

Salon Jargon Translator - Your A-Z Guide to Client-Friendly Language

In [Episode 63](#) of Marketing 100 on [The Salon Business Show](#) we revealed how salon jargon is silently killing your bookings. This guide helps you translate common salon industry terms into language your clients will actually understand and respond to. Stop losing bookings because of confusing communication—start connecting with clients using words that make sense to them.

Use this reference when writing emails, social media posts, service descriptions, and during consultations to ensure your message is crystal clear.

Hair Cutting & Styling Terms

Salon Term	What to Say Instead
Asymmetrical cut	"A style that's intentionally longer on one side than the other, which can create a modern look and frame your face in a unique way"
Blunt cut	"A clean, straight-across cut with no layers, which makes your hair look thicker and creates a bold line"
Botanical smoothing	"A gentler alternative to straightening treatments that reduces frizz for about 6 weeks without the harsh chemicals"
Concave layers	"Shorter layers on top that gradually get longer, creating natural volume without looking too layered"
Dusting	"Trimming just the very ends—about 1/4 inch—to remove split ends while maintaining your length"
Elevation	"How we hold your hair when cutting to create different effects like volume or sleekness"
Feathering	"Creating soft, light ends that move easily and blend seamlessly, rather than a heavy, solid line"

Graduation	"A technique that creates a slight stacking effect toward the back, giving you volume where you need it"
Interior layers	"Hidden layers cut underneath the top section to create movement without visible layers on the surface"
Point cutting	"Cutting into the ends to create soft texture rather than a blunt edge, so your hair moves more naturally"
Precision cutting	"A technique for creating clean, exact lines in your haircut that works especially well for structured styles"
Razor cutting	"Using a special razor instead of scissors to create soft, wispy ends that give your hair natural movement"
Texturizing	"Removing bulk without losing length to make your hair more manageable and give it movement"
Thinning	"Removing some of the weight and bulk from thicker hair to make it more manageable and reduce styling time"
Undercut	"Cutting the hair underneath much shorter while leaving the top longer, which reduces bulk and creates a modern look"

Hair Coloring Terms

Salon Term	What to Say Instead
Balayage	"Hand-painted highlights that create a naturally sun-kissed look with softer grow-out than traditional highlights"
Base color	"The main color we'll apply to your roots or all over, which serves as the foundation for your overall look"
Color correction	"Fixing a color that didn't turn out as expected, which usually takes longer and may require multiple appointments"

Demi-permanent color	"Color that gradually fades over about 24 washes, without the obvious root line when it grows out"
Dimensional color	"A combination of at least two colors that add depth and make your hair color look more natural"
Double process	"A two-step service where we lighten your hair first, then tone it to the desired shade"
Foilyage	"A technique combining traditional foil highlights with hand-painting for a more natural yet brightened look"
Glaze	"A shine-enhancing, semi-translucent color that refreshes your existing color and adds a healthy-looking sheen"
Global color	"All-over color applied from roots to ends, creating a uniform shade throughout your hair"
Gloss treatment	"A quick service that adds shine and sometimes a hint of tone to refresh your color between full colorings"
High lift tint	"A color that lightens and tones your hair in one step without bleach, but only works on certain hair colors"
Lowlights	"Darker strands added to create depth and dimension, especially helpful if your hair looks too one-dimensional"
Money piece	"Brighter highlights around your face that brighten your complexion and draw attention to your eyes"
Ombré	"A gradual transition from darker roots to lighter ends, creating a more dramatic look than balayage"
Permanent color	"Color that doesn't wash out and permanently changes your hair color until it grows out"
Roots	"The new hair growth at your scalp that shows your natural color as your colored hair grows out"

Sombré	"A subtle, soft ombré where the transition from dark to light is more gradual and natural-looking"
Toner	"A service that refines the tone of your hair color, like neutralizing brassiness or adding warmth"
Virgin hair	"Hair that has never been colored or chemically treated before"

Treatments & Add-On Services

Salon Term	What to Say Instead
Bond builder	"A treatment that strengthens the internal structure of your hair, reducing breakage from color or heat styling"
Chemical service	"A treatment that changes the structure of your hair, like coloring, straightening, or perming"
Clarifying treatment	"A deep cleansing treatment that removes product buildup, hard water minerals, and residue"
Deep conditioning	"An intensive moisture treatment that restores hydration to dry, damaged, or over-processed hair"
Detoxifying treatment	"A treatment that removes environmental pollutants, product buildup, and impurities from your hair"
Hair gloss	"A quick treatment that adds shine and sometimes a hint of color to refresh your look between appointments"
Keratin treatment	"A smoothing service that reduces frizz and curl for 3-5 months, making your hair easier to style daily"
Olaplex treatment	"A repairing treatment that reconnects broken bonds in your hair, especially helpful after bleaching"

Protein treatment	"A strengthening service for weak or damaged hair that restores structure and prevents breakage"
Scalp treatment	"A service focused on your scalp health to address issues like dryness, irritation, or product buildup"

Consultation & Styling Terms

Salon Term	What to Say Instead
Blow-out	"A service where we wash and style your hair with a blow dryer and brushes for a smooth, polished look"
Consultation	"A conversation before your service where we discuss your hair goals and create a plan together"
Density	"How much hair you have (thin, medium, or thick), which affects how we cut and style it"
Porosity	"How easily your hair absorbs moisture and products, which affects how your hair takes color and styles"
Structure	"The underlying shape of your cut that determines how it will grow out and how easy it is to style"
Texture	"The natural feel of your hair (fine, medium, or coarse), which affects how it behaves when styled"
Thermal styling	"Using heat tools like flat irons or curling irons to create your final look"
Undertones	"The subtle hues in your hair color that appear under different lighting (like gold, ash, copper)"

Red Flag Phrases to Avoid Completely

Instead of using these confusing or off-putting phrases, try the alternatives:

Avoid Saying	Say This Instead
"We have availability with our junior stylist "	"Emma has just completed our advanced training program and specializes in styles like yours"
" Chemical services require a consultation"	"For color services, we start with a quick conversation to ensure we achieve exactly what you're looking for"
"We offer add-ons to enhance your service"	"You can customize your appointment with extras like a deep conditioning treatment or scalp massage"
"This service requires maintenance "	"To keep this look fresh, most clients come back every 6-8 weeks"
"Your hair has a lot of breakage "	"I notice some areas where your hair could be stronger. I have some treatments that could help with that"
"You have product buildup "	"I can see your hair might benefit from a fresh start with a deep cleansing treatment"
"We can't achieve that in one session "	"To keep your hair healthy and get the result you want, I recommend we take this in two appointments"
"Your regrowth is significant"	"It looks like it's been about 8 weeks since your last color"
"That would be contra-indicated for your hair"	"Based on your hair's current condition, I'd recommend a different approach that would be healthier"
"We need to discuss realistic expectations "	"Let's talk about what would look amazing with your hair type so you'll love the results"

Word-for-Word Scripts for Explaining Technical Services

How to Explain Balayage

"Balayage is a highlighting technique where I hand-paint color onto your hair to create a natural sun-kissed effect. Unlike traditional foil highlights that start at the root, balayage is painted on in a sweeping motion, which creates that graduated, natural-looking effect.

The best part is that as it grows out, there's no obvious line – just a natural fade from darker to lighter. This means you can go longer between appointments, typically 3-4 months instead of the usual 6-8 weeks with traditional highlights.

For your hair specifically, I'd focus the brighter pieces around your face and the ends to brighten your complexion and add dimension to your style."

How to Explain Toner

"After we lighten your hair, a toner is what gives us the exact shade you're looking for. Think of it like this: bleaching removes the color from your hair, but often leaves it with warm tones like yellow or orange. The toner is what transforms that into the cool blonde, rich brunette, or vibrant red you want.

Toners generally last about 4-6 weeks before gradually fading, which is why blondes sometimes notice their hair looking brassier over time. When that happens, you can come in for a quick toner refresh – it only takes about 20 minutes – to revive your color between full appointments."

How to Explain Keratin Treatments

"A keratin treatment is essentially a smoothing service that reduces frizz and can make your curls looser for about 3-5 months, depending on your hair. It doesn't completely straighten your hair like a Japanese straightening treatment – you'll still have body and can style waves if you want.

The biggest benefit is how it reduces your styling time. Most clients say they can air-dry their hair instead of blow-drying, or cut their blow-dry time in half. It also makes your hair more resistant to humidity, so no more frizzing up on rainy days.

The treatment takes about 2-3 hours in the salon, and afterward, you'll need to keep your hair straight and avoid washing it for 48 hours to let the treatment set properly."

How to Explain Olaplex

"Olaplex is like insurance for your hair when we color it, especially when lightening. Here's how it works: when we color or bleach hair, it breaks some of the internal bonds that give your hair its strength. Olaplex actually repairs those broken bonds during the coloring process.

This means two things for you: First, we can push your color further without damaging your hair. Second, your hair will feel stronger and healthier after coloring than it would without Olaplex.

While it's most powerful when mixed with your color, we also offer it as a standalone treatment to strengthen hair that's been damaged from heat styling, previous coloring, or environmental factors. Many clients notice their hair feels stronger and breaks less after just one treatment."

Conclusion

Remember these key principles when communicating with clients:

1. **Focus on benefits**, not technical descriptions
2. **Use visual examples** whenever possible
3. **Compare to familiar experiences** ("Your hair will feel like it did after that beach vacation")
4. **Describe the end result** rather than the process
5. **Check for understanding** by asking clients to explain back what they expect

When in doubt, ask yourself: "Would someone outside the beauty industry understand what I'm saying?" If not, use this guide to translate your expertise into language that connects, builds trust, and books appointments.