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# image | to prime or not to prime

by Linda Bertaut

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**I** WAS INTRODUCED TO THE concept of foundation primer for the first time in 1996 when I launched the Laura Mercier line in San Francisco. Mercier herself trained our staff on her newly developed makeup artist line. With her authentic French accent, she described how primer smoothed out the skin so the foundation would glide on easily and create a flawless face. In the words of a classically trained artist and painter, she explained how to prime the canvas before painting. Primer works on the face in a similar way, as it smooths out the skin while foundation provides the coverage to even out skin tone and hide imperfections. Makeup does not get absorbed into the skin and the rest of the color applied looks better and creates a more finished appearance.

## Viscoelasticity

Even though Mercier's explanations of how primer worked made sense, I found it hard to believe. The primer left the face feeling dry and taut, not moisturized as usual. However, when applied before Mercier's highly pigmented oil-free foundation, the result was perfectly smooth skin onto which makeup went on effortlessly and looked perfectly natural. It worked. Add skin nutrients and antioxidants and you have a multi-purpose product!

Since that lesson from Mercier, most makeup lines have added one or more foundation primers to their selections. They target

specific skin concerns ranging from dry, mature skin to oily problem skin. The key ingredient in these primers tends to be dimethicone, a silicone that has a quality called viscoelasticity—viscosity relating to thickness and elasticity that describes its natural ability to mold to any surface and cover imperfections. Therefore, you have a product that can resurface skin imperfections and smooth out large pores, minor acne, patchy skin and scarring.

## The good and the bad

As good as all of this sounds, primers have their pros and cons.

### Pros:

- Oily skin tends to do better with a foundation primer, as it creates a barrier and helps to block the oil in the skin from absorbing the makeup, allowing it to last all day.

- Dry skin could also fare well, as primer covers scaly patches that may be accentuated with foundation alone.

### Cons:

- It does not mix well with all types of foundation. Mineral powders tend to do better over a moisturized face, as the moisture enables the powder to adhere to something.
- Not everyone needs a primer if they already have smooth and healthy skin.
- The botanicals and antioxidants may create skin irritation and breakouts for some clients.
- Some products tend to peel and ball up when foundation is applied on top of it. That problem is hard to correct without washing everything off and starting all over again.

The best way I found to determine if your client needs primer is to put it on half of their face before applying foundation to the entire face. You will be able to see the difference. If it works sell it, if not, do not. When you keep your client's best interests at heart, they are more likely to be happy with you and continue keep coming to you for their skin care and makeup needs. ■

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