

WIG DRESSING, FITTING AND MAINTENANCE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will help you to understand how wigs have been used throughout history and are still used today. In this chapter, you will also learn the process of wig making, including the choice of products, tools and equipment used when working with wigs. It also covers how to wash, dress and style a wig, how to prepare a performer's hair for wig application and how to secure it in place, and the correct procedure for removing a wig and storing it ready for the next time it is needed.

In this chapter, you will learn:

- 1 the historical influences on wigs and hair postiche
- 2 how to make wigs and hair postiche
- 3 how to create and dress a hair postiche and style a wig
- 4 how to prepare and fit a wig or hair postiche
- 5 how to maintain wigs and hair postiche.

1 HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON WIGS AND HAIR POSTICHE

Types of wigs and hair postiche

Wigs

Wigs may be handmade, machine-made, or a combination of both. Organisations such as theatres and opera houses might employ specialist wig makers (often known as wig mistresses or masters) to make wigs for their productions to their specific guidelines. Wigs made by hand can be knotted using a number of knotting techniques, which are described in Chapter 14, page 324.

Handmade **weft** is made by weaving human hair onto string. Hair weft can be added to a performer's hairstyle – for example, as hair extensions – or can be sewn onto a **foundation** to make a wig or postiche.

Machine-made hairpieces are generally mass-produced by machines that knot **synthetic hair** either onto a foundation base for wigs or into hair weft. They are generally much cheaper than handmade hairpieces and can be worn as a fashion statement or for fancy dress. They are available in a wide variety of lengths, styles and colours.

KEY TERMS

Weft: hair strands that have been woven onto string or a fine strip of cloth, which it can be clipped in as hair extensions or sewn onto a wig.

Foundation: the net or lace base of a wig or hairpiece that hair is knotted onto.

Synthetic hair: hair made from man-made plastics such as acrylic or nylon.

There are many types of wigs and hairpieces.

- **Full wigs** are generally made from human hair knotted onto a hair-lace foundation base. They are very realistic and would be hard to identify as a wig. The performer's head needs to be measured to ensure the wig will fit perfectly, and a template is drawn up and transferred onto a wooden block. The wig maker then starts to knot following the planned pattern, colour and design.
- **Three-quarter wigs** are fitted on top of the performer's head, rather than at the front of the head, so that it can be disguised using the performer's natural hair. They are used to add fullness and length.
- **Partial wigs** (up to a quarter of a wig) can be fitted for fullness, thickness or even length at the nape of the performer's head.
- **Nylon wigs** are generally made from wefts that are machine stitched onto a foundation base. Nylon hair is not as realistic as a wig made with human hair, but it is inexpensive and can be purchased in a variety of styles, lengths and colours.
- **Hair-lace wigs** are used in theatre, film and television productions. The hair-lace front is very fine, allowing the edge to blend seamlessly with the skin. Hair is finely knotted onto the hair-lace, making it appear like a natural hairline.



▲ **Figure 18.1** A nylon wig

Hair postiche

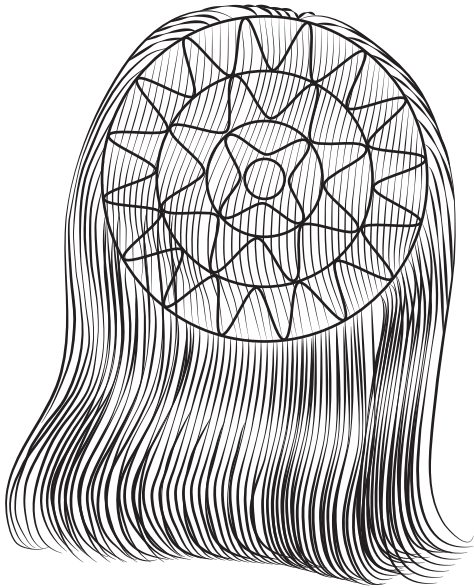
Hair postiche can be made by hand or by machine on a foundation base – these pieces are known as foundation postiche. They can be fitted at the crown of the head or at the nape of the neck.

Examples of hair postiche include:

- chignon, which can be fitted at the back of the head or the nape of the neck
- toupees, which are generally used by male performers to conceal thinning hair or baldness
- ponytails, which can be added to the back of the head to create length and can be incorporated into the performer's natural hair to create a hair-up style or add additional length
- ringlets, which can be incorporated into the performer's natural hair.

Ponytails and ringlets are made from wefts that have been sewn together to make a type of hair piece called a stem switch. Ponytails usually have more hair sewn together, while ringlets have less. Stem switches can be one-stem (ponytail), two-stem (coiled) or three-stem (plaited).

A diamond mesh is a foundation base for a hairpiece. A thin wire is included with the weft, which means that the hairpiece can be bent and shaped to fit around the head.



▲ Figure 18.2 Foundation base

Types of hair used for wigs and postiche

Different types of hair can be used for making wigs and postiche.

- **Human hair** is available in a range of colours and can be mixed to create the desired colour before being hand-knotted onto hair-lace wigs. Typically, Asian and European hair are used. Asian hair is usually darker in colour and very straight and strong, so colouring and curling it can be difficult. European hair is finer in texture, more varied in colour and can be wavy.
- **Animal hair** is used for weaving and knotting to make wigs and postiche. Horse and yak hair are thick in texture and have a coarse feel that resembles real facial hair. Animal hair is cheaper than human hair.
- **Synthetic hair** is made from either acrylic or nylon and is used in mass-produced wigs, generally for the purpose of fancy dress, although some mass-produced wigs are made to a higher quality. Synthetic hair is considerably cheaper than human hair and is available in a vast range of colours. However, it has a high sheen that gives it an artificial appearance.

How wigs and hair postiche have changed throughout historical eras

Early wigs

People have worn wigs throughout history, with the earliest recorded wig being dated to 2700BC. Wigs were initially made from palm and wool fibres, then animal hair was used. Ancient Egyptian people used to shave their heads, in part due to their religious beliefs but also to prevent infestation from head lice, so wigs were used to shield their heads from the sun and to indicate their rank and status in society.

HANDY HINT

Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years by Richard Corson (published by Peter Owen Publishers) is an accurate resource that you can use when researching historical hair and wigs.

Wigs were not worn widely in Europe during the Middle Ages (roughly the fifth to thirteenth centuries), when the church condemned them as 'badges of the devil'. The fashion at this time was for women to pluck or shave away their natural hairline, creating a very high hairline and large forehead, with the rest of the hair plaited to keep it off the faces. Any wigs that were worn in this era were made of human hair or silk thread, and were worn mostly by women.

The Renaissance and Elizabethan eras

This period of European history marks the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity, beginning in the fourteenth century and ending in the seventeenth, with its 'golden age' in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The Renaissance was a cultural movement characterised by new ways of thinking in art, architecture, politics, science and literature.

Wigs became fashionable during the sixteenth century, led by royals such as Henry VIII, Mary, Queen of Scots and Elizabeth I. The wigs of Mary, Queen of Scots were predominately styled into a heart shape. The fashions of the Elizabethan era (1558–1603) were extreme in shape, colour and the use of ornamentation and the wigs matched this style of dress with their extreme height and vast amounts of padding.

This trend continued into the seventeenth century, when wigs became an indispensable part of the wardrobes of the upper classes. Elaborately styled wigs were designed, and sometimes coloured, to complement and match women's clothing. The French king Louis XIII, who ruled from 1610 to 1643, began wearing wigs to disguise his premature balding. This made the wearing of wigs fashionable among men. His successor, Louis XIV (who ruled from 1643 to 1715), actually shaved his head in order to wear a wig. During this time, the wigs became bigger, which led to the term 'bigwig' meaning a person of importance. These wigs were mostly styled with a centre parting and the length of the hair cascading over the shoulders. Horse or goat hair was often used as human hair became less available following periodic outbreaks of bubonic plague during the seventeenth century.

Eighteenth century

The eighteenth century, 1701 to 1800, was known as the Georgian period in England. In France, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette became the last king and queen of France due to the French Revolution (1789–99).

During the eighteenth century, men typically wore white powdered wigs. Women's wigs were brushed back, creating height, with tight curls and ringlets cascading down the back and sides in a style known as the pompadour. Fashions in the shape, style, width, height and even colour of wigs was set by the reigning monarch, especially in France. Each monarch had a distinguishing style that would set the trend among the upper classes.

Men's wigs became smaller and more formal during the late eighteenth century. The periwig was a heavily powdered wig that had length on the sides and back, and was sometimes tied back into a ponytail with a ribbon. This style was adopted by a number of professions, such as judges and barristers, and it is still customary to wear wigs in this style in British courts to this day.

Victorian and Edwardian eras

From the Victorian era (1819–1901) and into the Edwardian era (1901–18), male and female hairstyles were generally created using the person's own hair and wigs were not in common use. For more details on the hairstyles of this period, see Chapter 7, pages 172–173.

Films, theatre and television productions frequently feature these eras, so the most common use for a wig or postiche in these productions is to replicate historical hairstyles that would have originally been styled using people's own hair. The quality of wig making has had to become more refined to do this realistically.

Twentieth century

During the 1920s and 1930s, women embraced greater freedom, becoming more independent, wearing more comfortable clothing and cutting their hair into short bobs. This was not always seen as acceptable, so some women wore a hairpiece or wig to avoid any confrontation.

The influence of the pompadour hairstyle continued into the 1940s and 1950s. Inexpensive wigs made from synthetic were invented in the late 1950s, when they were mainly used in film and theatre. During the 1960s, wigs could be worn to create bouffant styles, while hairpieces became a fashion accessory in the 1970s.

Wigs may be used to replicate these eras in a production. They may also be worn as a fashion statement, for fancy dress or for a number of medical reasons. For more details on hairstyling in the twentieth century, see Chapter 7, pages 173–180.

Contemporary wigs

Today, wigs are widely available and more affordable. They may be worn for numerous reasons.

- Theatre, film and television productions – wigs may be used because of time constraints. For example, if the character has a complex hairstyle it would be more time-consuming to set and style the performer's own hair. Also, the performer may not have the colour or length of hair that is needed for the character. Wigs can be prepared in advance, so they only need to be fitted on the performer just before the production.

HANDY HINT

Visiting the National Portrait Gallery in London can help you research the style of wigs worn in different eras. You may also get inspiration from portraits and historical pictures in local galleries and collections.

HANDY HINT

Working with amateur dramatics groups can help you to build confidence in working with wigs.

- Fashion – wigs can add a dramatic impact to a look, providing a wow factor on the runway or in an editorial shoot. This is especially true of synthetic wigs, which come in a vast range of vibrant colours. Wigs might also be used if the model has hair that is not the required length, although in the fashion industry, models usually have to go along with the designer with regard to hairstyles and hair cutting.
- Hair loss – wigs may be worn to conceal natural hair loss or scarring, as well as hair loss due to illness or from the side-effects of certain medications. There has been an increase in independent wig specialists who cater to this group.

Wigs are also worn regularly by many celebrities and influencers, such as Beyoncé and the Kardashians, which has led to an increase in wigs being used as fashion accessories by the general public. They are also worn by many in the black community and by some Orthodox Jewish women.

ACTIVITY

Create a mood board of images of different wigs and hairstyles from different historical eras. Sketch out some hair designs that replicate the hairstyles for each of the eras. Make a piece of hair ornamentation that can be linked to one of the eras.

2 MAKING WIGS AND HAIR POSTICHE

Hair preparation and taking measurements for wigs

The aim of this process is to measure the complete head shape and size accurately. Before you start you will need a record card to write down all of the measurements and the specifications for the final wig, such as its planned length, colour, where partings should be placed, and so on.

Wrapping the performer's hair

Begin by preparing the performer's hair, brushing it thoroughly so that there are no lumps and bumps. The hair should be flat to the head to give you an accurate head shape. The whole head shape should then be wrapped with cling film, ensuring that you do not obstruct the performer's airway. Wrapping both back-to-front and side-to-side will help you cover the head fully. The cling film should then be covered with a few layers of sticky tape – starting from the front, going round from temple to temple, and working down into the nape of the neck – to mould it to the shape of the head.

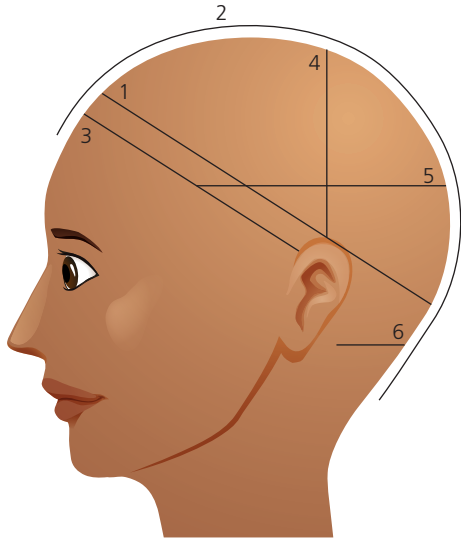


▲ **Figure 18.3** Wrapping the performer's head with cling film

Taking head measurements

Once the head is fully wrapped, the measurements shown in Figure 18.4 should be taken using a tape measure. These are:

- **head circumference** (1)
- from top of the forehead to the nape of the neck (2)
- from ear to ear around the hairline (3)
- from ear to ear over the crown of the head (4)
- from temple to temple around the back of the head (5)
- the width of the nape of the neck (6).



▲ **Figure 18.4** Taking wig measurements

These measurements are used to check the fit after construction, rather than for the construction itself.

Making the template

You can now mark out the performer's hair-line on the template. Using a permanent marker pen or **chinagraph pencil**, draw around the entire hairline. Add more sticky tape over the line so that it is not rubbed away, then remove the cling film from the performer's head and cut around the line. This should leave you with an accurate template of the performer's head shape. If you have any loose areas when you place the template onto the wooden block, you can make a small cut in it and fill it with cotton wool and tissue to pack it out before taping over the cut.

Techniques for making wigs and hair postiche

See Chapter 14 for information on securing the template to the wooden block and making the foundation base.

KEY TERMS

Head circumference: the distance around the head from the top of the forehead, round to the nape of the neck and back again, tucking in just behind the ears.

Chinagraph pencil: a waxy pencil that can be used to draw hairlines on cling film templates.

Knotting

Knotting is the technique used to attach hair to the hair-lace in wig making, with different knots giving different results.

- **Single knotting** is the most common form of knotting and is used for fine work.
- **Double knotting**, when another knot is repeated over the original knot, does not look as natural as single knotting; it is used on a thicker caul netting.
- **Point knotting**, a technique of knotting with the points of the hair, is used for the fine detail around the hairline, where the wig needs to look most natural.
- **Cross knotting** is when knotting is carried out in opposite directions (one row knotted to the right and the following row to the left), which replicates the random patterns of human hair growth. It ensures that there are no gaps or partings in the wig and gives a light lift to the hair at the root.
- **Under knotting** is when hair is knotted all the way around the edge of the wig on the upper side to soften the edge of the cap. It is often used at the nape of the neck.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Knotting hooks can be sharp and you could cut yourself with them if you do not use them correctly.

Work with good lighting when knotting as poor lighting can cause eye strain.

ACTIVITY

Practise knotting on a small square of hair-lace to build confidence and competency.

Weaving

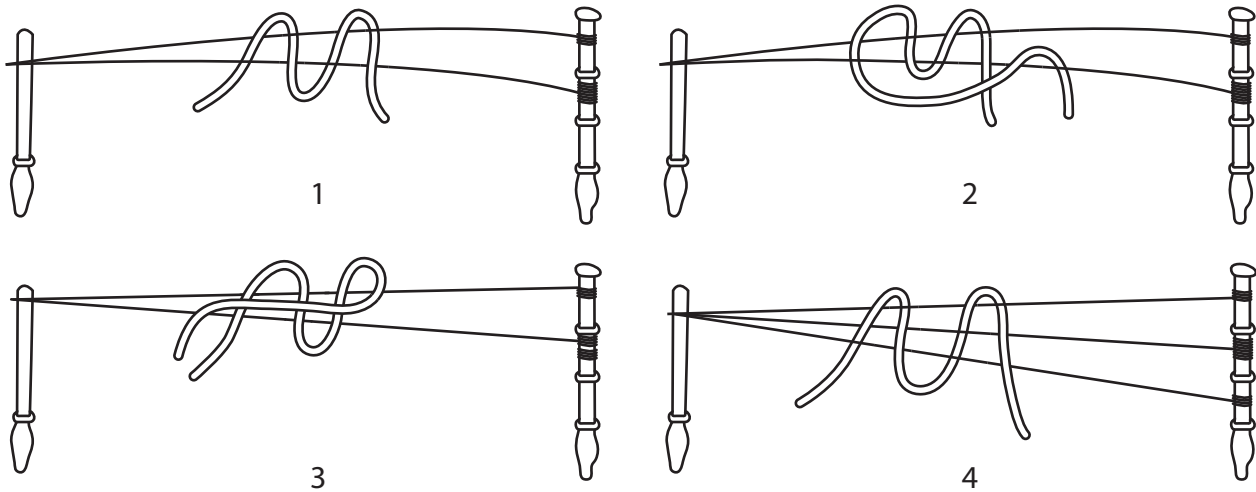
Weaving is a technique used to create hair weft for postiche. Most postiche use human hair, but you should select the hair type depending on the length of hair that you want for your overall look.

Two weaving sticks are secured to a table, about 50 cm apart, to hold the three strings onto which the hair will be woven. The strings are tied tightly to the weaving stick on the left-hand side – one around the bottom of the stick, one in the middle and one around the top – then wrapped around the stick on the right-hand side. The hair should be kept to the side in a drawing mat for easy access, as this keeps the hairs running in the same direction and stops them from knotting up.

Taking a strand of four to six hairs, begin with a starting knot to stop your weave from falling out and from moving on the strings. Once the starting knot has been woven, you can then continue to weave a few hairs at a time onto the strings. A jockey clip can be used to make sure that the hairs stay in place on the strings when you are knotting. You will need to apply a little beeswax to the strings while you are weaving to protect them from wear and to prevent breakages. When the weft reaches the desired length, you should end with a finishing knot.

Different weaving techniques include:

- **fly**, also known as a three-string fly weft, is a fine weaving technique using only four to six hairs at a time
- **once-in**, commonly known as a flat weft, is the most commonly used technique for weaving hair wefts
- **twice-in**, which can be used for a longer length of weaving, is similar to once-in, although the hair is slightly more widely spaced
- **thrice-in**, also known as the wig weft because it is mostly used for making wigs, is a more widely spaced weft.



▲ **Figure 18.5** Knots and weaving techniques

ACTIVITY

Practise constructing a small hair weft to gain confidence and competency. Make it 20 cm in length and include a starting knot and a finishing knot.

Try incorporating your hair weft into a hairstyle. It can be made to match your performer's hair colour or a fashion colour.

Other techniques

Templates can be taken with coloured paper, making it easier to see when you are knotting against the hair-lace. Accurate measurements are taken around the circumference of the head. Taking the template for a semi-transformation is exactly the same as taking templates for wigs, although a semi-transformation is a much smaller hair postiche that only covers the front and sides of the head.

Drawn-through is a complex procedure used to create partings in wigs. It requires practice and expertise. The parting is made separately and inserted into the parting space on completion. The parting can be any length, width and position but it should be clearly marked on your template.

Tension springs and positional springs are sewn into a wig to ensure that it is secure and stays in place when worn. Tension springs are made from finely coiled wire and are designed to create tightness around the nape of the neck to ensure there are no gaps between the neck and the wig. Positional springs are designed to hold down the wig around the ears and temples. Springs can be sewn in during or after construction to ensure that the wig fits the performer's head correctly.

Products, tools and equipment for making wigs and hair postiche

▼ **Table 18.1** Products, tools and equipment for making wigs and hair postiche

Human hair	This is knotted onto hair-lace to make a wig or used to create a weft or weave.
Animal hair	Yak hair is the most realistic alternative to human facial hair when creating a facial postiche. Horse hair can also be used.
Beeswax	This is used when weaving to prevent the strings from wearing thin and breaking.
Boiling water	This can be used to wet set the hair, creating a firm tight curl.
Paper	This is used to make templates when making wigs and foundation postiche.
Pens	These are used to make notes on the performer's record card, and a permanent marker pen is used to draw around the hairline when making templates.
Scissors	These are used to cut out templates.
Tape measure	This is used to take measurements of the performer's head shape.
Hackle	This tool has rows of pointed metal nails fixed to a base. It is used to mix hair and to unwind and tease out crepe hair.
Drawing mats	These are used to hold hair when knotting or weaving.
Weaving sticks	These are used when weaving to hold the strings in place. They are generally clamped onto a table.
String	This is used when weaving human hair.
Jockey clips	These little pin curl clips are used to keep the hair in place when weaving.
Wooden block	The template is secured onto this before knotting the hair onto hair-lace.
Nails	These are used to secure netting, caul or hair-lace to the wooden block when knotting.
Hammer	This is used to secure nails into the wooden block.
Pins	These are used to secure hair-lace onto a malleable block.
Template	This is a pattern for making a wig or foundation postiche.



HEALTH AND SAFETY

The hackle is very sharp and it can easily stick in your hand, causing serious injury, if you do not use it correctly.

Hair-lace	A fine nylon lace that is virtually invisible, depending on its grade, and is often used at the front of a wig.
Knotting hook	This is used to knot hair onto hair-lace.
Caul	A thicker, denser form of netting that is not as fine as hair-lace.
Needle and cotton thread	This is used for sewing on the foundation base.
Nylon thread	This is used for sewing tension and positional springs onto wigs.
Clamps	These are used to secure weaving sticks to a table or workbench, holding them upright and in place.
Drawing brushes	These are wooden-handled brushes with bristles. They hold the hair in place and stop it from becoming loose, knotted or tangled.
Jigger	This is a block of wood with string attached, which is used when permanently curling the hair.
Pinching irons	These are flat plate irons used directly on the hair.
Iron oven	This is used for heating tongs.
Drying cabinet	This is a large cabinet that radiates heat and bakes the wigs dry slowly, ensuring that the hair is set in place.
Malleable blocks	These are used for blocking wigs and hairpieces onto. They are made of fabric and filled with sand and sawdust, and they are available in different shapes and sizes.
Cling film/ polythene	This is used when taking a template. It is also used to protect malleable blocks to prevent them from getting wet.
Postiche pins	These are used to secure wigs and postiche to a malleable block and they come in different sizes.
Rollers	A variety of types and sizes of rollers are used when setting wigs.
Clips	These are used to keep sections of hair in place.
Brushes	These are used for brushing hair through, for preparing the hair, and for styling and dressing wigs and postiche. A variety of wig brushes are available.
Cradle	This is an open wooden box with curved sides, used to support wig blocks.

3 CREATE AND DRESS A HAIR POSTICHE AND STYLE A WIG

Construct a hair postiche

To meet the learning outcomes for this unit you will need to construct one of the following hair postiche following your design brief: foundation postiche, nape or crown, chignon, toupee, ponytail or ringlets.

If you are weaving to construct a foundation postiche, your hair weft needs to be a long length – at least 1 m – so that it can be sewn onto a foundation. Details on weaving are given on pages 8–9. Remember, in order to conceal a hair postiche, it is imperative that the colour of the hair is an exact match to the performer's hair.

The 1 m weave can now be sewn onto circular caul netting that you have previously measured on the performer's head. It is sewn in a clockwise direction, starting from the centre and working around to the outer edge of the netting. Ribbon is then sewn around the weft and netting to finish off and tidy up the edges. This creates a hair postiche that you can now style, dress and finish ready for the performer to wear.

For more on constructing and fitting a postiche, see Chapter 14.

Block a wig and hair postiche

Once you have completed construction of your wig or hair postiche, you can start to block it. This is the process of securing it to a malleable block so that you can progress on to cutting and styling it.

Prepare the malleable block by covering it with cling film to ensure that it remains dry when you are working on it, then take the wig or hair postiche off the wooden block. Wigs should be lined up with the front of the malleable block and both sides should be balanced and symmetrical as though it were on somebody's head. Hair postiche can be secured to the crown area of the malleable block.

Once it is central and symmetrical, the wig or hair postiche is secured in place with pins and ribbon to prevent damage to its outer edge. Starting in the centre at the front, and working either left to right or right to left, place ribbon along the edge of the hair-lace and start to press pins into the ribbon and through the hair-lace into the malleable block. Do this for the whole outer edge of the hair-lace at the front of the wig or postiche.

Once the front hair-lace is secure, you can secure the wig around the nape. Pull down on the back of the wig gently so that it fits as if it were on a performer's head and secure it in place with T pins (pins shaped like the letter T). You can also secure the crown area of the wig to prevent it from lifting once you start to style and dress the wig.

You may need to use padding, such as cotton wool, tissue or crepe hair, to secure the wig or postiche in place.

Set a wig or hair postiche

Once you have securely blocked your wig or hair postiche, you can start to set it. The style you want to achieve will determine the products, tools and equipment that you use.

HANDY HINTS

Each pin that you secure on the block should be placed in a zigzag pattern. This helps to distribute the tension, stopping the hair-lace from being stretched or torn.

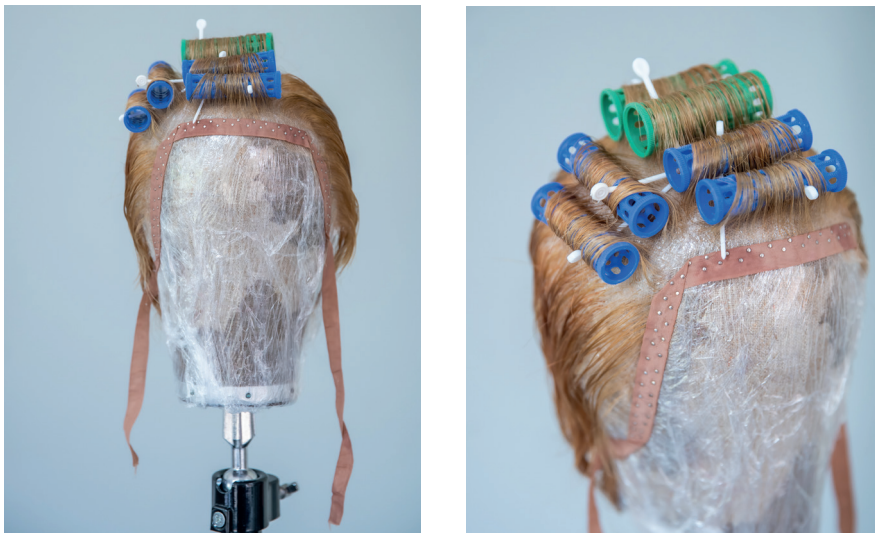
Pins should be placed 1 cm apart, so a number of them will be needed to secure all the hair-lace and ribbon onto the malleable block.

You may want to use a thimble to protect your finger when blocking wigs onto a malleable block.

Wet set

Wet setting involves spraying the hair with water or shampooing the wig. It helps the style to last longer, especially if products are added to the hair while it is wet. Setting lotions, mousses and gel sprays enable a firmer hold and add to the longevity of the set. Longevity is important as the wig may need to stand up to long periods of filming as well as travel to different locations and environments.

Once the wig has been set in rollers, curls or the required style, the malleable head should be placed under a hot hood dryer to dry the set. You will need to time the set – the length of the hair will determine how long it will take to dry. You can also place the malleable block into a wig oven if you are fortunate enough to have one.



▲ **Figure 18.6** Blocking the wig and wet setting the hair in rollers

Rollers

For a style with loose large waves, you would set the hair with large rollers. If you want to achieve a very curly look, the wig needs to be set on small rollers, and for very tight curls it could even be set on perming rods.

Depending on the style of the wig, it could be set directionally: this is when the rollers are placed in the direction you want the hair to fall into. For example, if the wig has a parting, the hair would fall into the direction of the hair parting. If the hair is set in a conventional set, or even a brick set, it is generally set straight back off the face, falling down at the sides equally.

The rollers should not be taken out until the hair is totally dry and has cooled down. Waiting till the hair is cold will ensure that the set holds better and increase the longevity of the hairstyle. Once you have taken the rollers out, you can brush the set through thoroughly, making sure that you do not leave any roller marks. You can then comb and place your set into the shape you are trying to create.

HANDY HINTS

Identify what a wig or hairpiece is made from before setting or dressing it to avoid any damage.

Do not use heat on synthetic (acrylic or nylon) wigs or hairpieces because they are plastic and will melt if tongs or straighteners are used.

It is advisable to use heat protection products to look after the hair while heat is used on it.

HANDY HINT

Velvet rollers are good for setting wigs. They are smooth, have a good grip and do not leave marks in the hair.

HANDY HINT

End paper can be wrapped around the ends of the hair when pin curling to help keep them all together.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ensure all electrical equipment has been PAT tested.

Finger waves and pin curls

Waves and curls might be used to create an authentic hairstyle from the 1920s or 1930s. You will work with brushes, combs and section clips for pin curling. Finger waves are added when the hair is set; they can be secured in place using ribbon and pins.

Pinching irons can also be used to dress and style the hair.

Dry dressing and styling

If you choose not to do a wet set, the hair can be set with heated rollers. As before, the rollers should be set in the direction you want the style to go in. Crimping is another dry styling technique. It gives the hair a full-textured frizzed look and can create body and fullness, making the hair more malleable when creating a full-bodied hairstyle.

You can also backcomb the wig if more height is needed, for example to create an authentic 1960s beehive with extra body.

ACTIVITY

Sketch out a design plan for setting techniques to create a 1940s hairstyle. Annotate it to describe the techniques, products, tools and equipment that you would use.

Dress a wig or hair postiche

You can use finishing products while you are dressing out your wig to give extra hold to the shape and to add some shine. Finish off with hairspray to hold the shape in place.

The following are finishing products that could be used to dress a wig.

- **Serum** – this is an oil that can be applied to wet or dry hair to smooth it and add shine. Take care, though, as too much serum can make the hair greasy.
- **Wax** – this is good for smoothing over the hair when it is dry. It can control the hair, smooth stray hairs and help to maintain the shape.
- **Gel** – this can be used to hold a hairstyle in place and can also create a wet look.
- **Dressing cream** – this is good for smoothing over the hair when it is set in rollers as it helps keep the hair smooth and stops stray hairs. It also helps to maintain the hairstyle and adds shine.
- **Texture powder** – this is useful for fine, flyaway hair. It thickens the hair and adds body to the hairstyle.
- **Colouring** – you can use coloured hairspray or mousse to add colour. Because these are temporary, the colour can be washed out with shampoo.
- **Shine spray** – this adds instant shine to the hair. Be careful not to spray too close – a little bit of spray, added finely, is all that is required – as too much can make the hair greasy.

The following tools and equipment can be used when dressing and finishing wigs.

- **Brushes** – a variety of brushes can be used for brushing the hair through, blow-drying, styling and dressing the hairstyle.
- **Combs** – a range of different combs are used for combing the hair through, setting the hair and dressing out the hair.
- **Backcombing brush** – this is a narrow bristle brush that can add root lift from back brushing but also smooth over to neaten the back brushing.
- **Ornamentation** – this can include anything from costume jewellery to authentic ornamentation.
- **Hairdryer** – this is used to blow the hair dry.
- **Straighteners** – these can straighten hair and even add curls to it.
- **Tongs/wand** – these are used to create tight curls or loose waves.
- **Rollers** – a range of small and large rollers can be used to create tight curls and loose waves.
- **Pin curl clips** – these small metal clips hold pin curls and barrel curls in place.
- **Kirby grips** – these are used for putting hair up. They have a strong grip and give a style longevity.
- **Fine wavy pins** – these small, fine pins are used to keep hair discreetly in place.
- **Geisha pins** – these are large, thick, wavy pins that secure a wig in place to the anchor points. They are strong so they are used for heavy wigs and hairpieces.
- **Padding** – this is used to add height and volume to a hairstyle when dressing the hair into a hair-up style.
- **Synthetic hair** – artificial hairpieces can be incorporated into a hairstyle to vary the look.
- **Nets** – fine hairnets can be used to hold a hairstyle in place and keep it under control.
- **Donuts** – these are another form of padding that can be used to create a high bun or add height and width to a hairstyle.

ACTIVITY

Block a wig then set it with two different setting techniques. Use setting products. Brush the set out, then dress and style the wig using finishing products.

Once you have achieved the style you want, take care not to disturb it. Keep the wig in a safe place, ready for when you apply it to the performer.



▲ **Figure 18.7** Dressing a wig using straighteners

HANDY HINT

A wall of grips is when you place grips in a vertical zigzag pattern. This is used for securing pins into when dressing the wig into a French pleat.



▲ **Figure 18.8** A finished wig ready to be fitted

4 PREPARE AND FIT A WIG OR HAIR POSTICHE

Prepare hair for wig or hair postiche

Once the performer is sitting in a position that is comfortable both for them and you, you can prepare their natural hair using one or more of the following techniques.

- **Wrapping the hair flat around the head** – this is the same technique you would use to apply a bald cap (see Chapter 12, pages 274–275). The hair should be secured in place using grips, ensuring that the grips face the crown only.
- **Placing anchor points around the head** – anchor points are criss-crossed hair grips that face inwards towards the crown. These should be placed at the sides of the head, at the crown and also at the sides of the nape of the neck.
- **Braids** – you can prepare the performer’s natural hair by braiding it, as braids are just as effective as anchor points.
- **Bandages** – these can be used to help secure a wig in place, particularly if the performer has shorter hair. Pins can be secured to the bandages.
- **Toupee tape** – this can be used to secure a toupee on a performer with little hair.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

PPE should be worn throughout the process of preparing and fitting a wig or hair postiche.

Ensure that the performer is sitting at a height that is comfortable for them and also comfortable for you to work at.

HANDY HINT

Once the hair is totally off the face you can add a stocking cap over the hair wrapping and add anchor points to hold it in place neatly.

You are now ready to apply your wig.

ACTIVITY

Practise wrapping hair and creating anchor points.



▲ Figure 18.9 Wrapping the hair and placing anchor points

Fit a wig

Slowly and carefully unblock your wig from the malleable block, removing the pins and ribbon from the front of the hair-lace and the T pins from the nape and the crown of the wig.

Hold the front of the wig up to the performer's forehead, just under their natural hairline, and ask them to hold it in place. Gently pull the wig over the entire head, being careful not to disturb the anchor points. It should fit into the nape of the neck and cover the head shape closely. You can now ask the performer to let go. The wig should now be sitting in place, covering all of the performer's natural hair. Make sure that it is symmetrical and that both sides are evenly balanced.

You can now secure the wig in place. If there is hair-lace at the front of the wig, it should be secured with a small amount of **mastix** at the temples. Hair pins are then pushed into the anchor points – you will remember where they are, but you can also feel them through the wig. The wig should be secure so that it cannot move or fall off.

You should not need to dress the wig once it is in place because this should have been done on the malleable block prior to applying it, but you can comb it lightly if the wig has been disturbed while applying it.



▲ **Figure 18.10** Fitting and securing a wig

Fit a hair postiche

Fitting a hair postiche is very similar to fitting a wig in that anchor points are used to secure it, but the position of the anchor points will depend on where the hair postiche is going to be fitted. Position the hair postiche over the anchor points, ensuring that it is symmetrical and balanced, then fix it in place with pins pushed into the anchor points. The pins should be a similar colour to the postiche and the performer's hair so that they can be concealed.

You can then finish off styling the performer's hair, incorporating it around the postiche before securing it in place with finishing products and pins. No grips should be on show.

KEY TERM

Mastix: a type of adhesive used to secure hair-lace.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ensure that skin sensitivity testing is carried out correctly before applying adhesives.

HANDY HINT

For extra security when pinning into your hairstyle, use a fine pin and bend one side over.

5 MAINTAIN WIGS AND HAIR POSTICHE

Products and tools used maintain wigs and hair postiche

In addition to the products and tools mentioned for setting and dressing, the following products may be used when maintaining a wig or hair postiche.

- **Isopropyl alcohol (IPA)** – this is used as an adhesive remover and as a cleaning solution.
- **Wig shampoos and conditioners** – human hair wigs and postiche are cleaned with specialist wig shampoos and conditioners.
- **Fabric detergent and fabric conditioner** – these can be used on synthetic (acrylic or nylon) wigs to give them shine and make them manageable.

Remove a wig or hair postiche

Extreme care needs to be taken when removing a wig or hair postiche, both to keep the performer safe and comfortable during the removal process, and to look after the wig or hair postiche. You also need to be careful not to disturb the shape or style of the dressed wig.

If you have applied the wig using adhesive, you will need to use adhesive remover to dissolve it. Using remover and a small brush with a tissue underneath it to catch drips, slowly brush over the hair-lace and adhesive until the adhesive dissolves and the hair-lace starts to lift. When the hair-lace has lifted, gently take out the large pins that were put through the anchor points on the performer's natural hair. When you have removed all of the pins, slowly and gently lift the wig off the performer's head.

Placing a tissue underneath the hair-lace front, slowly brush adhesive remover over the hair-lace to remove any remaining residue so that it is completely clean and ready to be reapplied in the future.

The wig should now be secured onto a malleable block. You may need to redress it, for example by adding rollers, or simply comb or brush it into place and finish off with products, keeping it in shape for continuity and future scenes.

When removing a hair postiche, remove the pins that attach it to the performer's natural hair. Once it is removed, secure it to a malleable block ready for redressing if needed.

See Chapter 14 for more information about removing adhesive from the performer's skin.

ACTIVITY

Prepare a performer's skin and hair ready for a wig application. Fit the wig, checking for balance and symmetry, and secure it in place. You should then remove the wig from the performer and block it.

Clean and maintain a wig or hair postiche

If a wig or hair postiche is made of human hair, it will need to be washed with professional wig shampoo. If the wig or hair postiche is to be reused on the same performer, it does not need washing very frequently unless conditions are particularly hot and humid. If the wig or hair postiche is to be reused by a different performer, it should be washed beforehand.

Start by wrapping a malleable block with cling film to make it watertight. The wig should then be secured to the malleable block, paying attention to the hair-lace, to ensure that there is no movement so that it will not be damaged. Next, the wig should be given a good brush to brush any sprays out of the hair.

The wig is then rinsed in a basin filled with warm water and wig shampoo. You may need to let it soak for 10 to 15 minutes if the wig has a build-up of product on it. You must not rub the wig. After it has soaked, rinse the shampoo off the wig with fresh water.

When you apply conditioner, gently work it through the hair with your fingers or a very large-tooth comb. You can leave it on for a further 10 minutes, then rinse the wig in cool water. The conditioner can be applied directly to the hair or, like the shampoo, diluted in a basin of water. The latter method may be preferable so as to not weigh the hair down.

Allow the water to run from the wig, then gently fold a towel around it to remove excess water, making sure that you do not rub it. Comb the wig through with a large-tooth comb. It is then ready to set in the style you need to create. You can leave human hair wigs to dry naturally, but setting or blow-drying is recommended.

Synthetic wigs cannot really be washed, but they can be conditioned by rinsing them in fabric softener to help prevent knotting. They should be allowed to dry naturally as they will always regain their original shape and style. To sanitise synthetic wigs for hygiene purposes, you can spray them inside and out with isopropyl alcohol (IPA).

Store a wig or hair postiche

Once the wig is clean and dry, it should be stored safely until it is needed.

Human hair wigs should be packed with soft tissue and a fine hairnet should then be placed around the wig before gently wrapping it in tissue paper. It should then be placed carefully in a cardboard box lined with soft tissue to act as a cushion and protect it. Put the lid on and store it in a cool, dry place until it is needed again.

Synthetic wigs can be turned inside out and placed into a plastic bag. The difference in how synthetic and human hair wigs are stored reflects the very big difference in their cost.

It is useful to label the front of the box or the bag with a description of the length, style and colour of the wig.

HANDY HINT

If the wig is old and a lot of products have built up in it, you can soak it in washing detergent to help break it up.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Ensure all boxes and bags used for storage are labelled and identifiable.

Test your knowledge

- 1 What is the circumference of the head?
- 2 What is a wooden block used for?
- 3 Name the different hair types used for knotting.
- 4 When is single knotting mostly used?
- 5 Why would you wrap someone's hair?
- 6 What are anchor points?
- 7 What is a wig cap?
- 8 Why would you use velvet rollers when setting a wig?
- 9 Why should you block a wig?
- 10 Name at least three finishing products that can be used on wigs.

Practical assignment

Scenario

You have been asked to design a wig for one of the characters in the musical *Chicago*.

Task

Select a wig, wash it and set it according to your design, using at least two setting techniques.

Dress the wig and fit it to a performer to create a complete look.

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