



HOW *to*
SPEED UP
your **NAIL SERVICES**

*Tips to Help You Work Smarter and
Faster So You Can See More Clients
and Make More Money*

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WHY SPEED MATTERS

By Holly Schippers

If you find yourself frustrated by your inability to move through services more quickly, you're hardly alone. Whether you are placing the pressure on yourself to go faster because another local salon offers quick in-and-out services, or because an owner who's never done nails sets the service times and expects you to stick with them, speed is an intimidating part of the job.

Of course, the other reason speed is important is that in the beauty industry, as elsewhere, time is money. Increasing your speed can literally add thousands of dollars to your income each year. It also can increase your customer retention. Everyone is on schedule, and even though clients like getting their nails done, they do not want to spend the afternoon in the salon. They want quality nails that can be done on their lunch hour, on the way home from work, or before they pick up the kids from school.

So let's talk about ways you can improve your salon speed without cutting corners on the excellence of your services.



HELPFUL WORK HABITS



Cutting down your service times doesn't mean you have to cut back on the quality of your work. Small, incremental changes in your routine can add up and make a big difference in your schedule.

There are a few things that you may not realize intrude upon your service time. **First, make your clients aware they are expected to wash their hands as soon as they enter the salon.** If they wash while you are finishing up or checking out the client ahead of them, then they will be ready to sit right down as soon as the chair is vacated.

The next piece of advice is an oldie but goodie: Talk to the hands! If you were raised with the notion that it's rude to talk to someone without looking into their eyes, then this is actually more difficult than you would think.

Talking to the hands allows you to keep moving continuously during the service without pausing your hands while looking up. Talking with your hands is another culprit. How many times do you catch yourself waving a file or tool in the air to make a point during a story or explanation?

Keeping your eyes and hands focused on the service from beginning to end will streamline things more than you think. If you want to test this theory, invite a few trusted clients to bring in headphones and listen to music or a book during a service, completely ignoring you. The difference in your service time will be an indicator of how much you lose focus on a regular basis while taking care of clients' nails.



REDUCING PREP TIME

Beginning with prep — whether for natural nails or enhancements — you can maintain a solid pace by keeping the client in your chair and using tools properly to get the job done. For those using a cuticle removal product that requires deactivation by water, **keeping a spray bottle filled with plain water or slightly soapy water at the table will enable you to quickly wash the nails without oversaturating them**, as well as keep the client in the chair.

If you are asking clients to use a sink, teaching them how to effectively wash their nails to remove cuticle product could be a big help in the time factor. Also, a small clock with a second hand near the sink could be a visual aid for your client to wash for 60 seconds so that they don't get lost in thought or conversation and stand at the sink longer than necessary. Another time-saver: **Make sure the tools you use for cuticle work are good quality and that you know how to use them.**

All nails have cuticle over the surface. The first time a client sits in your chair the cuticle needs to be removed from the extension edge to the proximal nail fold. You should see a thin layer of tissue lift away from the nail plate. The purpose of the pusher is to lift and separate the cuticle from the nail so that you have a clean surface to work on. If you don't ever feel the pusher slightly catch on that tissue or see any tissue come up, it may be time to evaluate if your pusher is effective. Some inexpensive pushers are very dull and do not help lift the cuticle.

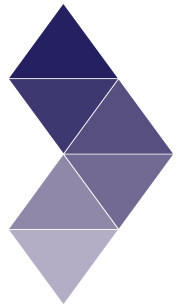
Another way to improve speed in this area is to use a professional removal product. If the product does the work for you by breaking the bond between the tissue and the nail plate, your tool is allowed to be more effective and efficient.

It is important you use your pusher at the angle the manufacturer suggests. If you also use a curette, it is critical that the more open side of the scoop face is as flat to the nail as possible. The curette is only an amazing power tool if used properly. You should see the cuticle coming up from the sidewalls and corners of the nail while moving the curette in small circles, which should give you a clean working surface and prevent lifting.

Once you have removed the cuticle from the entire nail plate on the first visit, the only tool needed on return visits would be the curette, as there will only be cuticle in the regrowth area. Cuticle work done properly may add a little time to the first visit, yet it will save you time in the long run because the nail plate will be clean and free of waxy tissue that causes little bumps in polish or gel-polish or lifting in enhancements.

Some services require the surface of the nails to be gently buffed in order to remove surface shine. Having the cuticle wholly removed makes this step faster and easier. According to industry chemist Doug Schoon, the direction of filing on the natural nail does not disrupt the nail plate. Having just learned this myself, it is a huge help in improving speed for prep work. This means **you can quickly and gently buff the nails to remove the shine with the file going back and forth in the direction that is most comfortable for you.** Unless your product manufacturer calls for the nail to be "etched," removing the shine should be a very brief part of the service. Make sure you are pulling back the lateral folds to remove shine from the entire surface so that you do not have to come back and catch it later or spend time on repairs due to remaining shine.

APPLYING POLISH OR GEL-POLISH



Whether applying polish or gel-polish to the natural nail, most of the rules for improving salon speed will be the same. The base coat should be applied as neatly and carefully as you would apply a red polish. Where the base coat goes the color flows, so if you are fast and sloppy with your base coat, you will be spending time cleaning up the color where it has flooded the lateral folds or the proximal nail fold. **Cleanup wastes more time than a precise application of base coat**, so don't be afraid to put a little more time into a thin even application so that your color will seem to magically flow on neatly.

Apply very thin layers of color. Thick layers take longer to dry in the case of polish and may wrinkle or under-cure in the instance of gel-polish. Two thin layers of color should give you beautiful, even color coverage every time. If not, ensure that your color is mixed well by either shaking or rolling, depending on the manufacturer's suggestion for that product. Taking the time to add a third layer of color is going to be more of a time drain than if you had just ensured it was mixed properly.

Another tip to save time in application is to **seal the edge before you polish the nail plate surface**. This helps in a couple of ways. If your routine is to polish the nail, seal the edge, then pull back over the nail to remove excess, then you are duplicating effort and that takes time. If you seal the edge first, followed by polishing the surface, there is no additional time taken to remove excess from the edge. This also ensures you do not create the bulge or lump at the extension edge that causes chipping or extra dry time.

Top-Coating Tip: When it comes to top coat application, the timesaver is to **leave a tiny margin of at least 1/16-inch around the color so that you are able to seal it with the top coat**. The margin makes it easier to apply the top coat just past the edge of the color without getting it on the skin and requiring cleanup.



REMOVING POLISH OR GEL-POLISH



When your client returns and it's time to remove her nail polish, your fastest removal medium is going to be pure acetone or an acetone-based remover. **Using a non-acetone remover will slow down the removal process.** If you're concerned about dehydration of the skin, many manufacturers now offer an acetone-based remover with moisturizing properties.

A plastic-backed polish remover pad is most effective because it holds the remover on the cotton longer and can be used on more fingers as a result. It also keeps your skin from absorbing some of the remover and slows down evaporation slightly. If you have to use cotton balls, gauze, or any other non-plastic-backed medium, then wearing gloves can help efficiency just a bit by keeping your skin from absorbing some of the product and allowing you to use more of the surface since you don't have to be concerned about transfer of color onto your fingers.

If you are using a gel-polish, chances are good that the manufacturer's instructions are to remove the top coat or break the top coat seal before wrapping it with remover. This step can drag down your salon speed significantly, so let's look at ways to do it that will make it a lot less stressful and more consistent.

Removing the top coat or breaking the seal can be done with a lower grit file such as a 180. Using too high of a grit such as a buffer will slow you down. Watch the color of the nails to keep an eye on your progress. When you end up with quite a few places where you file through the color, then you have taken more time than needed for filing. If you can learn to watch the nail for signs that you are finished filing, it will make the process more streamlined.

On the flip side of that, not filing enough will also slow you down since the top coat is the most difficult layer for the remover to penetrate. If, for example, the gel-polish has only been filed down the center, this means

the edges are going to take much longer to remove since they are still protected by the top coat.

If you have added any embellishments to your gel-polish, such as glitter, pigments, and other fun things, then filing into them slightly will help with removal once the nails are wrapped up. **Leaving a thick layer of glitter or spots of shiny top coat will impede the remover's access to the rest of the nail coating,** which will again increase your service time and in most cases your frustration.

By preparing the nail before it is wrapped or clipped in your remover, it should come off cleanly and easily. When wrapping up the nails or securing them in a clip, it's important to wrap the nails tightly or use the clips properly and encourage the client to sit still. Some find a warm towel laid over the hands is a helpful way to keep clients still while giving the service an extra spa-like touch.

Set a timer for the time your manufacturer suggests and do not shortchange it. **Taking the remover wraps or clips off the nails prematurely will increase the time it takes to clean the nails.** Air hitting the gel-polish will act to re-harden it and make it more difficult to remove. Having a timer gives you the advantage of always leaving the remover on the correct amount of time.

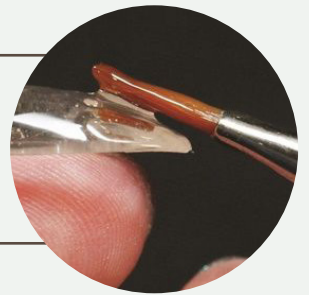
If you unveil a nail and the gel-polish is being stubborn, recover that nail with remover and move on to the next nail. Impatience in this step can easily cause damage to the nail plate, which will manifest in tiny white spots or in some cases large sections of white spots covering the nail plate. Whether or not you use a gel-polish that requires filing on the top coat, wrapping or clipping the nails correctly then leaving the remover on for the right amount of time will save time by ensuring a clean removal.

SCULPT WITH YOUR BRUSH (GEL OR ACRYLIC)

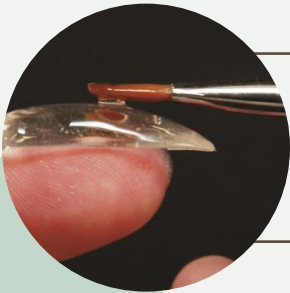


When it comes to application, **your brush angle can change the game completely.** When you apply product, if you imagine what you want the finished product to look like in your mind's eye and angle the brush accordingly, the time it saves you on finish filing would astonish you.

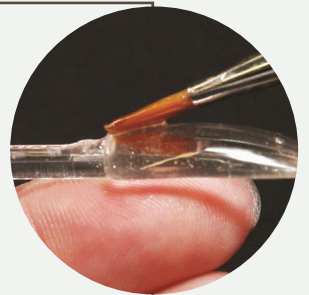
Looking at the image to the right, we know that the nail should taper toward the extension edge in that front third of the enhancement. If the brush is laid back so that the hairs are parallel to that angle, then the product is placed with the taper built in and the bulk of the product going toward building the arch.



In this image, you can see the angle of the brush has changed to reflect the change in the shape of the nail. The arch is where the strength comes from in an enhancement. Bringing the brush up to be parallel with the arch is going to keep you from flattening out the product toward one end or the other.

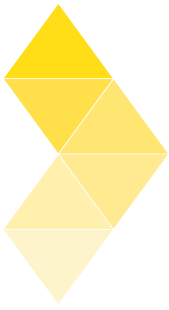


With this image, you can see how by bringing the brush handle up and angling the bristles down, you will get a nice angle down from the arch to the nail while remaining in control of the product to keep it from touching the proximal nail fold. Keeping the product off the skin will save you time on repairs in addition to keeping you from cutting the skin while finish filing, which would also slow down the service — not to mention irritate the client! **Using the brush to truly sculpt the nail into its finished shape will improve your finish file speed dramatically.**



Finally, make sure to tuck the brush into the sides when you work down from the arch to the sidewalls. As you can see in the two images above, having the brush turn to hug the sides will help taper the product down toward the sidewall, which will improve the chances of a good seal. Holding the brush straight as you move the product to the side will cause the product to be bulky at the sides, which takes more time to file and increases the chance of hitting the skin with product or the file.





FINISHING WITH A HAND FILE

If the enhancement has been sculpted with the brush, the finish filing can then be done quickly. Let's take it a step further and discuss how the finish filing can be done consistently, which will also improve speed as it becomes a habit. Let's look at hand-filing first.

Visualize the nail divided into three equal parts horizontally and vertically, which would create nine sections.

Using the grit your manufacturer recommends, begin the finish filing by perfecting the sidewalls and the shape of the extension edge. Next, on either the left or right "third" of the nail, begin to file using slightly rounded strokes moving from the side of the arch toward the sidewall. Repeat this on the opposite side. This step should seal your edges on the sides and simply perfect the curve and taper you sculpted in with the brush.

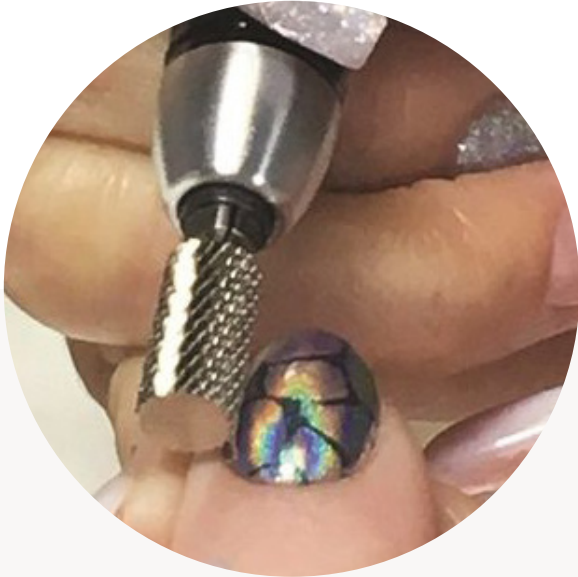
If you take a quick look down the barrel of the nail, the two sides should now be a reflection of each other. Using a stroke from the front edge of the arch to the extension edge, file the front third of the nail tapering the edge while keeping the file at a 45-degree angle to maintain the integrity of the arch. If you use your file to make flat strokes at any point in the finish filing, it will take away from the curves in the nail that give it strength.

For the fourth step, focus on the third of the nail nearest to the proximal fold. You can gently move the file side to side while keeping it at an angle to avoid flattening the arch. If you applied product with your brush handle angled up, this step should be fast and easy; you're basically perfecting and cleaning up to seal the edges.

Finally you can gently smooth the arch — which is that center square — blending it into the rest of the nail that has already been filed. **Leaving the arch for last allows you to be more confident in filing quickly without losing the strength of the arch.**



FINISHING WITH AN E-FILE



If hand filing is not for you, then let's talk about how to improve your speed safely with the e-file. According to industry educator Ann Chang, you should hold your e-file like a pen or pencil to use it the most proficiently.

She also recommends using a medium/coarse bit for finish file work. Unlike hand filing, you would work the e-file from one side of the nail to the other, ending near the proximal nail fold. Be aware of your pressure so that you maintain the curves sculpted into the nail for strength.

You can improve your finish file speed by having a process. **Following the same steps from nail to nail with the e-file will improve your speed the same way it does with hand-filing.** Consistency is key to finishing fast with nails that look the same from one to the next. Create a process that works best for you and the style of nails that you do. Something that could help with confidence and speed is to apply a slightly thicker layer of product than you need to give yourself a buffer that will help protect the nail and avoid accidental damage. Chang advises doing your finish filing at no higher than 7,000-10,000 RPMs with no lower than a medium grit.



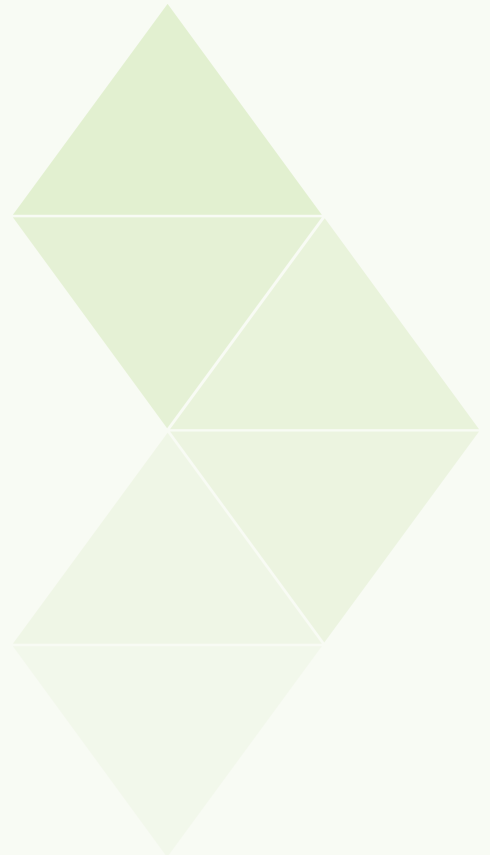
FINISHING TOUCHES

Once you have the basic finish filing in place for your enhancement, you have a few choices for finishing. With a gel enhancement, simply apply the sealant to finish. Liquid-and-powder extensions have the option of being hand-buffed to a shine, which could take some extra time. A longer-lasting alternative is to use a gel sealant.

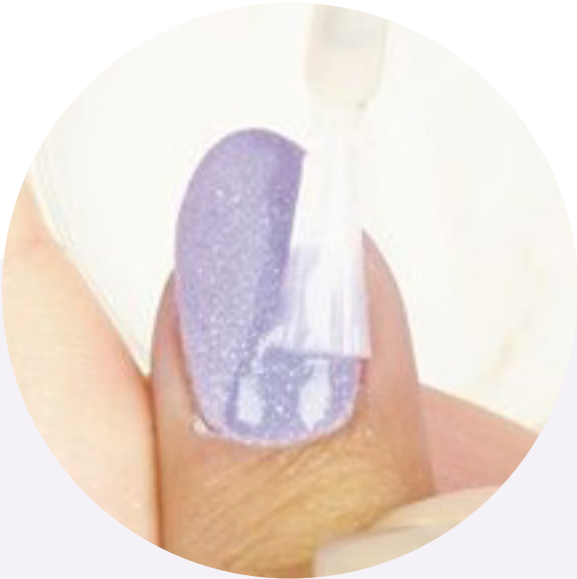
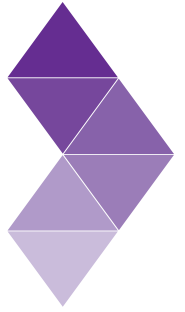
If you charge an additional \$5 or so to buff to a shine and send clients away with the buffer, or, alternatively, charge to apply the sealant, then you will be compensated for either the extra time used or the extra product. These options could also be built into your pricing. It's less frustrating adding on extra time when you're getting paid for it.

If you are going to apply traditional polish or gel-polish, it is not necessary to finish file beyond a 180-grit with most products.

If in doubt, touch base with your manufacturer. Doing extra filing when you are just going to apply color extends the service time for no reason.

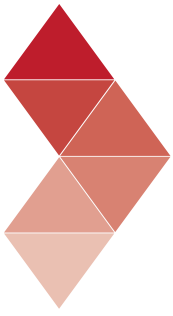


A WORD ABOUT DIP SYSTEMS



Recently, we've seen a resurgence of interest in acrylic dip systems, due at least in part to the fact that application is fast — **service times can be half that of other enhancement methods.** Dipping offers a brush-on method that can be done by anyone with good polish skills and does not require mastery of mix ratio or nail structure. It is similar to gel-polish in that the shine must be removed from the nails before application, and the top coat seal must be filed for removal. Another big time-saver: With colored dipping powders, there's no need for nail polish.





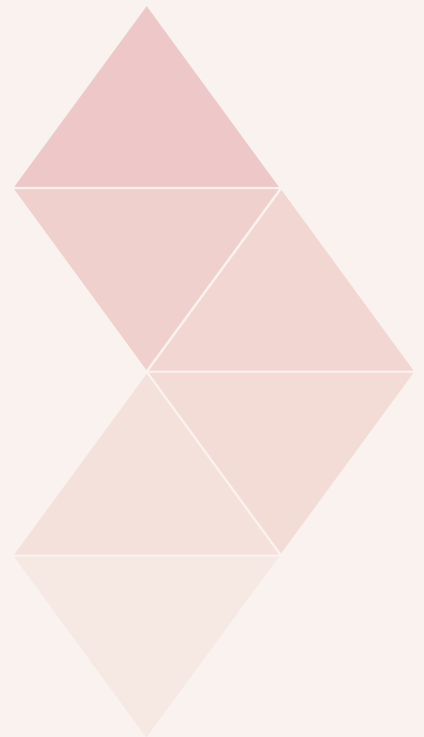
BE PATIENT AND PRACTICE

At the end of the day, speed comes with practice. If you have been doing nails for a few years, then some of these tips should help you shave a bit of time off your services. If you are new to nails, please focus on technique. It's scary to go slow and intimidating when the client gets antsy or the salon owner glares at you. But it's even scarier when they get angry because you have service breakdown issues, so lack of speed is the lesser evil.

Prepare the client ahead of time by mentioning how long she should expect the service to take and explain that you will be giving her nails meticulous personal care and focus. This takes a bit of pressure off you, making it less likely you will be rushed.

Using these tips as you practice will help you slowly improve your speed, as will attending classes or tradeshow for more education. Great technical skills and salon experience are not gained overnight; you've got to pay your dues before you get to reap the rewards. Be patient, practice in your down time or during those no-shows, and know that skills will gift you with speed in time.

Holly



MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR E-FILE



Today's e-files are lighter-weight and have less vibration than ever, so nail techs are using them for more aspects of the nail service than ever before — reducing service times and cutting down on fatigue. Use these practical tips from experienced e-file users to help stay on top of your electric file game.

Note: Robert Munkel, Brittany Hogan, Marc Foley, and Amanda Schison contributed to this section.

Cleaning Between Toes

Use a cone bit to clean between the toes at an RPM of 10,000. Use even pressure and keep the handpiece moving to avoid heat build-up. Use the coarse bit first to remove the bulk and then the fine bit after to smooth the skin when finished.



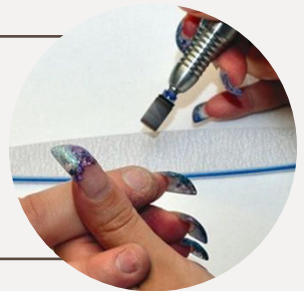
Cleaning Toe Cuticles

Use this B3 bit to clean the cuticle from the toenails after pushing it back with a cuticle pusher. Use very little pressure when doing this to avoid heat; let the bit do the work. Remember to move the handpiece and not stay in one spot.



Seasoning an Arbor Band

Use an arbor band for natural nail prepping, but first make sure to bevel the edge of the arbor band. This will remove any sharp edges. Simply run it against a hand file while it is in a low setting for only a second to ensure you do not nick your client.



Prepping the Natural Nail

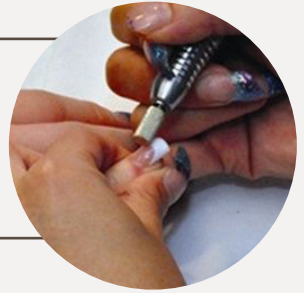
Use the e-file with arbor band on the lowest speed setting. Many e-files will “skip” or stop when used at the lowest setting. Do not use an e-file for prepping if it skips or stops, and do not use it at a higher speed setting to avoid this as this will cause excessive filing of the natural nail. Use no pressure whatsoever and let the electric file do the work for you. Make sure to get up near the cuticle area and sidewalls.





Removing Lifting

If there is any lifting around the cuticle area, use a medium carbide or diamond bit to cut a line just behind the lifted area. Make sure to be gentle, as these bits can do damage to the natural nail and must not come in contact with it.



Shaping the Nail

Using an over-grip, slightly adjust the client's hand so you have a perfect view of the upper arch from the side profile. File the upper arch by keeping the base of the barrel in contact with the free edge, the body in contact with the apex, and the tip in contact with the cuticle area.



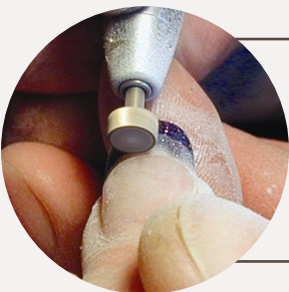
Edge Thinning and Finishing

When finishing the nail enhancements, use a sanding band under the nail to reduce thickness and shorten the nail. Hold the sanding band flush under the nail's free edge and use a slow speed to reduce the thickness and clean the underside of the nail.



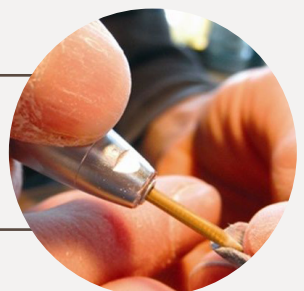
Prepping the Free Edge

Using a two-week carbide cutting bit, cut a new smile line by holding the bit at a 45-degree angle, cutting the old product out at the smile line but leaving the thickness at the tip. Add a second glitter mix to the previous fill, giving a fade effect by using a lighter or darker color combination.



Under Edge Finishing

When using a carbide bit to clean under the nail, use a slightly faster speed and hold the bit flush to clean the nail and remove burrs.



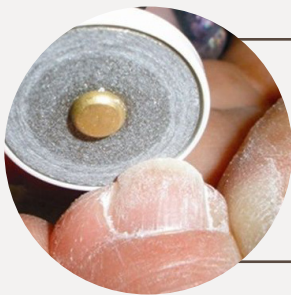


Cuticle Prepping

For hard-to-reach corners, use a flame point silicone stone to gently remove stubborn pterygium from the nail plate in the cuticle area. At a very low speed, about 3,000 RPMs, gently start from the right side of the nail at the groove wall and slowly work around the cuticle and top of the nail until you reach the left side of the cuticle.



Tip: Turn the client's hand, not the bit, to file around the sidewall and cuticle area. Too much pressure or speed will damage the nail and cause heat, but not enough pressure will get you nowhere — find a happy medium.



Toenail Shortening

When performing a dry pedicure, shorten toenails with a Saphire Pedicure Disk. This is very helpful to use if the nails are brittle and tend to crack in the wrong direction when using toenail cutters/nippers. Hold the bit at a 90-degree angle using a medium RPM, turning up the speed only as needed. High speeds can shred the edge of the nail.

Shortening Enhancements

Keep the bit straight up and down vertically (a 90-degree angle) when shortening the free edge to avoid skipping. Skipping can cause the product to weaken and break down. With medium speed, hold the bit against the tip of the nail, and start from the left side and work your way to the right. Turn the speed down if needed.



Callus Filing

Pedicure bits are excellent to use for dry pedicures or to just add extra smoothness. The use of a cone or barrel pedicure diamond bit is great to smooth dry and hardened skin on the heel, ball, and sides of the feet as well as to reduce the appearance of cracked heels. It is best to use a medium to high RPM, and make sure you do not leave it on one spot too long, as it can get very hot and uncomfortable for the client.



QUICK NAIL ART

You don't have to spend hours hand-painting a masterpiece on clients' nails. And even if you have the time, you may not have the talent. These eight nail art techniques produce beautiful results without requiring a great deal of time.



Credit: Kate Dix

Stamping



Credit: Nail Art Gallery/Linda165

Decals



Credit: Tracey Lee

Chrome



Credit: Nail Art Gallery/MoMaEl

Glitter Fade



Credit: Nail Art Gallery/MoMaEl

Crystals



Credit: Leslie Reese, Beaver, Pa.

Dotticure



Credit: Nail Art Gallery/Glittery_joy

Stencils



Credit: Katie Masters

Magnetic/Cat Eye

Upping Your Efficiency: Self Study

By Erin Snyder Dixon



A little self-analysis goes a long way toward determining what's slowing you down or where you're not working as efficiently as you could. To develop your own do-it-yourself efficiency study, you will need to pick a single service and break it down into its required components.

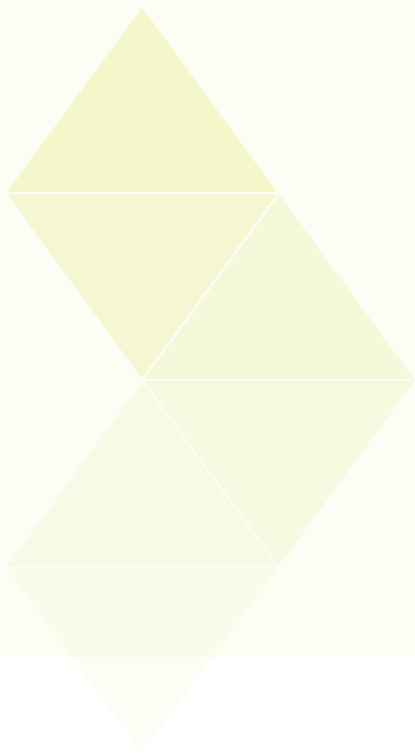
For example: Liquid-and-Powder Fills

1. Client washes hands
2. Polish removal
3. Inspect nails
4. Push back cuticles
5. Talk to client about service
6. File prep
7. Cleanse/dehydrate
8. Primer
9. Apply liquid and powder
10. File, buff, finish
11. Cleanse
12. Polish
13. Dry

You may have noticed that some components may be done at the same time as others, such as inspecting the nails and talking with the client while removing the polish. You may have also noticed that some steps often require many smaller steps. Applying liquid and powder can be broken down into many movements. If one of those movements is rifling through a drawer to find the right color of powder or struggling with a form, then you have just spotted a time-waster. And others, such as washing hands and drying polish, don't require technician "chair time" and should take place in another area of the salon (while you are with another client).

Carefully evaluate the services to identify motions that can be eliminated or shortened in duration. The question your study must answer is, "How are you using your time and motions now?" If at all possible, have an assistant or coworker act as a time and motion tracker for you. If that is not possible, borrow a video camera or use your cell phone to record yourself performing services. Study one type of service at a time. Once you have developed a written plan for that service, you can move on to another.

By evaluating your unique way of completing services, you will have the information needed to cut your service times. Most of the time, it's not about learning a fancy new technique but more about refining what you already know and do.



SAVVY CLIENT SCHEDULING



Smart scheduling allow you to see more clients with less downtime.

1. Develop and post a tardy policy. Most importantly, enforce it! If a client is 15 minutes late, explain that you will have to alter her treatment. You can't stay on time if your clients are late.
2. Discourage no-shows with a strict policy. After the first no-show appointment, charge the client for the missed service. (Use your discretion if the client's excuse is legitimate.) After a second missed appointment, don't book appointments for that client unless she has prepaid.
3. Have all new customers come in 10 minutes early. If they can't find the salon or need to fill out customer information cards, they'll have enough time.
4. Train your customers to walk in and immediately wash their hands. Don't let them wait until you're ready for them to sit down in your chair.
5. Book exactly how much time you need for a client. Most appointment books and software programs use blocks of 15 minutes, but if it only takes 50 minutes to do a client's nails, then book 50 minutes instead of the full hour.
6. Never put your most demanding client or the one who whines at the beginning or end of your day. You'll begin and end your day in a much better mood.
7. Set aside a certain time to return calls and check e-mail, so when you're with a client they have your full attention.
8. Pre-book as many of your clients as possible before they leave. Tell them: "I book out 12 weeks in advance so let's book your next appointment now so you get the best time for your schedule and are able to get in to see me."
9. Schedule several 10-minute time slots on your books every day for nail repairs. If you don't need the time for repairs, you can return messages or post on social media. Or you can reward yourself with a brisk walk, a coffee, or by closing your eyes to relax.
10. Overlap where necessary: Schedule clients so one client can begin soaking for her pedicure while you finish polishing another. One client can be soaking off a set of nails while you are rebalancing someone else.



TIME-SAVING TIDBITS



- Work in batches whenever possible. If you use metal implements, prepare enough sets to carry you through the day.
- Change out your drill bits and sanitizable files often — before they get dull.
- Book multiple appointments for clients with heavily callused feet; don't try to fix six months of damage in one session.
- Clip, rather than file, nails to bring down length.
- Keep your work table organized.
- Experiment with different systems to find the fastest application for you.
- Use the right files to shape quickly and effectively.
- Ask your client what shape she wants before you start to sculpt.
- Talk to the hand! Look up less often while performing services to maintain your pace.
- Keep supplies fully stocked — and nearby — including backups of frequently used items.
- Sculpt enhancements with your brush, not with your nail file.
- Schedule a break. It is hard to maintain your pace if you are tired or hungry.
- Educate clients about expectations.
- Work within systems to get the best results.
- Keep up with your product education to make sure you are using them as intended.
- Practice, practice, practice.

