

HOW TO SHOP FOR MAKEUP

A Beginner's e-Guide



THE SKINNY SCOUT

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INTRODUCTION

The very first makeup I ever bought was a Clean & Clear mattifying powder when I was 15. The cool girls in class were using it, and they looked gorgeous - so this must be the product that would make me look pretty too.

Well, I've come a long way since, and I've learnt that no matter what product you use, beauty really shines from the inside out. But there are always ways to help you look radiant, and just like how you feel inside. I mean, there are always days when we could do with more sleep or when coffee just doesn't quite cut it even though we're feeling like we're at the top of the world.

And what if you're just a beginner to this seemingly scary world of makeup? Where would you even begin and what are the things you'd start buying first? How would you know what you need or what to look out for when purchasing makeup? What about the ingredients like parabens and fragrance - what *exactly* are they and are they really bad?

This e-book serves as a guide you need to help you navigate the confusing thing known as makeup shopping. We'll look at the most important makeup items you should have and how to go about buying them. Enjoy the ride!

Part 1: Research and Get Out

Buying makeup can always be a little adventure of sorts. It's so easy to do too, in that makeup is so accessible everywhere you go. You can find makeup at the drugstore, at specialty stores, online and even at mega department stores. But because it's so accessible, and there are just millions of products to choose from, where does one even begin?

Sales Assistants

When it comes to buying makeup, thank goodness there are certain guidelines to follow no matter where you're shopping at. Shopping for anything should be a pleasant experience, if not an exciting one. After all, you are getting something to pretty yourself up (or a close girlfriend or relative) and just the idea alone of turning someone into a work of art has got to stand for something. You must never feel pressured into making a purchase – any purchase.

When you encounter an aggressive or overly zealous sales assistant and you start feeling uncomfortable, do the right thing and walk away. You should never have to feel forced into buying something if you're not 100% sure you want to get it. If the sales assistant starts making you feel even a tad insecure about the way you look, remember: It's not you it's them. They're just really desperate to get a sale but unfortunately for them, this time, it's not going to be from you.

It doesn't matter if the product at hand seems too good to be left behind. There will always be another store where you can get the same thing, or there might even be better products out there. Remember: the options are endless when it comes to beauty shopping.

Research Beforehand

When you are unsure of what to put your money on, always do research beforehand. Resources are within your reach; you just have to use them to help you make more informed decisions later on. Beauty blogs and review forums are some examples where you can get reliable facts quickly. Don't base your choice simply on one or two reviews alone. Find out as much as you possibly can so that you are aware of what you are looking into. Are there cheaper alternatives that work better? Are there certain beauty stores that offer discounts or member privileges? There are many things to consider before making that final purchase. As they say, knowledge is king.

Join Communities

If you're on reddit, you can always check out the beauty subreddits, where the communities are generally genial and helpful. You can even post comments in there and expect to get replies. Of course, do follow community guidelines and rules. Here are some beauty-related subreddits you should check out:

- [/r/makeup](#)
- [/r/beauty](#)
- [/r/asianbeauty](#)
- [/r/acne](#)
- [/r/makeupaddiction](#)
- [/r/skincareaddiction](#)

Have a Budget

Finally, and probably the most important thing to take note of, you should always have a budget in mind. This may be one of the harshest things to deal with but it is every bit as crucial as identifying how significant a product is to you. In general, packaging, marketing, branding and product quality are some of the aspects that affect prices the most. Perhaps that Dior eyeshadow palette is way out of your budget but don't give up. There might always be a dupe that's way more affordable but almost just as good (just do a quick search online for a dupe of the exact shade). At the end of the day, ask yourself this: What matters most to you when it comes to makeup?

Part 2: Foundation

One of the most basic makeup items that every girl has is foundation. Besides evening out skin tone and minimising the appearance of pores, foundation can also do so much more. Depending on your skin type and the climate you are in, there are different kinds of foundation that a girl can use. Not surprisingly, you can find more than one of it in your makeup stash and there'd be a good reason for it.

Know Your Skin Type

To find out the type of foundation that you should get, the first thing to know is your skin type. Liquid and mousse foundations suit dry and normal skin best (and also normal-dry) while compact foundations are generally meant for oily skin. The climate should also affect your choice of foundation mainly because your skin reacts differently under different conditions. For example, if you are located somewhere very humid, a compact powder would probably be your best bet to beat the sweat and excess sebum. If you are somewhere dryer and more temperate, liquids could be more desirable.

Certain brands carry products that may work wonders but this is not always the case for everyone. This is because not all of us have the same skin type that reacts similarly to the various chemicals and product ingredients out there. Once you have tried and tested a product from a particular brand and find out that it doesn't work for you (allergies, etc), move on to another brand altogether. Here's a tip: if a brand's skin care products manage to give you that perfect, healthy glow, chances are that its makeup range can do the same.

Find out Your Undertone

Once you've got all the basics sorted out, the last thing to note is the shade that adds the final touch. For foundations, there are three universal undertones: pink, yellow and neutral. The general rule is that pinks are for Caucasians while yellows are for Asians. Neutrals can be used for all skin colours as long as your original skin tone does not gear too far towards either end of the spectrum. If your complexion is fairly dark, you might want to consider cosmetic brands, such as Black Up and Iman Cosmetics (yes, from that Iman), that are geared towards this.

Part 3: Blush

When applying your makeup, whether it's a daily routine look or something more formal for a night out, the thing that comes after foundation is usually blush. Blush is the one makeup item that gives you a glow to your face and adds colour to the bare canvas. After all, they don't say, "Pink is for health," for nothing. Some think that buying blush is a relatively easy task. Yet, many don't realise that blush shades can actually complement or clash with your skin tone, as well as the colours of the other makeup products you will be applying to your face.

Visiting any makeup counter in a departmental store, you'll find throngs of blushes splashed out right under your nose. A sea of pinks, corals, shimmer, neutrals, bronzes and many more. On top of that, you also have blushes of different textures like liquid, cream and powder. Some have fragrance, some don't; some come with an applicator, some don't. So how do you pick a blush?

Consider Texture

The first thing to consider is the texture. Always remember that powders go together and liquids work best with one another. Therefore, if you are using a powder foundation, get a powder blush on top of it. If you have on liquid foundation and decide on a powder blush, make sure that you dust on a light layer of powder on top of your foundation before adding the blush to allow a more even application of the blush. Makeup products with similar textures also blend more seamlessly and perfectly.

Find a Suitable Shade

Once you know the type of blush to get, the next thing to look at is the shade, of course. Now, here is a general guide: Bright, light pinks are for fair skin. Corals fit tanned skin the

best. If you are tanned, I'd say go for corals with a slight shimmer to brighten and glam up your smile!

Stay away from very hot pink blushes because these can be tricky to work with - if you get a shade that's too dark, you will end up looking older. If you have oily skin, stick with mattes and avoid blushes with shimmer in them because this will accentuate the shine on your skin. If you really want some shimmer, just a very slight dusting will do and only on the cheekbones.

If your skin is sensitive, treat buying blush the same as you would when buying foundation. Find out the product ingredients if you are concerned. Some powder blushes come with a small brush but they're pretty much useless and aren't as good as real, decent-sized blush brushes.

The last thing to know about blushes is that if you have a tight budget for makeup, blush is the makeup item that you only need one of. You can increase the intensity (by applying more) for a nighttime look, or wear it in a faint layer for the day. Nobody would know, and you'd still look gorgeous and put-together.

Part 4: Lipstick

Lipstick. The thing that completes a look. The man getter. The colour of innocence. And so much more.

It is every part as important in getting the right lipstick for the right occasion as it is to find that one song to fit a special moment. For starters, there are four main types of lipsticks: matte, creamy, satiny and glossy.

The Types of Lipstick

Mattes are used for reducing any form of reflection or shimmer effects on your overall look. However, they can be pretty drying on the lips, so balms before mattes is a good idea if you don't want flakes of dead skin to appear before the movie date is over.

The main difference between creamy and satiny lipsticks is that the latter usually contains more pigments of shimmer or reflective bits in them. These two are more moisturising than mattes and are therefore friendlier to use. However, I personally prefer creamy to satiny, as satiny borders close to frosty, which is a trend that should remain in the 80s.

Glosses are the wettest, the least long-lasting and require the most touch-ups. They usually come in liquid form and are the best option for achieving the plump, juicy, kiss-me-now puckers that remind us of our youth.

There is no one lipstick that remains on your lips forever and never goes away. That said, mattes are the most long-lasting while glosses are the least. If you don't use a lip balm with SPF, it is advisable to use a highly-pigmented lipstick or one with sun protection.

Pick a Suitable Colour

While you won't wear dark purple lip gloss to a job interview, it is also not a good idea to put on nude lipstick if you are extremely tanned (try corals or mauve instead) because otherwise, you risk looking like a duck with swollen mandibles. If you are looking for something all-purpose, pick one that doesn't have too strong a colour. When unsure, ask for something natural. Rose shades are the most versatile; certain mauves make one look older; reds should be reserved for when you need to be taken seriously.

Product packaging is where the real bimbo in me finally kicks in. Lipsticks are one of the most carried around makeup items in a lady's purse, thanks to its portable size and weight. There is a reason cosmetic companies pump in thousands on product design and, loosely translated, it is so that you will look good in mini washroom sessions with the girls. Find something that fits your style, whether it is classy and glamorous, or casual and flirty.

Some of My Recommendations

If you're not sure where to begin, I recommend starting with drugstore lip products such as from brands like L'Oreal and Revlon (they last longer than the NYX ones). Some of my favourite beauty brands for lip products include Jouer Cosmetics and Laura Mercier for matte lip colours and Sara Happ for glosses.

Part 5: Mascara

Disney princesses all have one thing in common: those long, wispy, fluttery lashes. They are a girl's dream, aren't they. While there are many options, such as lash extensions and falsies, for us to get this effect, mascara is still the best option for the lazy days. Getting mascara is an affair that is not at all complicated. There are several things to look out for in selecting that perfect tube and it all depends on what you are looking to achieve.

Water-proof vs. Non-Water-proof Mascaras

Mascaras can be separated into two properties: water-proof and non-water-proof. What each does is self-explanatory. Water-proof mascaras can stay on your lashes for a longer period of time without flaking or smudging off as much as compared to non-water-proof ones. They are also harder to remove and should be taken off with a makeup remover.

As for non-water-proof ones, sometimes all you need is some warm water and your usual facial cleanser or foam. I recommend water-proof mascaras for events that last quite some time, such as work, or at weddings, where tears are bound to flow. Generally, we don't use makeup for sports but where it is inevitable, such as for fashion shoots at the pool, water-proof mascara is also a good bet.

But there is yet another category of mascaras, and you might have seen it being labelled as "smudge-proof." A smudge-proof mascara is simply a product that does not smudge once it's applied and dried but may be easily washed off with warm water.

Fibre vs. Non-Fibre Mascaras

Besides being waterproof and non-waterproof, mascaras can also be fibre or non-fibre ones. Again, the difference between these two is pretty obvious. Fibre mascaras are quite the

popular choice among Asians because they are able to lengthen and volumise lashes way better than their inky cousins. The fibres work by coating themselves over your lash hairs and can stick out at the ends to give the illusion of longer lash strands. The only drawback is that they tend to be more flaky and you might have to check in the mirror more often than if you were using a non-fibre mascara.

Once you have decided whether you'd like a waterproof or non-waterproof mascara, the next thing you'll need to ask yourself is what you want your lashes to be like. Do you want them volumised, lengthened, curled or all of the above? Although it's not easy to find that miracle product that can do all three, it's not impossible. Even going to the drugstore can yield good results. Just check out my [comprehensive review of 10 drugstore mascaras](#) and find out which one worked best for me (spoiler: it's the Heroine Make Long and Curl Super Waterproof Mascara).

Study the Mascara Brush

The last thing that really matters is the mascara brush. At the moment, many companies are coming up with all types of brushes, all promising to allow their products to better adhere to your lashes. There are the standard kinds that just differ in shape and size but there also exist in stores the ones that vibrate or rotate. To be honest, those that involve batteries are simply a waste of money because logic tells us that if the product is truly awesome, there is no need for a "super oscillatory brush." What you should look out for are mainly the shape and size of the brush. Therefore, bigger brushes for bigger eyes and smaller brushes for smaller eyes. Curved brushes are better than straight ones as they are able to fit better along the shape of your lash lines and, so to speak, can cover more ground.

Of course, you should always curl your lashes with a lash curler before applying mascara. If you find a mascara that doesn't hold your lashes after applying it, toss it away. Curling your lashes after applying mascara will destroy your lashes and may cause more of them to fall off.

Part 6: Ingredients

Before moving on to the ingredients - a huge part of beauty shopping - here's a note:

When shopping for makeup, we all need to shop smart. This means not being taken in by claims such as "dermatologist tested." In many cases, these "dermatologists" testing the products before shelf placement are employed by the company or brand, and they number less than ten.

Know How the Ingredient List Works

As for ingredient lists, the order in which ingredients are labelled for a product matters to a certain extent. As a general guideline, ingredients that are present in the highest concentration or amount are labelled first. This is followed by the next ingredient that has the next highest concentration or amount. And so it goes on - until it doesn't.

At some point in the ingredient list (and I'd be scared if it was a very long list) this guideline doesn't apply anymore because anything that is present at 1% or less does not need to be labelled according to the order of concentrations. So you could have 30 ingredients, of which 10 of them are present at less than 1% but because companies are not required to state the concentrations of ingredients used, you'd be none the wiser. This means you wouldn't know how many ingredients in the complete list are present at less than 1%.

Finally, colour additives are listed at the end of the lists but that doesn't mean they are used with the smallest concentrations in the making of the product.

Antioxidants

Everyone loves a good antioxidant! These help to reduce the damage that has been done to skin and improve its appearance. Because they are so fragile in nature, despite their great benefits to our skin, they need to be in an air-tight and opaque container.

Some types of antioxidants: vitamins A, C and E, green tea or white tea extract, turmeric, rosehip oil, zinc, isoflavones and coenzyme Q10. Retinol is a form of vitamin A and it is a great ingredient to have. In fact, it's one of my favourites in combatting wrinkles and many dermatologists recommend it. You can find retinol in prescription or over-the-counter products. However, it causes your skin to be dry and more sensitive to sunlight so you'll have to be vigilant about that (use a good moisturiser and sunscreen).

Vitamin C can come in the form of ascorbic acid, tetrahexyldecyl ascorbate, or several ascorbyl phosphates. It brightens up the skin and diminishes the dark colour blemishes. Vitamin E normally comes in the form of tocopherol and its derivatives, such as tocopherol acetate. Even if these two vitamins are not present in a beauty product, always remember that you can find them in your daily diet as well. I mean, beauty should be holistic and nothing can quite beat a natural, healthy blush.

Parabens

Parabens are currently commonly used as a preservative in beauty products. They're present most commonly as methylparaben, butylparaben and propylparaben (each differing in the number of carbon atoms). They've also been scientifically proven to mess up with the hormones in the body, namely oestrogen. They're termed oestrogen-disruptors, and mimic oestrogen's behaviour in the body. Because of this, it has been linked to causing breast cancer.

If you're getting a beauty product, whether it's skincare, body care or makeup, I highly recommend getting one that has no parabens in it. This would be replaced with other kinds of preservatives, such as phenoxyethanol.

Preservative-Free Products

Beauty products with no preservatives in them would generally last for a shorter period of time. They are also photo-sensitive, meaning that they will decompose faster when exposed to light. Thus, you need to make sure that when purchasing one, it comes in an opaque packaging where light cannot enter to the product.

Products that have no preservatives are also more sensitive to changes in temperatures and humidity. As such, they need to be stored in a cool and dry place, such as in the closed cupboard of your bathroom where the heat from your hot shower won't get to it much. They also need to be in an airtight packaging.

Bacteria will also speed up the decomposition of preservative-free products, so make sure your product comes in a pump or squeeze bottle rather than a tub. A pump bottle ensures that you don't come in direct contact with the remaining product and it helps keep it sanitised and longer-lasting.

Alcohol

I'm including this ingredient because I am personally allergic to this ingredient and not many people know about what this ingredient does to the skin.

Alcohol comes in many forms but are classified as either the normal type of liquid alcohols that evaporate very quickly (found normally in fragrances, perfumes and liquid foundations) or fatty alcohols. The first kind includes things like SD alcohol, isopropyl alcohol, denatured alcohol (normally listed as alcohol denat.). Fatty alcohols include things like benzyl alcohol,

acetyl alcohol, stearyl alcohol and cetearyl alcohol. Though fatty alcohols are deemed to be safer than the first type of alcohols, if you're allergic to alcohols, you're gonna be allergic to all of them. For example, benzyl alcohol has been proven to break down the skin's immune system and cause symptoms like itching and blistering.

Alcohols in general are drying to the skin and although some forms of it help the skin to better absorb vitamins that are also present in beauty products, they break down the skin's protective barrier while doing so. Because of this, the damage outweighs the benefits and I always stay away from products that contain high concentrations of alcohol.

Chemically, phenoxyethanol is a type of alcohol but it's usually present in small amounts. As such, you may be open to giving products that contain it a try.

Fragrance

Fragrance is another iffy ingredient. The thing is, it's not even a proper ingredient in itself!

According to the FDA, there are more than 3000 chemicals that classify as a fragrance, and companies do not need to specify in their ingredient list what these chemicals are. As you might have guessed by now, some of these chemicals have been known to cause negative side effects to users. For example, benzophenone and its derivatives are potential endocrine disruptors, while benzophenone itself is a possible carcinogen. Certain essential oil mixtures (some people are allergic to these) and even formaldehyde (a widely known embalming agent) also come under fragrance.

Companies are not required to declare what ingredients they have used as fragrance, as these are protected as industry secrets. Just make sure you look out for this when purchasing a beauty product. Better yet, pick one that doesn't have it!

Some Concluding Thoughts on Shopping for Makeup

Shopping for makeup is really quite a fun thing to do, especially if you've got a girls' day out planned and all. Shopping with like-minded friends can help give you some support, for example, when there's a 1-for-1 sale, or a 50%-off-the-second-item-purchased promotion. Sometimes, you can go googly-eyed at new makeup collections together, swatch eyeshadows on the back of one another's hands, or they can stop you from buying something you don't need.

In other words, buying makeup is great bonding time (even better if you go for tea afterwards).

But I do love shopping for makeup alone sometimes too, especially when I know exactly what I want and haven't got all day to spare. If you prefer to shop alone, I hope this guide has helped you be more aware of the things to look out for when buying makeup. If you'd like to spread the word about how helpful this resource has been to you, it would be really awesome if you tweet about it to let people know.



Roxanne is the face & brain behind [The Skinny Scout](#), a beauty blog that hopes to inspire women around the world to be more self-confident with weekly emails. She teaches online beauty courses and workshops to help thousands of people present the best versions of themselves. She is also the founder of indie jewellery brand, [Trouvée.Co](#), which specialises in semi-precious gemstone pieces that are classic and timeless in design.

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