

THE FOLLOWING FIVE LOOKS form a progression: Each requires slightly more boldness than the one before. Though you certainly don't have to go in order, doing so will allow for a slow, comfortable immersion instead of a dramatic plunge. Also, for all their differences, the looks have a few things in common. First, the ideal starting point: skin that's been consistently nurtured—and freshly cleansed and moisturized. Taking care of your complexion obviates the need to over-camouflage and creates the freshest makeup canvas.

The second common thread is the recommended set of tools. The right brushes, in particular, can be a revelation, making application noticeably easier and more precise. A one-time splurge on a high-quality set (which is maintained through regular cleanings—at least once per month) is well worth the investment.

THE BASIC TOOLS:

1. Separate brushes for concealer, foundation, cream blush, facial powder or bronzer; lip-, eye-, and brow-color; and eyeliner.

2. A good eyelash curler is another must, as it really helps to open the eyes (a relatively small percentage of the population has lashes that curl upward naturally; most of us have lashes that grow downward). Whether you prefer the puffy, padded plastic variety or the sleek metallic one, your lash curler should approximate the width of your lid.

3. The last tools to consider: loose, product-free mascara wands (to remove any rogue clumps) and foundation sponges. You can buy both cheaply and in bulk at beauty supply stores.



The third common element to the looks is the technique or process by which foundation, concealer, blush, lip liner, and false lashes are applied . . . and by which lashes are curled. The steps you should always follow, in order (unless otherwise instructed by the text that accompanies a specific look):

1. Apply foundation first. If you need moderate to heavy coverage, use a brush to apply a cream or stick formulation. For lighter coverage, use a sponge to apply a liquid or cream.

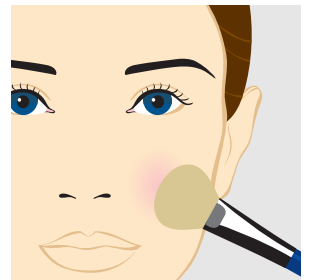
2. Find a concealer that's as close to your foundation shade as possible. There's a widely held, antiquated idea that concealer should be pale at least a shade lighter than your foundation. But the result is totally unnatural and raccoon-like. One easy solution: Stick to a brand that offers multiple formulations of its foundations (and countless cosmetics companies do). A liquid version can serve as your foundation, and a stick version of the same shade name can serve as your concealer.



3. With the aid of your concealer and a brush, dab away any major imperfections (discolorations, scars), but unless you're going for the Hollywood glam look, leave freckles alone.



4. Your cheek color should unless otherwise noted in the individual looks match your skin's own natural flush. Once you've found an appropriate shade, apply it to the apples of cheeks with either a brush for cream blush or your fingers. Blend outward from the center, until only the most diffuse hint of color remains at the perimeter. (Again, the idea is to mimic your natural flush.)



5. Using a sponge with a bit of foundation on it (and if you used a sponge to apply foundation at the beginning of this process, whatever remains of the product should suffice), press lightly over the just-blushed area for an even more natural-looking, almost airbrushed effect. You can do the same wherever colors aren't yet perfectly blended; this will soften and eliminate any remaining lines of demarcation.

6. To create the perfect lip shape, follow the technique of makeup legend Way Bandy: Starting at the center (of the bottom) of one nostril, draw an imaginary line straight down to where your lip starts, and place a dot of pencil there. Next, do the same thing below the other nostril. Finally, place a third dot midway between the two others, then connect the dots, line the lower lip, and use the pencil to fill your mouth in.



7. For properly curled lashes, clamp as close to the roots as possible without risking pinched skin. Hold steady (don't make the common mistake of pulling) for at least three seconds, then release. Next, lightly coat the lashes with mascara.

8. If you'd like extra pop, add some false lashes. For the most natural-looking results, use only individual lashes and only the shortest versions thereof (still plenty long). Place a tiny dot (think: pinhead) of lash glue on the hand you won't be applying the lashes with, then dip the base of the lashes into the glue. This step prevents over-gooping. Next, starting at the center of your eye and working your way outward, lay the base as close to roots of your own lashes as you can. If the base touches your eyelid, you've gone too high. Once you get the placement right, re-mascara your lashes with a single, finishing coat. Make every lash count.

