



Playcare for small dogs and grooming for all!

The Three Secrets to Getting Your Dog Groomed Perfectly

By Arlene Sinanian

Dog groomers are professional technicians. They take pride in a job well done. When a dog's owner is thrilled with the results of a grooming session, the groomer who did the work is equally thrilled. Groomers really want to do what is best for a dog, *and* the dog's owner.

Beyond professional pride, dog groomers want your return business. A large following of loyal customers is a dog groomer's bread and butter. Your satisfaction is a groomer's job security.

Given that a good groomer wants to do right by you and your dog, you can take full advantage. There are three secrets to getting the perfect result every time you drop your dog off for a bath and a haircut. Here they are:

1. *Take a good, hard look at your dog.*
2. *Explain exactly what you want.*
3. *Listen to, and give, clear feedback (with tact.)*

Okay, I know at face value, these three secrets seem kind of obvious. Let's go between the lines and look at what may be not so obvious.

Secret 1: Take a good, hard look at your dog.

Your dog is the apple of your eye. He or she may not have champion bloodlines, but your dog is a winner in your heart, and that is all that really matters. I say this because not every dog has the coat or physical dimensions to be groomed to show ring standards.

Even if your dog is an AKC pedigreed canine, his or her coat might not be ideal for a breed standard trim. If your dog's fur is naturally curly, for example, and you would prefer a grooming that results in a straight, silky coat, you are setting yourself up for disappointment.

Next, take a look at your dog's lifestyle. If your dog is a rough-and-tumble character, it makes more sense to give your dog a short, neat, low-maintenance style, than a style that will accumulate dirt and tangles.

While you are looking at your dog's lifestyle, look at your own. Are the sort of person who has the time, energy, money, and persistence to maintain an elaborate grooming style? Some breed-standard styles require a lot of daily upkeep. For example, the classic Poodle show ring cut, with pom-poms and bracelets, will quickly disintegrate without frequent brushing, fluffing, and trimming.

As I said at the beginning, if your dog's coat is not proportioned to breed standards, some grooming styles can enhance, or detract from, your dog's appearance. For example, your groomer has a few techniques that can enhance your dog's beautiful eyes. Fur length can be left longer to cover up minor deformities, in some cases. Crooked body lines can be smoothed out just a bit with the right trim. Not everything can be masked with the right groom, but there are possibilities.

Finally, it pays to take a realistic look at your dog's coat and skin condition. A thin, cottony coat cannot be

groomed to appear coarser and thicker. A ropey, thick coat cannot be groomed so as to stay thin and silky. While grooming can remove loose hair, no grooming work will ever permanently stop shedding.

Skin condition is also important. Pink-skinned dogs, for example, are especially prone to sunburn. If you frequently take your pink-skinned dog outside for long periods of time, you would help your dog tremendously by leaving his or her coat on the long side to protect against sunburn.

In summary, when thinking about how you would like your dog to look after a grooming, be realistic. Take a good, hard look at your dog. See what's actually there, and begin your decision making from that point. Once you have your decision made, it's time to move on to Secret 2.

Secret 2. Explain exactly what you want.

You know that expression "If you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got." Your groomer can give you what you ask for, but you have to ask for it. Those who say "It doesn't matter what I say to my groomer, she does what she wants to do anyway," are not being clear about what they want. Either that or they did not take a good hard look at their dog. (See Secret 1.) If you feel you have been clear about what you want, and your groomer still does not follow instructions, then it time for some feedback. We'll get to that in Secret 3. Let's look at how to explain exactly what you want.

You have a choice: A thousands words, or a picture, or both. Photos that show a dog grooming style that appeals to you really help in a discussion with your groomer. Please realize that the dog in the photo you bring in will probably look absolutely nothing like your dog—unless it's a photo of your dog. Getting back to Secret 1, taking a good hard look at your dog, there is almost no way your groomer will be able to exactly reproduce the style in the photo because that dog is not your dog. Instead, you can use the photo as a reference. Explain which features you like and see if your groomer can work along those lines.

When explaining what you want in words, point to the part of the dog you are referring to. Non-verbal communication is an important part of expressing what you want. It helps to clarify your meaning. The visual technique will also help your groomer remember your instructions. You can also use gestures to indicate fur length. Some people will say "Take off an inch," while indicating a half-inch with their fingers. The visual indication is the one your groomer will use.

Finally, don't assume anything. If it is important to you, include it in your instructions. If you leave it out, then your groomer will do what he or she thinks is best.

Before I wrap this up, I want to put on my groomer's advocate hat for a second. Your groomer will likely have years and years of experience. When explaining what you want, it is not necessary to give him or her a grooming lesson. If you want, for example, your Schnauzer to have a breed-standard cut, explaining to your groomer how to do a breed standard cut for a Schnauzer is a waste of everyone's time. All that's necessary in that case is to explain how you want your dog's particular style to vary from the standard.

You've spent some time telling your groomer what you want. Now it's time to do a little listening, which brings us to the next secret.

Secret 3. Listen to, and give, clear feedback, (with tact.)

Good job, so far, determining what you want, and then explaining what you want. Now it's time to do a little listening—to get feedback.

Your groomer wants to do the very best job not only for you, but also for your dog. He or she will listen to what you want and then determine if it is possible. Some things your groomer will consider are:

- Does your dog have the coat and body shape to support what you want? (Yes, I know you already thought about this. Your groomer's experience means he or she may have some additional insight you could consider.)
- Does your groomer have the skill set to do what you asked for? While a groomer wants you to be happy, he or she may not be able to work a minor miracle.

- Will what you asked for cause the dog discomfort? For example, a dog's coat may be so matted and tangled, that it may be more humane to trim away the problem areas than to try and straighten the fur. De-matting and de-tangle requires aggressive tugging and slicing. If the problem areas are very extensive, the de-tangling process may be more than your dog should be subjected to.

Feedback is a two-way street. That means there should be some discussion. Ask questions. Get clarification. Communicate so both of you are operating from the same sheet of instructions and have reached a consensus. It should be easy to remain tactful throughout this discussion if you remember that your groomer's best intention is to serve you and your dog.

When you get your dog back after the grooming appointment, give some feedback immediately. Let me stress *immediately*. The quality of a coat trimming is closely tied to the cleanliness of the coat. If you wait even a couple of days after your dog's appointment to ask your groomer to fix or change something on your dog's coat, the entire grooming process, bath, dry, and trim will have to be started over. If you give immediate feedback--right after your dog's groom is complete--your groomer should be able to make the change on the spot.

Your groomer is not a mind reader. It does no one any good to say "He looks terrific, thank you," when you feel something could have been done better or differently. You groomer wants to know what your true opinion is, because that is the only way he or she can make improvements. It really is your job to speak up, (again, tactfully,) so you ultimately get what you want. If you don't, "You will always get what you always got."

The Three Secrets to a Perfect Grooming are not really secrets, but they do take some thought. In order to have your dog groomed just the way you wish, you have to be realistic, communicate what you want, and then give and take feedback. Everyone wants your dog to look and feel the best. It takes a little work, but it's worth it.

If you have questions about this article or about anything concerning dog grooming, please call us at Pupcakes, 404-273-7440.