

Your First Safety Razor Shave Checklist

Print this and keep it by the sink for the first fortnight. The safety razor learning curve is short, and almost all of it is unlearning cartridge habits: pressure, speed, and going against the grain too early.

Before you start

- [] Buy a blade sampler, not a single brand. Blade preference affects comfort more than the razor does.
- [] Start with a mild, non-adjustable head. Aggressive razors are for people who already have technique.
- [] Map your grain first. Run the back of your fingernails across dry stubble; smooth is with the grain, rasping is against it.

Preparation (three minutes, not thirty seconds)

- [] Shave after a shower, or hold a hot damp towel to the face for two to three minutes. Hair needs that long to hydrate enough to cut cleanly.
- [] Build a lather with a brush. It should look like wet meringue, not shaving foam from a can.
- [] Lather the whole area and leave it on while you rinse the brush. The soak is doing work.

The shave

- [] Rest the head flat on your cheek, then drop the handle until both the cap and the guard touch skin. That is roughly thirty degrees, and it is the angle.
- [] Use no pressure at all. The weight of the razor is the correct pressure. Pressing is the number one beginner mistake.
- [] Short strokes, about two to three centimetres. Long sweeping strokes are a cartridge habit.
- [] Pass one: with the grain only. Do not chase closeness.
- [] Re-lather completely before every pass. Never shave over bare skin.
- [] Pass two: across the grain. This is where the shave actually becomes smooth.
- [] Pass three (against the grain): skip it for the first two weeks. Add it later, and only where your skin tolerates it.

Afterwards

- [] Rinse with cool water. Pat dry do not rub.
- [] Use a balm rather than an alcohol splash while your skin is adjusting.
- [] Rinse the razor, shake it dry and leave it out of the shower. Standing water dulls blades.

Troubleshooting

Weepers and nicks: you pressed, or your angle was too steep. Drop the handle further towards your face.

Burning afterwards: too many passes, or an alcohol aftershave on skin that is not ready. Cut to two passes.

Bumps a day or two later: you went against the grain. Stop at two passes permanently if this keeps happening.

Tugging: the blade is finished. Most last three to seven shaves.

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