



# *Why Dogs Shouldn't Wear Tutus*

*&*

## *115 Grooming Tips for the Professional Pet Groomer*

created by Melissa Verplank CMG  
illustrated by Lisa Van Sweden





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Created by: Melissa Verplank  
Illustrations by: Lisa VanSweden

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*For information, please write:*  
**White Dog Enterprises, Inc.**  
16060 Peach Ridge Avenue  
Kent City Michigan 49330  
[www.whitedogenterprises.com](http://www.whitedogenterprises.com)  
616-667-7297





## ~ Introduction ~

My career has spanned over 30 years. During that time, I have worked with thousands of dogs, testing ideas and perfecting skills. My classroom was on-the-job training, learning through hundreds of lectures, seminars and workshops across the country. I learned and perfected my craft in the contest arena, in my mobile grooming van with everyday client pets and on the training room floor. I listened to top stylists, judges, handlers and breeders who graciously took the time to share their knowledge with me. Conformational dog shows, breed books and the study of canine structure and movement all are indispensable tools when learning the finer details of professional pet styling.

Through the years, golden nuggets of information have been tucked into my brain. The thoughts present themselves like magical fairies flitting around whenever needed. They are a constant reminder that learning is a journey – never to be ended.

These are a few of my treasured golden nuggets. They have helped me ensure quality in everything that I do. When shared, I've discovered they are a gift to inspire others. They are a constant reminder that we can always learn more.

Happy Trimming,  
*Melissa*



# *Why Dogs Shouldn't Wear Tutus*

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## *115 Grooming Tips for the Professional Pet Groomer*

#1. Dogs don't wear tutus. On most pets, the pattern lines should be invisible when you are 3 to 4 feet away from the dog.

#2. In most cases, a balanced round head will place the eyes and the nose at the center of the headpiece.

#3. Thinning or blending shears are the pet stylist's eraser.

#4. For the most advantageous control while scissoring, hold the shear with your thumb and ring finger.





#5. When scissoring, only your thumb should move.

#6. To gain optimum control over a pair of shears, stretch your index finger to the balance point, which is approximately the point of the screw head on the shear.

#7. When holding the shear, always keep it at right angles to your thumb and wrist.

#8. There is a huge variety of shears. For the best fit try shears before you buy them.

#9. Highly controlled scissoring stems more from your waist and the movement of your entire body than it does from just your wrist and elbow.

#10. Think of your first knuckle as a laser beam when you're scissoring. The flow should be smooth even as you guide your shears by hand over the coat.

#11. Blades used in reverse tend to trim the coat about two blade lengths shorter than going with the grain.





#12. To quickly round a foot use a #40 blade to trim the pads. Brush the entire coat down over the foot, then slide your hand down the dog's leg with your thumb and index finger towards the table and pick up the foot. This will force the longer coat over the edges of the footpad. Gently clip the excessive length off level with the footpad while you are trimming the pads.

#13. Always remember the 3 Cs:

- ★ Calm
- ★ Cool
- ★ Collected

#14. Dogs get a lot of their confidence through their handler. Learn to “speak the language” of the dog.

#15. Gently stroking the inside of a nervous dog's thigh can help the dog relax, aiding in building its confidence.



#16. Cotton placed in the ears can help calm a fearful dog by muffling sound and minimizing airflow into the ear canals.

#17. Temporarily blindfolding a terrified pet coupled with gentle but firm handling can help soothe it so you can regain control of the situation without injuring the pet.

#18. When working with a pet that is being slightly challenging, a subtle way to establish your leadership position and win cooperation is to look directly at the dog while firmly giving the command.

#19. Lightly stroking or gently pulling from skull to tip on the pet's ear leathers can act as a calming agent and help build trust.

#20. The word 'no' can be one of the most overused words in the pet's vocabulary. Develop your own sound that indicates an action that is undesirable from the pet.



#21. Learn to anticipate a move or reaction from a pet. Correct undesirable behavior before the pet follows through on the action. Block the intent rather than respond to the action.

#22. When a client requests their pet be “shaved” on a pet that traditionally is only given a bath and brush, ask them if they want a “lab look”. Labrador Retrievers have been one of the most popular dogs in the United States for years. Most clients immediately know what a lab looks like and you can quickly get to the root of what the client really wants.

#23. The word “naked” is normally a highly effective adjective when describing to a client how much coat will be left on after a full shave off.

#24. Using the end of your thumb as a reference guide when discussing how much coat will be left on the pet after the haircut is an easy way for the client to grasp what you are explaining.





#25. Always remember we are dog beauticians ... not magicians.

#26. One six week client represents almost \$400 in annual revenue if the average price per groom is \$45.

#27. A six week client represents approximately \$4000 over 10 years of grooming.

#28. Whomever is asking the questions is in control of the conversation.

#29. Over 50% of customer loyalty stems from delivering excellent customer service. A key ingredient to excellent service is that you solve a client's problems while showing a high level of respect and compassion toward both the pet and owner.

#30. 80% of your business comes from 20% of your existing customers. Treat that 20% like gold... they are.

#31. Always find something positive to comment on with every pet.



#32. Always offer assistance to any client that has their arms full with children or is having a difficult time moving about. Quickly take the dog from them or offer to take the pet to the car for them.



#33. If you accidentally trim a nail too short, send the pet home with a small amount of styptic powder just in case the nail starts to bleed again.

#34. People normally retain only about one third of the new information they hear. If it's important, write it down or hand them an educational information piece about the topic.

#35. The grooming safety loop is the pet's seatbelt on the grooming table or in the tub. When adjusted correctly, the pet should be able to stand comfortably in the proper position, with only a small amount of slack in the safety loop.

#36. New clients form a lasting impression within 30 seconds of meeting you for the first time.



#37. If your local newspaper were to drop by, UN-announced, to do a feature story about you and your business, would you be proud of the impression made to the community as your photos are splashed across the front page? If not, take the steps necessary to create that positive, professional image that will make a lasting impression on all of your clients every day.

#38. Well made, stylish bows are one of the most effective marketing tools.

#39. Using hemostats to attach bows made with small elastic bands is one of the best ways to ensure a firm hold in the fur.

#40. Embellishing a bow with a small silk flower using a hot glue gun is a fabulous way to announce the arrival of warmer weather, especially for those that live in a cold weather climate.

#41. If you like to make bows, use idle time like riding in a car or watching TV to do so.



#42. Hit your local craft stores and holiday departments right after the holiday to stock up on bow making supplies for the year.

#43. Small pieces of colorful holiday garland make an impressive accent on bows throughout the year and they come in a rainbow of colors to highlight any holiday. Add festive garland and a colorful bead to the center of any basic bow and you will have something clients will talk about to their friends!

#44. Cats are much more sensitive to flea products than dogs. Make sure you read the label to ensure a product is SAFE to use on cats and kittens.

#45. When working with cats, always trim their nails before you attempt to do anything else.

#46. Cats have tissue paper thin skin. Use extreme caution when grooming them.





#47. Short muzzled breeds of dogs are breathing challenged and more sensitive to heat than others. If you opt to kennel dry a pet with a short nose, use extreme caution, minimize the amount of time the pet is in the dryer and never – ever - leave the pet unattended!!

#48. Under a microscope, the hair shaft looks something like a briar bush. The greater the coat mats, the more barbs there are on each individual hair shaft.

#49. The correct brush action when working with a slicker brush is a light “pat n’ pull” method. As you pat, pull up and away from the dog’s skin without flicking your wrist.

#50. When de-matting, start at your lowest point working up into the matted area utilizing line brushing techniques.





#51. Line brushing is a technique used to thoroughly brush right down to the skin in a gentle, methodical fashion. The process starts by holding the coat up and pulling small portions of the coat down with each stroke, allowing for a clear view of the skin. The junction point between where the coat is held up and out of the way and where the coat is brushed through will create a line or part in the fur so you can clearly see the skin.



#52. If you are clipping with the grain but getting track marks, replacing the blade with one two lengths longer and clipping in reverse can minimize or eliminate the marks on many coats.

#53. The faster you get the dog into the tub, the faster you will finish it.

#54. A soft scrub brush used while bathing pets works extremely well to quickly get a pet really clean.

#55. Use a soft toothbrush when bathing a pet to clean the eye area.



#56. With the products and tools we have today, the old cliché “Never bathe a matted pet” no longer holds true. If water can penetrate the coat, always bathe the pet using products that will aid in the dematting process as you use your high velocity dryer and a brush to remove the mats from the coat.

#57. When doing a final rinse on a dog in the tub, always let a gentle, lukewarm stream of water flush over the dog's eyes ensuring there is no shampoo left in them.

#58. Wrapping a pet in a towel after the bath and letting them sit for a few moments will draw the moisture from the coat making it quicker to dry once an active drying method is used.

#59. An active form of drying will always give you the highest quality results on any groom.

#60. Effective use of the high velocity dryer can increase your productivity tremendously in a professional setting.



#61. High velocity dryers can dramatically reduce your electric bill.

#62. A strong high velocity dryer will greatly assist in the removal of many forms of matting.

#63. High velocity dryers can be used to: blow excessive moisture from the coat, blowout loose coat, stretch-dry a coat, blow out loose matting, eliminate brush burn plus give you a clear view of the skin.

#64. To salvage an extremely matted coat, sink the comb between the skin and the mat. Scissor off the bulk of the matted hair ON TOP of the comb. The comb will act as a safety guide to minimize the risk of cutting the pet's skin. You can normally remove the remaining one inch of matting with little trouble once the coat is clean if using the right products and dematting techniques.

#65. To eliminate dirty, greasy ears that drag in the food and water dish, trim the ears to the length of the nose.





#66. On pets that typically just get baths like Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers and Shelties, it's normally not necessary to heavily shave the groin area. Clipping this area could lead to irritation, more from the coarse hair stubble than from actual clipper irritation. If you do need to clip the groin for sanitation reasons, doing less is better than more.

#67. Corduroy marks left in the coat when clipping are normally caused by too much coat being fed into the blade at one time. Slow down; adjust the tip and pressure of the clipper to minimize tracking.

#68. Track marks are normally associated with dense coats. When clipper cutting pets with heavy under coats, it is beneficial to remove much of that undercoat prior to the clipping process to minimize the tracks.

#69. Corduroy marks can be minimized by carding a coat after the clipping process.





#70. Corduroy marks can be minimized by stretching the skin in the area that you are clipping, reducing the number of hairs being fed into the clipper blade as you cut.

#71. Metal guard combs offer a high level of durability and flexibility as to the amount of coat left on a pet.

#72. A #10 blade, used in reverse, is considered a moderate length which is safe to use for close work on pet dogs around the face, tummy and rectal areas.

#73. When edging ear leathers, remember this phrase to minimize nicks and cuts: "Keep the tip of the shears towards the tips of the ears."

#74. To minimize a hole cut into the coat, blend out the high edges with thinning shears.

#75. To quickly tidy up the feet on a dog such as a Golden Retriever or a Sheltie, try a 4F blade in reverse to remove the tufts between the toes.



#76. To get a nice round foot, box the foot by first creating a square shape. Once the box has been formed, go back with curved shears and remove the corners.

#77. Blocking is a technique used to quickly outline the basic shape using either long shears or a clipper.

#78. When setting eyebrows on terrier styled pets, use the eye socket rim, or the frontal bones of the skull, to assist you in setting consistent brow lines.

#79. A #7F blade in reverse does a beautiful job setting in the crisp brow lines on Schnauzers.

#80. When setting triangular eyebrows on a pet, you can line up your shears from the back corner of the eyes towards a consistent point on the nose to ensure you get the same shape.

#81. When trimming the end of the tail close to the tip, always hold your thumb over the end to protect it.



#82. To get a round pom-pom on the end of a poodle tail, brush the tail back and twist the end. Trim the twisted end to the length you prefer. When you release the tail the entire top will be rounded leaving only the sides and the base to shape.

#83. On dogs that have flags for tails , the general rule of thumb is the tail should be only long enough to reach the hock.

#84. A #15 blade used with the grain is the blade of choice on pet poodle feet while using a #40 blade gently clears the pads.

#85. A #40 blade, when used softly , does a super job removing any of the small stray hairs that are still around the nail bed of the poodle foot.

#86. A great way to remove the stray hairs around the nail bed of a poodle's foot is to use a #15 blade, upside down, and pushed gently against the nail bed.





#87. A well shaped topknot on a poodle should be an elegant extension of the skull not a short mushroom cap.

#88. The basic guideline for the height of a poodle topknot is the same distance between the outside corners of the eyes. Taller than that, adds elegance and flair; shorter than that, the pet starts looking dumpy and frumpy.

#89. To soften the lines of the ear junction to the skull on a round head style, hold both of the ears tautly under the jaw. At the junction point, the stray hairs will pop out when held in this fashion. Lightly trim the stray hairs with shears to maintain a soft look.

#90. Using a nail file designed for acrylic human nails can quickly file away the sharp edges on freshly trimmed pet toenails if you do not have a dremel handy.





#91. When clipper cutting a coat that is traditionally handstripped, carding the coat will encourage a more proper coat texture by removing the undercoat and promoting the harsh guard coat to grow. This will also enhance deeper, richer color in the coat which is found in the guard hairs.



#92. A dull #30 or #40 blade works great as a carding tool. Grasp the blade between your fingers and let your thumb rest on the backside of the blade. Then, apply gentle pressure and pull the blade in the direction of the coat growth, with the teeth resting on the dog's coat.

#93. The technique of carding is a process used to pull out the dead undercoat on a dog using a tool with very fine short teeth.

#94. When working with a pet's feet always keep them as low to the table as you possibly can for comfort and safety.



#95. With the guard comb, sink it into the coat, and then lean your clipper back so the guard is riding on its heel as you pull through the stroke, lifting the teeth slightly so they don't dig into the pet or jam into the skin.

#96. Placing cotton in the ears will minimize the amount of water that could seep into the ear canal.

#97. Keeping your hand tools highly organized will aid in efficient and speedy grooming.

#98. Never – EVER – leave a pet unattended on a grooming table or in a tub.

#99. Fleas spend about 90% of their time OFF the host animal. If you had to treat a pet for fleas, you will need to educate the client about the importance of treating the environment as well.





#100. Many pet coats left unattended after being wet, will mat up tightly, much like a wool sweater that has been washed in hot water. Water can work like a magnet on certain coat types. It does not matter what form the moisture comes in whether it be; rain, dew in the grass, snow, swimming in the pool, or bathing at home. The only way to ensure a pet can maintain a stylized haircut, is to make sure the owner knows how to effectively brush between professional groomings.

#101. For a pet that is heavily matted, you can try bathing the pet first. Shampoo twice. On the second lather in the tub, use your most powerful high velocity dryer to blowout a large portion of the mats and tangles with the shampoo still on the coat. This procedure works much the same as getting a ring off your finger with soap and water when it's too tight. You will not be able to blowout all of the mats, but you should be able to move the matted coat away from the dog's skin enough to get a slightly longer blade through the hair.





#102. During peak seasons when you are extremely busy, have the phone number of your favorite restaurants close to the phone.

#103. During peak seasons when you're extremely busy, organize a potluck with your team that will allow you to get a nutritious meal without missing a beat.

#104. Never take a dog that you do not know well directly from the arms of an owner.

#105. Always be brutally honest, yet tactful, with the client when informing them how their pet did for the grooming process, especially if the pet was not an angel.

#106. Never work on a dog with eyes that glow green or red - DANGER!

#107. When working with a challenging dog, eye contact speaks volumes. When looking directly at a dog when in a mild to moderate disagreement, whomever holds the eye contact the longest is alpha - the leader.



#108. Always inform the owner of anything new or unusual that you have spotted during the grooming process on that day.

#109. If you have accidentally injured the pet in any way, no matter how minor it may seem to you, always inform the owner.

#110. There are too many nice dogs in this world to work on those that can be a danger to themselves or to you.

#111. Learning is a never ending process. Actively seek new and better ways to accomplish any task.

#112. In the service industry, time is money. Actively seek more efficient ways to accomplish any task.

#113. Attending trade shows is one of the best ways to meet new friends and rekindle a sagging spirit.





**#114. Anger and frustration have no place in a professional setting. If you feel you can not handle a pet safely and with compassion, walk away. Take a few moments to regroup then try again.**

**#115. The Golden Rule of all professional pet stylists is “humanity before vanity.”**





# Inspired to Learn More?



**Check out the following websites:**

**[www.ParagonPetSchool.com](http://www.ParagonPetSchool.com)** for hands-on training from beginner to advanced

**[www.MelissaVerplank.com](http://www.MelissaVerplank.com)** for books, DVDs, products & tools

**[www.Learn2GroomDogs.com](http://www.Learn2GroomDogs.com)** for a full video library of streaming pet grooming lessons available 27/7 computerside - watch top pet stylist grooming demonstrations, salon tours, business lessons and much more

