

Formalized Makeup Schools: Pros and Cons

By Suzanne Patterson

Attending a makeup school is the biggest decision and money investment concern among aspiring and novice artists wanting to learn makeup from the ground up, or strengthen their skill set to work in media makeup. Makeup schools are heavily advertised through online social media, makeup shows, and magazines, and often have very high end displays, graphics, and videos with hope-filled claims to attract their customers.

I hope this article will help to clarify some important issues you need to focus on as you consider this path for makeup training, especially if you are unsure about makeup schools in general and what they can and can't provide for your budding career. Your decision to invest a significant amount of your time and money to a school requires that you do your homework and comparison shop very carefully while you weigh out the pros and cons of each.

Credibility:

Consider what kind of professional credibility you would be paying for when considering a makeup school, and how that investment will pay off with future networking in the makeup industry for jobs when you graduate. Paying high priced tuition does not mean you are getting more than what another school is advertising less for. Higher prices can also include a commission paid from your tuition cost to those selling the program to you.

By the same token, be wary of inexpensive or "bargain" schools, and the growing trend of traveling makeup schools. Check out their credentials thoroughly as shady operations crop up frequently with scams that appear legitimate with glossy advertising hype, but are set up to take money fast and then suddenly disappear.

If you really are concerned about a particular school ask to see a business license or contact the state corporation commission where they are based to see if they are legitimately registered as a business. I strongly suggest that you ask them for names and contact information of previous students who actually attended the school to get their honest feedback on their experiences with the school.

Licensing:

Formalized makeup schools that are set up to accept federal government or state funded loans as a payment source are required to be licensed or accredited by the state they operate in. They must offer a state approved curriculum that meets a certain number of clock hours of instruction required by the state.

Many times the curriculum is somewhat dictated by state requirements so there may be some material taught in the class to meet the requirements of the state that doesn't necessarily translate as an end result benefit the student. Thus, the student may walk away from the experience with a lot of "filler" information that will never actually translate into to their technique in application on the job.

State licensing allows these schools to accept student loans, government grants, GI Bill, and other payment options from their applicants regardless of the skill or talent qualifications (or lack thereof) of the student applying for entrance. This often means very large classes (anywhere from 15 to 30 at a time) resulting in a very high student to teacher ratio. Schools tend to care more about filling the vacancies rather than be selective about the qualifications or talent potential of the student, and their ability to complete the program successfully.

Keep in mind that you could possibly be in a class where some of the students are not able to grasp concepts or techniques as quickly as the rest of the students in the class. This means the learning pace slows down considerably to accommodate them, so if you are a quick study this could be frustrating to your personal progress and achievement.

Interview the Instructors:

I can't emphasize this important detail enough: Talk directly with the school's instructors **FIRST** before you ever commit to signing a contract to attend! These are the people you will be spending your money for and the entire time with, NOT the school administrators or sales staff. This means you should have enough confidence in their skills and ability to impart the course to your satisfaction.

If they can't confidently explain the school's syllabus to you or mentally show some of their talents by talking intelligently about the curriculum, chances are they might not be able to instruct the program satisfactorily. It could become a critical issue should you sign on anyway, pay your tuition, and then find yourself in a class full of students with different or slower learning speeds. If the instructor is less than competent with the curriculum, then that makes it even worse for them to articulate the course to the most advanced student in a satisfactory manner.

Ask to see the instructor's resume and ask to look at a portfolio of their makeup field work, especially if you are going to a school for film and television makeup. Ideally, your instructor should be from inside of the makeup industry you want to work in, with a resume and strong portfolio that reflects professional grade work. If you get a sense from an instructor that you are being pitched too hard about how great or accomplished they are, or a sales job from them on why you should only attend this school and none other (to the point of bad mouthing other schools) then take a step back and think hard on this: a good instructor should never have the center of attention on themselves or bad mouth others to prop themselves up. They should bring a focused discussion on the important elements and fundamentals of the school's program and how those will be successfully integrated into your skill set for YOUR career potential.

If the school does feature a well known or celebrity makeup artist as a guest instructor, and whose credentials are widely recognized in the field of artistry you are pursuing, then consider that a plus. Make sure you understand the distinction between the artists just "endorsing" the school in print advertising of the school, or is actually a part of the teaching staff who personally instructs students.

HDTV Makeup Technique Training:

Television and video are now in full digital (HD) format, so you should also be

hearing and seeing a major emphasis from the school and in their curriculum that relate to learning about makeup techniques and products for this medium. Ideally, your makeup instructor should have good field experience working in this format that qualifies them to teach this platform. It must include a strong emphasis on advanced color theory, lighting theory, and camera mechanics. If not, then you can strongly suspect you might not be receiving adequate training on the vital elements of makeup artistry that translates to High Definition work.

I would consider this a major reason not to select the school because most everything done with media makeup today (including still photography) will definitely interface with HD. You must have good working fundamental HD knowledge in technique to be successfully working in this format, and it would be a waste of your time and money not to have this vital experience in your schooling.

Makeup Products:

Beware of schools heavily promoting or selling their own makeup line in the school sales pitch, or saying you can only use their products during your education there. I consider that a major reason not to enroll in the school because it severely limits your ability to learn the vital elements of cosmetic chemistry from the broadest view possible.

You should have the choice and advantage of experimenting with as many makeup materials and products as possible, including those that are industry standards, not just the limited items they sell or use exclusively. As such, you should never be forced into buying a makeup kit from the school as part of your tuition costs! There is nothing wrong with a school providing products as a convenience to students for purchase, but it should NEVER be a non-negotiable part of your tuition costs.

If they are not willing to give you a credit or an alternate product supply list so that you can purchase items in other brands on your own, then you definitely need to re-evaluate this situation. Part of learning about makeup products and cosmetic chemistry is to take responsibility from the start to build out your own kit with a wide range of products. A makeup school should encourage their students to study product chemistry and build their own kits throughout their training, and just provide helpful oversight as students become more confident in their product selections and usage.

You will learn far quicker about this important element of makeup artistry if you are encouraged to take control of your product choices at the start and within the guidelines of the school. If you decide to choose the school makeup kit option, make sure you review the products to your satisfaction and have the option to make substitutions where you feel it is necessary to optimize your kit.

The Classroom Experience:

Understand that large part of the course you pay for might be filled with material or instruction that is allegory, historical, or metaphoric in nature, but often has no usable transition into an immediate working skill or technique on the job. There is the possibility that you might be sitting under instruction from a teacher who has a narrow field makeup expertise, or a recent school graduate themselves with little experience on the job.

If there is a high student to teacher ratio then it would be logical for you to expect that the teacher would be provided an able assistant to help facilitate the day's curriculum agenda and student interaction. Never assume that this will be the norm, and be sure to get clarification on just how many students will actually be allowed to enroll per session before you pay your tuition costs. If there are too many students for an adequate instruction ratio then it may significantly dilute the effectiveness of the instructor's ability to impart the lessons directly if too much reliance from the class shifts onto the assistant rather than the instructor.

In general, you must consider the value of personal oversight you may or may not receive from the instructor (or the assistant) due to large student numbers in the class, and the speed of overall student comprehension during the daily sessions. Take into account how much of the curriculum would be achieved or eventually discarded because of time constraints, or because of students lagging behind performance each day.

Allow for the fact that the pace or learning curve of the class is always dictated by the slowest learner and their main modality of learning (seeing, hearing, and doing.) The slowest learner in the class automatically dictates the speed of instruction, the major method used in instruction (which may not be your best modality), and will occupy the most attention and need from the instructor before the rest of the students can move on.

In a large class situation, this can be very frustrating to naturally talented students who get it down the first time around and are ready to move on to the next thing, but must wait for the others to catch up. Often times the class can become disoriented and lost in control if the instructor allows everyone to phase in different directions without oversight, and away from the day's planned curriculum. This is especially disastrous if the instructor is not experienced in teaching to a large group of people with different learning curves. The overall curriculum becomes truncated to speed up for the loss of time

Make sure that the school provides an adequate balance between lecture, demonstration, and hands-on learning. A school should provide a substantial emphasis on hands-on practice so that the student is able to translate the concepts learned through lecture and demonstrations into their own skill performance. A school that is heavy on seminar style teaching will not be as beneficial to the student's overall experience and skill elevation if the instructor only lectures and demonstrates the material without adequate student hands-on application.

The Benefit:

In view of the significant time and resource investment you must make in attending a formalized makeup school, it does give you an entry level place to begin with if you feel you can't find other good makeup training opportunities elsewhere. The small amount of collective application experiences a makeup school can provide is enough to give you a direction to pursue more advanced work on your fundamental skills, or define a makeup field specialty you may desire to eventually focus on.

Adequate film and television makeup training CAN'T be found at cosmetology schools or esthetician schools, because that is not their main focus, so eliminate those if you want to spend your time and money centered exclusively on makeup training.

Makeup schools can also be a good contact experience for you through the sustained interaction with teaching professionals and other students in your class. Makeup schools create the environment that allows students to gather together daily and network with each other as they go through training together. This helps strengthen professional friendships that may benefit them later on as they begin to build their careers. You also have the benefit of watching and being inspired by your colleagues work and creations, which is often very encouraging to very beginner students with no previous makeup experience prior to class.

The Realities You Won't Hear From a Makeup School:

The best you can come away with your makeup school experience is "example and practice" learning that hopefully put you on the way to building a strong fundamental skill set. However, after graduation **you** must work long and diligently on your own to advance those fundamentals into solid, top to bottom and front to back professional makeup techniques. Expect to apprentice and work for free along the way until you get to the point that you have a polished skill set that will eventually earn you money.

Above all, you must realize that a makeup school will not be the "be all and end all" of makeup training, especially if you want to work in a field specialty. No matter how long the course is it will not immediately launch a student's makeup career or field specialty with a fully polished professional skill set. That comes with sustained work experience and a lot of trial and error along the way.

By the same token, no makeup school can excel in teaching a full compliment of all high level makeup specialties such as editorial/fashion print makeup or special makeup effects, and immediately turn out professional grade artists ready to work in those fields upon graduation. Expect to take continuing education throughout your career to help you further advance and achieve your goals.

Most film and television industry makeup professionals really don't care about a novice artist's makeup school training or certificate, and in many cases it can end up as a set-back to advance in a timely manner. Many makeup school students have to be re-trained to current techniques, product selection and usage, and set protocols that students simply weren't taught in their schooling.

Moreover, most professionals don't want to waste time in taking on students and retraining them while on the job. If you know you lack skills that will make you set-ready to assist a professional then take it upon yourself to find focused workshops that will help fill those voids.

One of the biggest turn-offs is the fact that makeup school graduates have little or no ability to interface with a wide range of professional cosmetics because they have been only trained on the school's preferred line. Again, this is a set-back because it severely limits the graduate to work from any product line they may be given to use on a job. Knowing makeup from a cosmetic chemistry and color theory point of view rather than brand recognition is very crucial to work effectively in HDTV.

What professionals care about the most is common sense ethics, strong fundamental technique in application, and the above mentioned protocols in product usage. Being able to show evidence of good makeup work progress (a reel or portfolio with a

verifiable resume) with actual set experience is something that you will not get through a makeup school; rather it takes lots of time and investing further of your talents (and resources) to gain work experience order to develop your visible worth and a working resume. Expect this to come by working a lot of jobs for free and for a long period of time, because the payoff in the beginning is in the networking you are developing for future potential in paying jobs.

Realize that when you graduate you will be joining the ranks of hundreds of other artists who also graduated, and many falsely expecting to find paying work right away. The biggest misunderstanding makeup school graduates seem to have is that the school will automatically place them into makeup industry jobs. Some schools go so far as to guarantee this, but it is in very vaguely written terms. Other schools teach a class on how to secure employment as part of the curriculum. Be very realistic about all this, because no matter what the school says or teaches on this subject you will find it extremely challenging when you try to put it all into action!

Here are some facts to consider about a makeup career: Makeup artists are self-employed and mostly freelancers, so they are completely responsible for their marketing business successes or failures. Very few artists sign on with agencies, and even fewer still are good enough to make it into the makeup union. The majority of makeup artists never make enough money to support themselves full time through a makeup career, and mainly because the makeup industry is extremely saturated with competition.

Realize that your chances of being gainfully employed in the media industry right out of school are virtually none, and for the reasons stated in previous paragraphs in this section. Realize you may never earn a decent living in this career, and not because you are not well trained, but because the industry is already oversaturated with artists and makeup schools keep turning out more competition in great numbers. Many who have graduated 2 and 3 years ago are still struggling to make it or have left the business because of failure to succeed.

If you are still determined and can move past the obvious barriers then focus and hone in on your ultimate goals. Work hard to polish your talent and technique in application, and make sure you have good hard science back ended into your skill set. It will be entirely up to you to create your own job networking as no one in this industry is going to do it for you. Be willing to work for free to advance your networking and build your reputation. Most of all it is crucial that you establish respectful working relationships that show your trustworthiness and ethical character because that can pay off in getting your ultimate break into the business.