Lesson 2. WRITTEN TRAINING (THEORY)

In addition to learning the practical skills of grooming dogs, you need to know ‘The Written’. Your instructor may order you to spend time in the classroom, or at home, studying a text book. The textbook may be thick and heavy and look intimidating. It will be packed full of information. Pages and pages of text. A bunch of illustrations full of details, small-print and Latin terminology. You’d almost think you were at Med School training to become a doctor. You’ll wonder at the relevance of ALL this information. You just want to groom dogs.

I am not about to throw you a life-preserver and declare that “this is easy stuff, don’t worry about it”. The fact is, there is so much more to dog grooming than most people expect. It is a proper profession – and with it comes an academic discipline and a history of proper learning. Don’t be frightened by this. Embrace it. Because with a good level of dedication, study and perseverance, it will become second nature to you. You’ll become an authority or expert in this niche.

Let’s look at a few of the things you can expect to learn in the Theory part of your training.

Health and Safety

There are numerous Health and Safety considerations for employees in a dog grooming salon. You will need to learn these. Not just because you will be tested on them but because they really do matter. Sure, a lot of it is common sense. But, as they say, common sense is not so common.
Here are some examples of Health and Safety:

- **Personal Protective Equipment** – dog grooming is physically hard work. The constant noise of the blaster can affect your hearing. The flying about of tiny sharp bits of hair can get into your eyes. The water on the floor can be slippery and dangerous. So you need to wear PPE.
  
  o Ear plugs – to protect your hearing
  o Goggles – to protect your eyes
  o Face mask – to stop you inhaling fine hair and dust particles
  o Grooming shirt or apron – a protective layer of clothing that stops fine hair and particles from getting into your skin
  o Non-slip shoes – so you don’t slip on a wet floor
  o Shoes with supports – you spend all day on your feet. You have to wear the right shoes to prevent backache or knee trouble

- **Risk Analysis** – you need to be able to identify hazards in the salon and take preventative measures to mitigate the risk (reduce or eliminate and control). For example, electric cables on the floor are a risk. Can these be tied up securely so that they are not a trip hazard? Water on the floor. This needs to be cleared immediately. It might still be a bit wet, so is the floor a non-slip floor? Are the groomers wearing non-slip shoes? Heavy bottles of shampoo are sometimes put up on a high shelf that might be difficult to reach. Is there a risk of the bottle falling off the shelf, where it might land on a dog or cause the groomer to struggle and trip?

Hazardous Materials – the salon may have a cupboard full of cleaning agents that are toxic to a dog if ingested. The salon may also store various other products full of chemicals, like paint or varnish. Some of these may be flammable. You’ll learn about the correct storage, handling and disposal of Hazardous Materials.

Waste Transfer – grooming dogs generates waste. Not just dog hair, but discarded cotton swabs from ear cleaning or paper towels from expressing anal glands. Other dirty paper towels from cleaning up urine, faeces or blood. You can’t just throw this rubbish out with everything else. It needs to be disposed of in a correct manner.

- **Correct posture and lifting techniques** – bend correctly at the knees, keep your back straight, use hydraulic tables and baths. It is common for groomers to struggle with backache, neck and shoulder pains. You need to understand the preventative measures and methods.

- **First Aid / Accident Log Book** – a first aid kit for humans and another one for animals need to be within easy reach and they must be correctly stocked. You’ll also need to keep an Accident Log Book. Your course will teach you this. It isn’t just ‘best practice’ within the industry. It’s required by law and your insurers.
• **Legislation** – depending on where you live, there will be different types of Health and Safety legislation you need to be aware of. Your text-book should list the relevant legislation.

These are just a few Health and Safety concerns. Like I said, your course book will go into much more detail. But it’s fair to expect Health and Safety to make up a substantial part of the Written part of your training.

**Salon cleanliness, tools and equipment**

Your salon and the tools and equipment you use need regularly to be cleaned and sterilised. You will receive guidance about the importance of this and the needs for sterilisation to prevent the spread of bacteria and infectious disease. Think of your salon like a hospital clinic. You must ensure the highest standards of cleanliness. If you don’t, you open yourself to all kinds of harmful consequences.

**Canine Emergencies, Disease, Disorders, Fleas, Ticks, Worms and Other Parasites**

Dogs, like all of us, are prone to illness. They could contract Kennel Cough. Get infested with fleas or ticks. Develop worms. Suffer from ear mites. Struggle with a skin or eye disorder.

Groomers are at the front line of coming into contact with dogs suffering from these conditions. Not all dog owners are vigilant about staying current with vaccination, worming and regular visits to the vet. So you will come across dogs that are suffering or could be a risk to other dogs in your care.

In your training you will come across all kinds of terms, for example:

- Endoparasites (round worm, tape worm)
- Ectoparasites (fleas, ticks, lice, mites)
- Lick or Fold Dermatitis (skin disorders)
- Brachycephalic (short nose breeds) and Chondrodysplastic (dwarfism)
- Eye disorders like ‘Ectropion’ or ‘Entropion’, Glaucoma
- Musculoskeletal disorders like Elbow Dysplasia or Hip Dysplasia
- Gastrointestinal disorders like Diarrhoea, Constipation, Colitis (inflammation of the large intestine), Gastroenteritis (stomach bug), Gastric Dilation Volvulus (GDV) (a life threatening condition that needs immediate treatment – it’s when the stomach twists because of a build-up of food and gas)
- Conditions like Proptosis (prolapsed eyeball), Epistaxis (nosebleed), Lick Granuloma (persistent licking of a sore)
- Paraphimosis – when the penis does not retract
- Aural Haematoma – collecting of blood or a blood clot in the ear flap
- Polyurea – increased urination

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- Polydipsia – excessive thirst
- Canine Parvovirus, a bacterial infection and the clinical signs
- Zoonotic diseases like rabies, leptospirosis, toxocariasis, toxoplasmosis, Lymes Disease, Salmonella and more

This list is not exhaustive (although it might appear exhausting). Your course will teach you an awareness of these health conditions, disorders and emergencies. You’ll learn what you must do when confronted by them with a view to first aid treatment, the urging of dog owners to see the vet and to minimise the risk of harm to other dogs.

**Anatomy and Structure**

Most training centres will have a chart on the wall with an illustration of a dog’s anatomy as well as skeletal structure. You’ll need to memorise the terms because your instructor will refer to these constantly. But you’ll also gain an appreciation for differences in structure between dogs and how this makes for variation, for example, in the drop of the coat.

**Planning your grooming**

How you plan your grooming is critical to workplace safety and your productivity. Your training will cover how to be smart about it. You may be given an exercise to complete whereby you allocate a day’s worth of dogs into an appointments book.

So, for example, if you have five dogs to plan for the day, you might decide to book a Cocker Spaniel bath, brush, tidy-up along with a couple of Yorkshire Terriers in the morning slots. For the afternoon, you book a complicated Miniature Poodle styling session and a King Charles Spaniel. You know the Poodle trim will take more time and the King Charles will be easy for you.

You’ll be taught to think of the time required to bath, dry, brush out, clip and scissor different breeds and plan your day accordingly.

**Breeds and Dog Groups, Characteristics and Features**

You’ll need to develop an encyclopaedic knowledge of dogs, including all the different breeds, groups, their coat types, physical characteristics and features, exercise and nutritional requirements, health considerations, their original purpose of breeding and more. This is a fair expectation because as far as the dog-owning public sees you, you’re the expert. You can expect this part of your training to be rigorous and demanding. But, hey, you’re here because you have a passion for dogs. So the learning will be fun!
Terminology

It’s important to have a shared vocabulary within the industry. Here are some example terms that, before you know it, you’ll be using with ease².

- Angulation
- Broken coat
- Cape
- Clipper alopecia
- Drop ear
- Expression
- Fall
- Flank
- Gay tail
- Hock
- Layback
- Mantle
- Muzzle
- Patella
- Plume
- Rose ear
- Screw tail
- Standard
- Tulip ear
- Withers

I will resist providing you the definitions here. It will be a good exercise to look these up and find out for yourself (if you aren’t already familiar).

Dog grooming career and business opportunities

The Written part of your training is likely to include some guidance about career opportunities open to groomers. You’ll also get some high level advice about customer relationships, rules about taking on premises, opening a new business, marketing your services, and a bit more.

In dog grooming training, the setting-up-in-business part is often kept to a minimum. That’s fine. Because the priority is for you to learn to groom.

The reason we created THIS course is precisely because most training centres don’t go into any detail. This course, therefore, complements your dog grooming training. Because we’re doing a ‘deep dive’ here, comprehensively surveying your career options and looking at how to get you up and running with your own dog grooming business.

² Caley, Angela, ICMG. In an email. 20 Feb 2015.
Summary of Written part of dog grooming training

We have covered some of the highlights of the Written part of your professional dog grooming training. A ‘taster’, if you like. If you’re not a trained groomer yet, this should give you a high level appreciation of some of what you will experience. If you’re already a trained groomer, then you should know this, or most of it, already. And if you have no intentions of becoming a groomer, but you’d like to operate a dog grooming business, then it’s certainly worth your looking further into – perhaps borrowing that text-book from one of the groomers you are employing.

Okay – you’ve made fantastic progress getting through these first two lessons in Practical and Written training. We can get through the rest of this module fairly quickly because the following lessons are much shorter by comparison. In the next lesson we look at getting qualified!

>>> Go to Lesson 3