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Third Generation Master Barber Greg Zorian shares insight on mastering the fade.



The How to Guide for Fading Hair Greg Zorian, Master Barber

Throughout my 20 year career as a barber and an educator the two most common questions I am asked when it comes to fades are “How do you fade hair without leaving a line?” and “How high should I cut the fade?” The answer to the first question is simple. If you don’t make a line in the first place you won’t have to worry about fading it out. Start the haircut on the top instead of the bottom. The first advantage of this technique is you are removing length on the top so that when you start fading with the clipper you won’t lose site of the cutting blade in the excess hair. The next advantage is the

clipper will cut through the hair much easier. As the head rounds in at the top take an imaginary line parallel to the side of the head until you run out of hair. This one technique will save you an enormous amount of time and improve your fades drastically. This technique works best with a detachable blade clipper with metal blades. The power of the clipper plus not having any of the teeth covered with a plastic attachment allows the blade to move through the hair with ease. It also works very well with a powerful adjustable clipper. Make sure the attachments used with this clipper fit

extremely tight so you don’t run the risk of it falling while you are cutting.

The answer to the second question is not as simple. There are many things to consider as you decide on how high to cut a fade. Some of them include cowlicks, hair density, hair color, the shape of the head, surface of the scalp (lumps, bumps, and/or indentations), moles, scars, customer’s age, customer’s job, and desired hairstyle. The following section will go into a more detailed description on how each of these can affect the fade.

COWLICKS

The first and most important thing I would like you to always remember is what I have been teaching years: “IT IS ONLY A COWLICK IF YOU CUT IT TOO SHORT”. This may sound over simplified but if you don't cut the hair too short in the crown or the pivot area the hair will not stick up. There is nothing worse than a customer walking out of a barbershop or hair salon with his hair standing up in the back.

The most difficult cowlicks to deal with are the ones on top of the head in the crown area. They can be closer to the top of the head, all the way down by occipital bone in the back, or somewhere in between. The following instructions will help you deal with cowlicks:

- Always make sure to layer the top first. This will remove the weight and give you a guide to blend to. If there is too much hair on top you will lose sight of the cutting blade and most likely go too high with the clipper. If you go too high it is too late to recover.
- Depending on how strong the cowlick is or how much the hair wants to stick up or out you need to leave anywhere from an inch to three inches from the root of the cowlick for blending into the fade.
- If the cowlick is closer to the top of the head you can usually fade past the occipital bone (round of the head).
- If the cowlick is lower let the occipital bone (round of the head) push the clipper blade away from the head in an arcing motion. This will leave you enough room to blend.

Dealing with cowlicks correctly is one of the best ways to can keep a customer for life. The customers with problem cowlick are the guys who have rarely receive a good haircut in their lifetime. They will appreciate you tremendously and their tip and repeat business will definitely reflect that.



Haircolor

A lot of men have different shades of hair. In more extreme cases some men have different colors of hair. This is especially the case when men with dark hair are turning grey or white. Different shades and/or colors will definitely have an effect on a fade. Try to keep the fade in the area where there is the largest portion of one color or shade of hair (this can be very difficult with men who are greying because the change of color does not always occur evenly). The predominant area for lighter shaded areas is in the semi-finish section of the haircut and on the sides and back below the round of the head. You can cut the fade low (about a 1-2 finger width) or cut the fade higher into the darker section. If you see a shadow in the transition area you can go over it with the thinning scissors. Just make sure to move the scissors quickly to avoid removing length. Just a light blending is all that is needed to smooth out the fade.

Headshape

The shape of the head in many cases will determine the best area to cut the fade. If the client has a rectangular shaped head there are a more options. You can fade the hair high, medium, or low and it will look balanced. If the client has a round shaped head **DO NOT** fade the hair higher than the widest point of the head. This will lead to an



unbalanced looking haircut. If the client has a protruding occipital bone (big lump in the back of his head), fade the hair low below the bone. Learning to work with the customers particular head shape will help you to design the best look for them.

Scars

When you are asking the customer how high they like their fade make sure to ask them if they have any scars. If you are uncomfortable asking the customer that question, just spend an extra few seconds combing through the hair in an upward motion so when the hair is lifted you will see any scars. You will most likely find scars in 2 areas. In the temple region and/or on the occipital area which is just above the nape of the neck. If the scars are any lower than that there is not a lot that can be done. They

are most likely going to show no matter what. Just make sure the customer knows that before you begin the fade.

If you find scars in the higher areas leave the hair thicker or darker in those areas and fade the hair low. This will leave the hair long enough to cover the scars. When cutting the fade start arching the blade or floating the blade away from the scalp about 1/2" below the scars. This will leave enough room to blend into the longer hair over the scar(s) without cutting it too short.

Scalp Indentations

When you become more experienced cutting men's hair you will notice a lot of men have indentations in their scalp. These can really impact how your fade will look. The area of indentation

will look darker because the hair in that area is actually longer. If it is possible, try to keep the fade level below the indentation area to avoid this. If the customer still wants the fade higher you will need to cut into the indentation area with the thinning scissors to lighten up any darker or shadowed areas.

Hair Density

Fading hair is difficult enough but when the hair has different thicknesses throughout the head shape it becomes a lot harder. The most common difficulty you will find is when the hair is much lighter around the 1-2 finger area around the hairline also known as the semi-finish. My suggestion is whenever possible fade the hair past the lighter area into the thickest part of the hair (as long as this doesn't take the fade so high it looks unnatural or past the round of the head). This way you won't have to blend two different hair textures together.

As always start out with the longer blade and work down which will help you from taking the fade too high. Make sure to leave a quarter to half an inch distance in between blades to create the fading effect.

A quick tip to put the finishing touches on these difficult fades is to use a 40-44 tooth blending scissor to further blend the transition area from lighter to thicker hair. Use the fine teeth of the finishing comb and move the comb at a moderate speed so you don't take out too much hair. You can always go over it a second time if necessary. Start cutting slightly higher than the transition area so you will only thin out the thicker hair.

Length of Hair on Top

There are many modern and classic men's hairstyles that require a longer top. Even though these styles require a longer top, a close taper or fade around the outline of the



haircut is required to finish off the haircut. The most important thing to keep in mind is: The longer the hair on top the lower the fade or taper should be cut. If the fade is cut to high the haircut will look out of balance. The best way to avoid this is to start the haircut by layering the top section. Next, cut the round of the head section using the top section as the guide. Before starting the fade, cut the sides and back section to give yourself a guide for the fade. After these three steps you will know exactly how high the fade should be cut to perfectly blend into the longer top.

Profession

It is a good idea to find out what the customer does for a living and the type of activities they are involved in before cutting their fade. Make sure to do this in a polite way that is not intrusive. An easy suggestion might be: "I want to make sure I give you the appropriate hairstyle for you job and leisure activities. If you don't mind could you please tell me some of your interests and what you do for a living?" This is a non-threatening approach that I find works well. Not only does it put the customer at ease, it shows them that you really care about what you are doing.

If you pay close attention to the customer when he walks in the door and sits in your chair you will get a good idea how to cut his fade just by the way he dresses and how he carries himself. The more experience you have cutting and communicating the easier it gets.

Length of Bangs

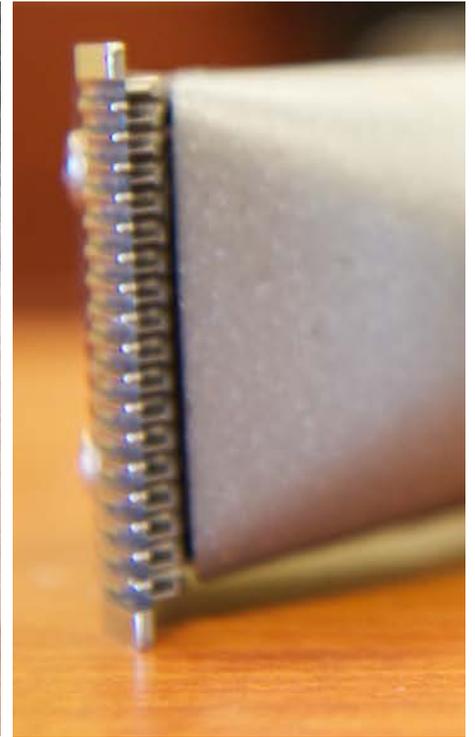
The height of the fade should be balanced properly with the length of the bangs. The fade should never be higher than the bangs when they are combed straight down in a forward position or to the side.



This is a little tricky because with most of today's styles the bangs are either pushed up or brushed straight back. For these styles cut the top first and then comb the bangs straight forward before beginning the fade. When you are clipper cutting the sides, start arching the clipper away from the head about a 1/2" – 1" below the bangs. This will leave enough room to blend the sides to the top without fading the hair too high.

This is a little easier with the shorter styles that get a line-up. Make sure to leave yourself enough room so the fade stops where the line-up in the temple

area begins. Every customer's preference is a little different. When cutting a skin length fade make sure to clarify where the customer wants to see the outline visible.



Author's Commentary

Getting familiar with and following these guidelines will make your job a lot easier. The fade customer is the most particular customer that you will have. It is not enough to just give a technically blended fade for them to be happy. The fade has to be in the exact area of the head where they want it blended into the exact hairstyle they are looking for. Practice these principals and watch the video instruction as much as possible until cutting all of the different types of fades becomes second nature.