

Trading places

Hairdressers have it tougher than most during job interviews. A trade test is an essential part of the recruitment process designed to highlight technical ability, plus styling and finishing skills. It's natural to feel totally intimidated in this situation and to clam up rather than being calm and articulate. There are however, measures you can make prior to zero hour, which will make you feel more confident and in control as you're put through your professional paces.

Be prepared not scared

If you've been given an interview and you don't feel you have all the facts as to what the format will be, you should have no hesitation in contacting the salon and asking for more details so you can fully prepare. Try and pick your moment though, first thing in the morning is probably the best time, and always call the office number if you have it, rather than reception.

Start right

There's a lot riding on the outcome so be early for your appointment. Be precise about where you're going and how long it will take you to get there. Always allow extra time for unexpected delays as being late by even a few minutes will create a bad impression in this appointment driven industry. Wear a watch, rather than relying on your phone, as you can discreetly glance at it as you work through your haircut. Think polished professionalism, dressing the part with clean, pressed clothes and shined shoes. Your hair will be the first thing your interviewer notices most so it should be immaculate. Check it before you walk into the salon.

Steps to success

As scary as a trade test sounds; the thing to remember is that you're not being asked to do anything you wouldn't normally do in the salon environment. You need to listen to instruction and to interact well with your model/client. Be conscious of the time you're taking to complete the test in the context of being a stylist with a busy column. In essence you're delivering a dummy appointment and it's as much about service as skills. You need to focus on communication, concentration and customer care. You may know everything there is to know about your model's hair, but you should nevertheless ask the type of open ended questions that you'd address to a first time client. Retail recommendations and re-booking conversations are brilliant closers and will impress your examiner.

Top tips for a star performance.

- Show thorough knowledge of the company you're interviewing for: history, ownership, how many salons there are and who's in the art team if they have one. It's quite usual for an art team member or Director to test you and knowledge of the company set-up will earn you bonus points.
- Come prepared with a complete kit bag. Don't turn up missing essential items and have to ask to borrow some clips or scissors. It looks flaky and will count against you.
- If you've been asked to bring a model, make sure you have a suitable candidate that you can completely rely on. They must be in need of a haircut so that your technique shows through and the style is noticeable. A quick trim will do you no favours.
- Ensure you're executing the haircut you've been asked to demonstrate. Don't use the occasion to be experimental. If you've been asked to cut a classic bob then that's what you should do.
- Think about any prep you need to do beforehand. If you're just doing a cut in the test, have your model's hair coloured a couple of days in advance so your cut is complemented as much as possible.
- Stay calm and collected and enjoy showcasing your skills and ability. Enthusiasm, passion and a positive attitude are important for this industry so let yours shine through.