

How to choose a hairdresser

Why the price list does not answer your question, what a consultation is for, and how senior and junior pricing actually works

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Hairdressing is priced in a way that hides the two things that matter most: who is actually doing your hair, and what the service will cost once your hair is looked at. Neither is a trick - it is just genuinely hard to price without seeing you.

What it should cost

Cuts are usually priced in bands by seniority: a junior stylist, a senior stylist and sometimes a director, often with substantial gaps between them. Ask which level you are being booked with, because it is not always volunteered and the price difference can be significant.

Colour is priced by the service and usually by the amount of product, which depends on hair length, density and how far the colour has to lift. A salon that gives you a range rather than a fixed figure before seeing your hair is being honest. A salon that quotes a firm price on the phone and revises it in the chair is not.

Ask whether the price includes a blow-dry and styling, because some lists price the cut and the finish separately.

What the law requires

Hairdressing is not a licensed trade in Australia, so qualifications are not legally required to cut hair. That makes asking about training more important rather than less, and it means the difference between a qualified stylist and an unqualified one has to be established by asking.

For colour and chemical straightening, patch testing is a genuine safety requirement for many products, normally 24 to 48 hours before the appointment. A salon that skips it is skipping the part that protects you from a reaction.

Salons must maintain hygiene standards and should hold public liability insurance. Neither is optional, and neither is visible from the street.

Red flags

A firm colour price over the phone with no questions about your hair.

No patch test offered for a tint or chemical straightening.

Being booked with a more junior stylist than you asked for, discovered at the chair.

A stylist who does not ask what you want, or who dismisses what you ask for.

No consultation offered before a significant change.

What good looks like

The stylist level and price are confirmed when you book.

A free or low-cost consultation is available before a big change.

They tell you honestly when what you want will take more than one appointment.

A patch test is offered automatically for colour.

They ask what you did not like about your last cut.

What to ask

- "Which stylist level am I booked with, and what does that cost?"
- "Can I have a consultation before the appointment, especially for a big change?"
- "What is the price range for the colour I want, given my hair?"
- "Does the price include the blow-dry?"
- "Are you going to patch test me, and when?"
- "What is your cancellation policy?"

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