

Barbers, Cosmetologists, and Other Personal Appearance Workers

(0*NET 39-5011.00, 39-5012.00, 39-5091.00, 39-5092.00, 39-5093.00, 39-5094.00)

Significant Points

- Job opportunities generally should be good, but competition is expected for jobs and clients at higher paying salons; opportunities will be best for those licensed to provide a broad range of services.
- Barbers, cosmetologists, and most other personal appearance workers must be licensed.
- Almost half of all barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers are self-employed; many also work flexible schedules.

Nature of the Work

Barbers and cosmetologists, also called *hairdressers* and *hairstylists*, help people look neat and well-groomed. Other personal appearance workers, such as *manicurists and pedicurists*, *shampooers*, and *skin care specialists* provide specialized services that help clients look and feel their best.

Barbers cut, trim, shampoo, and style hair. Also, they fit hairpieces and offer scalp treatments and facial massages. In many States, barbers are licensed to color, bleach, or highlight hair and offer permanent-wave services. Many barbers also provide skin care and nail treatments.

Hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists provide beauty services, such as shampooing, cutting, coloring, and styling hair. They may advise clients on how to care for their hair, straighten hair or give it a permanent wave, or lighten or darken hair color. Additionally, cosmetologists may train to give manicures, pedicures, and scalp and facial treatments; provide makeup analysis; and clean and style wigs and hairpieces.

A number of workers offer specialized services. *Manicurists and pedicurists*, called *nail technicians* in some States, work exclusively on nails and provide manicures, pedicures, coloring, and nail extensions to clients. Another group of specialists is *skin care specialists*, or *estheticians*, who cleanse and beautify the skin by giving facials, full-body treatments, and head and neck massages and by removing hair through waxing. *Electrologists* use an electrolysis machine to remove hair. Finally, in some larger salons, *shampooers* specialize in shampooing and conditioning clients' hair.

In addition to their work with clients, personal appearance workers are expected to maintain clean work areas and sanitize all work implements. They may make appointments and keep records of hair color and permanent-wave formulas used by their regular clients. A growing number actively sell hair products and other cosmetic supplies. Barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers who operate their own salons have managerial duties that include hiring, supervising, and firing workers, as well as keeping business and inventory records, ordering supplies, and arranging for advertising.

Working Conditions

Barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers usually work in clean, pleasant surroundings with good lighting and ventilation. Good health and stamina are important,

because these workers are on their feet for most of their shift. Because prolonged exposure to some hair and nail chemicals may cause irritation, special care is taken to use protective clothing, such as plastic gloves or aprons.

Most full-time barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers put in a 40-hour week, but longer hours are common in this occupation, especially among self-employed workers. Work schedules may include evenings and weekends, the times when beauty salons and barbershops are busiest. Because barbers and cosmetologists generally will be working on weekends and during lunch and evening hours, they may arrange to take breaks during less popular times. About 30 percent of cosmetologists and 19 percent of barbers work part time and 14 percent of cosmetologists and 13 percent of barbers have variable schedules.

Employment

Barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers held about 754,000 jobs in 2002. Of these, barbers, hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists held 651,000 jobs; manicurists and pedicurists, 51,000; skin care specialists, 25,000; and shampooers, 25,000.

Most of these workers are employed in beauty salons or barber shops, but they are also found in nail salons, department stores, nursing and other residential care homes, and drug and cosmetics stores. Nearly every town has a barbershop or beauty



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salon, but employment in this occupation is concentrated in the most populous cities and States.

Almost half of all barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers are self-employed. Many own their own salon, but a growing number lease booth space or a chair from the salon's owner.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

All States require barbers, cosmetologists, and most other personal appearance workers to be licensed. Qualifications for a license, however, vary. Generally, a person must have graduated from a State-licensed barber or cosmetology school and be at least 16 years old. A few States require applicants to pass a physical examination. Some States require graduation from high school while others require as little as an eighth-grade education. In a few States, the completion of an apprenticeship can substitute for graduation from a school, but very few barbers or cosmetologists learn their skills in this way. Applicants for a license usually are required to pass a written test and demonstrate an ability to perform basic barbering or cosmetology services.

Some States have reciprocity agreements that allow licensed barbers and cosmetologists to obtain a license in a different State without additional formal training. Other States do not recognize training or licenses obtained in another State; consequently, persons who wish to work in a particular State should review the laws of that State before entering a training program.

Public and private vocational schools offer daytime or evening classes in barbering and cosmetology. Full-time programs in barbering and cosmetology usually last 9 to 24 months, but training for manicurists and pedicurists, skin care specialists, and electrologists requires significantly less time. An apprenticeship program can last from 1 to 3 years. Shampooers generally do not need formal training or a license. Formal training programs include classroom study, demonstrations, and practical work. Students study the basic services—cutting hair, shaving customers, providing facial massages, and giving hair and scalp treatments—and, under supervision, practice on customers in school “clinics.” Most schools also teach unisex hairstyling and chemical styling. Students attend lectures on the use and care of instruments, sanitation and hygiene, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, and the recognition of simple skin ailments. Instruction also is provided in communication, sales, and general business practices. Experienced barbers and cosmetologists may take advanced courses in hairstyling, coloring, and the sale and service of hairpieces.

After graduating from a training program, students can take the State licensing examination, which consists of a written test and, in some cases, a practical test of styling skills based on established performance criteria. A few States include an oral examination in which the applicant is asked to explain the procedures he or she is following while taking the practical test. In many States, cosmetology training may be credited toward a barbering license, and vice versa. A few States combine the two licenses into one hairstyling license. Many States require separate licensing examinations for manicurists, pedicurists, and skin care specialists.

For many barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers, formal training and a license are only the first steps in a career that requires years of continuing education. Because hairstyles change, new products are developed, and services expand to meet clients' needs, personal appearance workers must keep abreast of the latest fashions and beauty

techniques. They attend training at salons, cosmetology schools, or product shows. Through workshops and demonstrations of the latest techniques, industry representatives introduce cosmetologists to a wide range of products and services. As retail sales become an increasingly important part of salons' revenue, the ability to be an effective salesperson becomes vital for salon workers.

Successful personal appearance workers should have an understanding of fashion, art, and technical design. They should enjoy working with the public and be willing and able to follow clients' instructions. Communication, image, and attitude play an important role in career success. Some cosmetology schools consider “people skills” to be such an integral part of the job that they require coursework in this area. Business skills are important for those who plan to operate their own salons.

During their first months on the job, new workers are given relatively simple tasks or are assigned the simpler hairstyling patterns. Once they have demonstrated their skills, they are gradually permitted to perform more complicated tasks, such as coloring hair or applying a permanent wave. As they continue to work in the field, more training is usually required to learn the techniques used in each salon and to build on the basics learned in cosmetology school.

Advancement usually takes the form of higher earnings as barbers and cosmetologists gain experience and build a steady clientele. Some barbers and cosmetologists manage large salons or open their own after several years of experience. Others teach in barber or cosmetology schools, or provide training through vocational schools. Still others advance to become sales representatives, image or fashion consultants, or examiners for State licensing boards.

Job Outlook

Overall employment of barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through 2012, because of increasing population, incomes, and demand for personal appearance services. In addition to those arising from job growth, numerous job openings will arise from the need to replace workers who transfer to other occupations, retire, or leave the labor force for other reasons. As a result, job opportunities generally should be good. However, competition is expected for jobs and clients at higher paying salons, as applicants compete with a large pool of licensed and experienced cosmetologists for these positions. Opportunities will be best for those licensed to provide a broad range of services.

Employment trends are expected to vary among the different specialties within this grouping of occupations. For example, slower than average growth is expected in employment of barbers due to a large number of retirements and the relatively small number of cosmetology school graduates opting to obtain barbering licenses. On the other hand, employment of hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists should grow about as fast as average, because many now cut and style both men's and women's hair and because the demand for coloring services and other hair treatments, such as permanent waves, by teens and aging baby boomers is expected to remain steady or even grow.

Continued growth in the number of nail salons and full-service day spas will generate numerous job openings for manicurists, pedicurists, skin care specialists, and shampooers. Nail salons specialize in providing manicures and pedicures. Day spas typically provide a full range of services, including beauty wraps, manicures and pedicures, facials, and massages.

Earnings

Barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers receive income from a variety of sources. They may receive commissions based on the price of the service or a salary based on number of hours worked. All receive tips, and many receive commissions on the products they sell. In addition, some salons pay bonuses to employees who bring in new business.

Median annual earnings in 2002 for salaried hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists, including tips and commission, were \$18,960. The middle 50 percent earned between \$15,010 and \$25,600. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$13,020, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$35,240.

Median annual earnings in 2002 for salaried barbers, including tips, were \$19,550. The middle 50 percent earned between \$14,540 and \$27,290. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$12,720, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$37,370.

Among skin care specialists, median annual earnings, including tips, were \$22,450; for manicurists and pedicurists, \$17,330; and \$14,360 for shampooers.

A number of factors determine the total income of barbers, cosmetologists, and other personal appearance workers, including the size and location of the salon, the number of hours worked, clients' tipping habits, and competition from other barber shops and salons. Cosmetologists or barber's initiative and ability to attract and hold regular clients also are key factors in determining his or her earnings. Earnings for entry-level workers are usually low; however, for those who stay in the profession, earnings can be considerably higher.

Although some salons offer paid vacations and medical benefits, many self-employed and part-time workers in this occupation do not enjoy such common benefits.

Related Occupations

Other workers who provide a personal service to clients and usually must be professionally licensed or certified include massage therapists, fitness trainers, and aerobics instructors.

Sources of Additional Information

A list of licensed training schools and licensing requirements for cosmetologists may be obtained from:

► National Accrediting Commission of Cosmetology Arts and Sciences, 4401 Ford Ave., Suite 1300, Alexandria, VA 22302. Internet: <http://www.naccas.org>

Information about a career in cosmetology is available from:

► National Cosmetology Association, 401 N. Michigan Ave., 22nd floor, Chicago, IL 60611. Internet: <http://www.salonprofessionals.org>

For details on State licensing requirements and approved barber or cosmetology schools, contact the State boards of barber or cosmetology examiners in your State capital.