

SHANTI
SKINCARE

THE SKINCARE LAYERING GUIDE

Find out why your routine isn't working for your acne and dark spots.

5-MINUTE READ

BY ANIKA HOSSAIN, LICENSED ESTHETICIAN

YOUR ROUTINE WAS NEVER MADE FOR YOUR SKIN.

That's why nothing has worked.



I'm Anika, a licensed esthetician of 9 years and the founder of Shanti Skincare, a corrective skincare studio in New York City. I specialize in working with clients who struggle with acne and dark spots, and who have tried everything but still can't figure out what their skin needs.

Before they came to me, most of my clients were where you are right now: frustrated, with a bathroom counter full of products and no change in their skin. A serum from TikTok, a cleanser your friend swore by, an acid you read about online. You've spent the money, covered your breakouts and dark spots with makeup, and started to wonder if your skin will ever change. None of it was chosen for ***your*** skin. Progress with acne and dark spots comes down to two things: the right ingredients for your skin, and the right way to layer them.

This guide walks you through the layering mistakes I see most and the order I teach my clients, so you can see what might be holding your skin back. First, I want to show you the cycle nearly every one of my clients was stuck in before they came to me. You might recognize it.

Anika Hossain

LICENSED ESTHETICIAN · FOUNDER, SHANTI SKINCARE

THE S.O.S. CYCLE

WHY NOTHING SEEMS TO WORK

An S.O.S. is a call for help. Your skin sends one when something in your routine isn't working, and the reason is different for everyone. Most people answer it with another product, and that's how this cycle starts.

S SPEND

A breakout shows up, so you research, read reviews, and buy the best product you can get your hands on.

O OVERWHELM

Then one of three things happens. Your skin barrier takes a hit, and your skin stings, feels tight, or turns red. Or your skin purges, breaking out more before it gets better, and you stop before the product has had a chance to work. Or nothing changes at all, because your products aren't layered or combined correctly.

S START OVER

Whichever one it is, you end up in the same place. You cover your skin with makeup before every meeting, photo, and night out, and go right back to looking for the next product.

Your skin keeps sending its S.O.S., and the cycle starts all over again.



WHAT BREAKING THE CYCLE LOOKS LIKE

The next pages come straight from my studio. They cover the mistakes I catch, the order I teach, and how I layer by texture. With my clients, this is only where we begin.

Real client, before and after, 7 months apart. Individual results vary.

SKINCARE GLOSSARY

TERMS WORTH KNOWING BEFORE YOU CONTINUE READING

ACTIVE

An ingredient that changes how your skin behaves, like clearing breakouts, exfoliating, or fading dark spots.

Examples: retinol, tretinoin (prescription), salicylic acid, benzoyl peroxide, vitamin C

RETINOID

A vitamin A ingredient that speeds up skin cell turnover. It helps with breakouts, texture, and dark spots, and can cause dryness at first.

Examples: retinol, retinal (retinaldehyde), tretinoin (prescription)

EXFOLIATING ACID

Loosens dead skin cells so skin looks smoother and brighter. AHAs work on the surface. BHAs get into pores, which is why they help with acne.

Examples: glycolic, lactic, and mandelic acid (AHAs), salicylic acid (BHA)

SKIN BARRIER

The outermost layer of your skin. It keeps water in and irritants out.

Signs it's damaged: redness, tightness, stinging when you apply products

DOUBLE CLEANSE

Two cleanses at night. The first breaks down makeup and sunscreen, and the second cleans the skin itself.

Example: a cleansing oil or balm, then a gentle cleanser

3 LAYERING MISTAKES

I SEE IN MY STUDIO EVERY WEEK

If any of these sound familiar, your routine could be holding your skin back.

MISTAKE 1 STACKING ACTIVES THE WRONG WAY

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Your actives all go on in the same routine, in whatever order feels right, because no one ever told you which belong in the morning, which at night, and which shouldn't share a day.

WHY IT BACKFIRES

Actives can work well together when they're used at the right time and in the right order. Stacked the wrong way, they irritate your skin, and irritation can leave even more dark spots behind.

THE FIX

Give each active its own slot. Antioxidants like vitamin C go on in the morning, and your one strong active goes on at night.

MISTAKE 2 APPLYING PRODUCTS IN THE WRONG ORDER

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Applying toner, then moisturizer, then serum? You have everything in your routine, but the steps are all mixed up.

WHY IT BACKFIRES

A thicker product keeps a thinner one from getting through, so the serum you paid for sits on top of your moisturizer instead of reaching your skin.

THE FIX

Go from the thinnest texture to the thickest, so every product can reach your skin.

MISTAKE 3 DOUBLING UP ON THE SAME INGREDIENT

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

A toner and toner pads that both contain exfoliating acids, or two serums that do the same job, one applied after the other. You're doing the same thing twice without knowing it.

WHY IT BACKFIRES

Doubling up rarely gets better results. It can over-exfoliate or be too much to properly absorb into your skin, and most of the time, you've ended up paying twice for the same thing.

THE FIX

Check the ingredient list on everything you use. If two products do the same job, pick one and stick to it.

THE ORDER

THE ROUTINE I TEACH MY CLIENTS

WHERE TO START

This is the base routine I start most clients with. The order stays the same, but the products I choose for each step are different for every client.

MORNING

PROTECT

CLEANSE
Gentle cleanser, or cool to lukewarm water only, depending on your skin type.

ANTIOXIDANT
Vitamin C serum on clean, dry skin.

MOISTURIZE
Seals in hydration. Optional if you're oily.

SUNSCREEN
Every morning. Reapply every 2 hours in the sun.

NIGHT

CORRECT

CLEANSE
Double cleanse to remove makeup and sunscreen.

TARGET
One strong active only to start, on clean, dry skin.

HYDRATE
Hydrating serum to combat dryness from actives.

MOISTURIZE
Supports your barrier while you sleep.

RULE OF THUMB

At night, stick to one strong active, like a retinoid or an exfoliating acid. Start with twice a week, with rest nights in between, and gradually build your way up. From there, the schedule is different for every client and needs to be tailored to your skin and lifestyle.

THINNEST TO THICKEST

HOW TO LAYER BY TEXTURE

Each layer has to get through the one before it, so thin products go on first and thick ones go on last. Which of these you use depends on your skin type. Oily skin, for example, may never need a balm.

TONER
Watery and light. It goes on first, right after cleansing.

WATER-BASED SERUM
Thin serums, like vitamin C or hyaluronic acid.

OIL
Face oils and oil-based serums.

MOISTURIZER
Lotions and creams that seal in the layers underneath.

BALM
The thickest layer. It goes on last, at night.

WHERE THE RULE BREAKS

THE EXCEPTIONS I TEACH MY CLIENTS

ACTIVES GO BY JOB
An active can be in a toner, a serum, or a cream. Whatever its texture, a strong active goes on clean, dry skin first so it can work at its best. For prescription creams, follow your prescriber's directions.

DRY SKIN OR DAMP SKIN
Vitamin C and strong actives go on clean, dry skin, since damp skin can make them more irritating. A hydrating serum works best on damp skin, where it can hold on to that water.

SUNSCREEN GOES LAST
It isn't the thickest product, but in the morning it always goes on last. Skincare layered over it can thin it out and weaken your protection.

THE COST OF WAITING

An S.O.S. that goes unanswered only gets louder. The longer you wait, the more it costs you.



Most of my clients had spent hundreds of dollars on products before their first visit. They'd bought from every prestigious brand, each one promising results, but their skin never changed. None of it had been chosen specifically for their skin.

You probably have a drawer full of products you've given up on. I call that the skincare graveyard, and it usually comes with your wallet giving you the side eye for every purchase that ended up not helping your skin. Every new product feels like one step forward, only to go two steps back.

Real client, before and after, 6 months apart. Individual results vary.

Here's how my clients got out of it.

YOUR SKIN ASSESSMENT

I ANALYZE YOUR SKIN

I look closely at your acne and dark spots, then we do a deep dive on what's worked and what hasn't.

WE GO THROUGH YOUR ROUTINE

We look at everything you're using now, so you know what to keep and what to cut.

YOU LEAVE WITH A PLAN

You get the right products and a routine, both tailored to your skin and lifestyle down to the last detail.

REAL RESULTS START HERE.

ANSWER YOUR SKIN'S S.O.S.

If you saw yourself anywhere in this guide, you're right where my clients were before they came to me. Your skin assessment is where you stop repeating the same patterns and commit to something different to see real change.



BEFORE + AFTER
6 MONTHS APART

WHERE SHE STARTED

For 15 years, Stebjola tried to fix her acne on her own. She followed online advice and bought what people recommended, without ever knowing which of it applied to her skin.

IN HER WORDS

"She has helped me tremendously with my acne journey. What really sets her apart is how much she genuinely listens and cares. She takes the time to explain everything in a way that's easy to understand, and she always follows up to check on progress, which makes such a difference."

STEBJOLA, SHANTI SKINCARE CLIENT

IN PERSON IN NYC

75 minutes in my studio, including an introductory facial. **$275.**

BOOK YOUR IN-PERSON SKIN ASSESSMENT

Not in NYC? Stay tuned for announcements about our virtual skin program.

See more client results

This guide is for educational purposes only and is not medical advice. It is not meant to diagnose or treat any skin condition. Individual results vary. If you use prescription skincare, follow your prescriber's directions. The price shown is before taxes and fees.