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# CORRECTING BRASSY OR ASHY HAIR COLOR AT HOME

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## WHAT IS BRASSY OR ASHY HAIR?

All hair dye is comprised of tones. Some dyes have only warm tones, such as a coppery red dye. Others have predominantly cool tones, such as a cool blue-black dye. In the hair industry, when a color turns out warmer than what we desired, we describe it as *brassy*. When a color turns out cooler than what we wanted, we describe it as *ashy*. Examples of both brassy and ashy colors can be seen in Figure 1.

While either result can be upsetting when it's not what we desired, correcting them doesn't have to be a gamble, and you don't need to rush to the salon or have a professional hair license to correct it yourself at home. Learning how to identify the tones in the unwanted color, which hair dye colors can correct them, how to prevent overcorrecting, and how to maintain your perfect color will help you make and execute a hair color plan to get your desired results every time.



Figure 1. Left: Brassy hair color. Right: Ashy hair color. Source: Mechawaifu. (2020, October 17) *I went from brassy to ashy*. [https://www.reddit.com/r/Hair/comments/jd0i4l/i\\_went\\_from\\_brassy\\_blonde\\_to\\_ashy\\_blonde/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Hair/comments/jd0i4l/i_went_from_brassy_blonde_to_ashy_blonde/). Accessed: 18 Jan 2021.

## PLANNING YOUR COLOR CORRECTION

Before buying dye or gathering supplies, you will need to understand and identify some key factors. These will help you figure out whether hair dye is the right option for you and if it is, how to choose a hair dye color.

**NON-DYE OPTIONS.** If the ashy or brassy color is due to previously applied hair dye or toner, then it is best to try to tone down the color in your hair by shampooing it a few times in warm water. This may be enough on its own, but if you need a slightly more aggressive option, a small amount of dish washing liquid mixed with powdered Vitamin C or crushed Vitamin C tablets can be applied to the hair and rinsed repeatedly to fade the color more significantly [1]. If this method is used, be sure to follow it with a deep conditioner. If, after this, your hair is still too brassy or too ashy, then toning with hair dye is the next appropriate step.

**CURRENT HAIR LEVEL.** To determine which hair dye color to use, you'll need to find the which level is needed. In the hair industry, the term *level* is used to describe how light or dark hair is. Hair levels use a numbering system ranging from level 1 to level 10. As you can see in Figure 2, level 1 is the darkest at pure black, and level 10 is the lightest at platinum blonde. These numbers are also used to describe how dark or light hair dye is.

Hair color levels are described in neutral tones to create consistency, but both warm- and cool-toned hair can still have light and dark levels determined using a hair level chart. For example, brassy dark red hair could be a level 5 or 6, while an ashy "dishwater blonde" might be a 7 or 8. You will need to identify which level the hair color is currently that you want to correct. This level number will be used to pick out a hair dye.



Figure 2. Hair color level chart. Source: Manic Panic. (2020) *Frequently Asked Questions*. <https://manicpanic.com/pages/faqs>. Accessed: 18-Jan-2021

Note: with this process you will not be able to make the hair a lighter level than it already is. Changing colored hair to a lighter level requires a different process than the one described here.



Figure 3. Color wheel. Source: Malhotra, A. (2015, September 10). *Color Wheel Basics: How to Choose the Right Color Scheme for your PowerPoint Slides*. Slide Team. <https://www.slideteam.net/blog/color-wheel-choose-right-color-scheme-powerpoint-slides/>. Accessed: 18-Jan-2020

**HAIR TONE.** Once you have determined the level of the hair to be corrected, you can focus on what tone you will need in order to neutralize either the brassy or ashy color. A *complementary color* is one that when mixed with its opposite on a color wheel will create a neutral color. In order to neutralize either the warmth or coolness in your hair, we will need to find the complementary color to your current one. You can do this by using a color wheel such as the one in Figure 3.

On the color wheel, find the tone you see predominantly in your current hair. If it is ashy, does it appear to have more violet, blue, or green in it? If it is brassy, does it look more yellow, orange, or red? Once you've found the current color on the wheel, find its complementary color directly across from it. If your hair is currently yellow, then violet will be its opposite. If your hair currently has green tones, then its opposite will be red. This complementary color combined with the level you found earlier will determine which hair dye color you should purchase.

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## PURCHASING MATERIALS

There are a few items you will need to gather prior to coloring your hair. These include the hair dye of course, but also developer, and proper tools for measuring and applying the dye to your hair.

**PROFESSIONAL HAIR DYE.** When purchasing a hair dye, it may be tempting to reach for box dyes, but there are several reasons to choose a hair dye from a professional color line instead. Box dye, meaning a box containing hair dye and developer that can be purchased in a grocery store or pharmacy, "is typically a more concentrated formulation than salon hair color because the color has to be strong enough to work on anyone's hair. This means the formula is the same, no matter how thin, thick, coarse, dark, light, highlighted, color-treated, or chemically processed your hair is at the time of application [2]."

Conversely, professional hair dyes, which can be purchased without a professional hair license at stores like Sally's Beauty in person or Brighton Beauty Supply online, come in a wide array of tones and levels. This means you can tailor the color to your own needs. At many beauty supply stores, you can see sample strands of the colors which may help you determine which color line to use. Many color lines also have color charts online featuring the levels and tones they have available. Find a dye within your chosen color line that has the level and complementary colored tone you determined earlier.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPER.** *Developer* is the chemical that activates the hair dye once the two are mixed together so that the dye can penetrate the hair strands. Professional color lines allow you to choose a separate developer that meets your needs. Developer strengths are called *volumes*. The higher the volume, the more a color will lift and damage the hair once it is mixed with the developer. They usually range from 5-volume to 40-volume.

Box dyes, on the other hand, do not usually specify which volume of developer is included in their kits. Many contain 20-volume developer no matter the desired results [3]. This can lead to unreliable hair color and dry, damaged hair. Alternately, professional hair color lines will usually recommend a 5-volume developer with a demi-permanent hair dye or else a 10-volume developer with a permanent dye when changing only the tone of the hair. For optimal results, once you've found your professional hair dye color, be sure to purchase the recommended developer in the appropriate volume within the color line you've chosen.

**OTHER TOOLS AND MATERIALS.** Make sure you have all the other necessary supplies to color your hair. These supplies include:

- A non-metallic color bowl and brush OR a color applicator bottle
- A non-metallic measuring spoon or beaker
- Disposable latex or latex-alternative gloves
- Access to running water
- Optional: A cape, towel, or apron to protect clothing and skin
- Optional: a non-metallic comb

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## COLOR CORRECTING YOUR HAIR

Now it is time to color correct your hair with the hair dye, developer, and other materials you've gathered.

*Warning* – Mixed hair color contains chemicals that can irritate the skin of certain individuals.

When using a color line that is new to you, mix a small amount of the color and developer, and apply it with a cotton swab to an inconspicuous part of your body, like the inside of your elbow, for 15 minutes. Then wash it off. Wait 48 hours to see how your skin reacts. If your skin becomes itchy, burning, or red, discontinue use immediately.

**MIXING THE DYE.** To properly mix the dye, read the directions for mixing that were provided by the color line. Each color line has specific instructions on the ratio of dye to developer required for best results. While wearing protective gloves, use a non-metallic measuring spoon or beaker to measure precise amounts of your hair dye and developer according to the ratio provided by the color line. Add the measured dye and developer to your color bowl or color applicator bottle and mix them together until completely combined.

**APPLYING THE DYE.** Quickly apply the color using either a color brush or the applicator bottle tip and your gloved hands to the portion of your hair that needs to be color corrected. Once you have applied the color everywhere it is needed, check the color every 2-3 minutes by scraping the color off of a small strand of hair using your gloved fingernail or the back of a non-metallic comb. If it is not the right tone yet, recover the strand with color and try again in another 2-3 minutes.

**RINSING THE DYE.** As soon as the tone looks right on the strand you checked, rinse the dye out with cool water. This may not be the full length of time suggested by the color line but leaving the color on after it has reached your desired shade can lead to unwanted overcorrection. After rinsing the color, shampoo the hair only if the color line's directions specified to do so.

## MAINTAINING YOUR COLOR CORRECTION

Now that you have reached your desired tone, you will likely want to maintain that color. Hair that started ashy and was corrected to be more neutral or warm can benefit from sulfate-free shampoos so that the color does not fade. For bleached hair like highlights or balayage, it is a good idea to use a toning shampoo or conditioner to maintain a cool or neutral color. You can use the color wheel method to determine what color of shampoo or conditioner you need. Maintenance toning products can be purchased from beauty supply stores or online from companies like Overtone. Check their included instructions on how frequently you should use them.

## CONCLUSION

Correcting brassy or ashy hair color doesn't have to be guesswork. Instead, by quickly checking hair levels and determining complementary colors, you can easily make a plan to get the beautiful hair color results you wanted all along.

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## MATERIAL CITED

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[2] Aarhus, K. (2020, March 31). Ask a Hairstylist: Is It Actually Bad to Color Your Hair at Home? Byrdie. <https://www.byrdie.com/when-to-color-your-hair-at-home-3517633>. Accessed 7-Jan-2020.

[3] Connell, A. (2020, April 14). Weekend Beauty Hack: 7 Hair Tips You Need to Know. <https://stylecaster.com/beauty/hair-dye-tricks>. Accessed 7-Jan-2020.