I will practise: _____

Who can give me feedback: _____

Evidence of progress: _____

My salon-ready checklist

■ Consultation skills ■ Hygiene and safety ■ Sectioning ■ Blow-drying ■ Basic cutting ■ Colour theory ■ Colour application ■ Client communication ■ Aftercare ■ Rebooking

Keep learning

Hairdressing changes constantly. Continue with manufacturer education, accredited training where appropriate, hands-on practice, observation and feedback. Keep a record of your development and the techniques you want to learn next.

Your Next Step

You do not need to know everything before you begin. Hairdressing is built through practice, feedback and experience.

Choose one skill. Practise it. Review it. Improve it. Repeat.

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Practical education for the next generation of hair professionals.

Important note: This guide is an educational starting point and is not a substitute for supervised practical training, your qualification requirements, salon policies, risk assessments, or individual manufacturer's technical and safety instructions.