



## How to Choose a Dog Groomer

By Carol Vaughn, Certified Master Groomer

In my past, I was a poorly informed customer. Before I knew anything about the grooming profession, I took my dogs wherever they could get in, never asked questions (nor was asked any by the groomer), never took tours of the groom shop, didn't know who was going to handle my dog or how they were kept while waiting to be picked up. I got what I deserved- grooms I didn't like, an eye injury that cost \$700 and dogs so stressed out it took hours for them to calm down.

I extended undeserved trust because I thought all dog groomers had training and certifications at least as stringent as cosmetologists. Not true. **Anyone (yes, anyone) can hang up a sign and call themselves a dog groomer/pet stylist.** Not one State in the U.S. requires education, licensing or certifications of the grooming profession so it is extra important that you ask questions of the person to whom you are taking your precious family pet.

**Getting a good-looking groom is really one of the later concerns you should have when choosing your groomer.** The unfortunate fact is there are groomers who are untrained, impatient and dangerous that can cause both physical and psychological damage to your dog. On the flip side, however, there are more and more groomers who have dedicated themselves to this as a profession who have received appropriate training, have sought advanced certifications through professional grooming associations, who go to seminars, trade shows and dog shows, who dedicate themselves to the pet industry and who love dogs.

Finding the groomer that's right for your family can be made easier by asking/doing the following:

1. **Ask your friends for a referral.** The experience of a trusted friend is priceless. Ask them specifically what they liked about the groomer. If they have changed groomers, ask them why they left the previous groomer.
2. **Ask your vet for a referral.** Vets see lots of dogs, get a lot of feedback about groomers, and unfortunately, treat injuries caused by groomers. If a groomer has a reputation of sending a lot of dogs to the vet, steer clear of that groomer.
3. **Call the groomer.** You should expect a cordial and informative conversation regarding your dog. (If busy with dogs, they will offer to call you back when they can give you full attention.) If the groomer asks few or no questions about your dog, consider this a warning sign and go somewhere else. I expect to talk at least 10 minutes with a new customer before scheduling an appointment. At the very least I ask name, breed, sex, spayed/neutered, age, health, when last professionally groomed, what they want/need and why they are looking for a new groomer.
4. **Schedule a visit.** If you are unfamiliar with the place of business, ask for a tour. If not available, go somewhere else. You should be welcomed with an appointment, given sufficient time to see the entire facility and be able to go wherever your dog will be during their groom. There should be no secret areas. You should expect the highest standards of cleanliness and organization. The groom shop should be spotless (there might be some hair from a current groom but it shouldn't be all over the place), orderly, pleasant odor, well lit, fixtures clean, tools maintained and personnel pleasant. Ask

- specifically to see where the dog will be before and after the groom. How a groomer maintains the grooming environment is a reflection of the service they will provide.
5. **Ask how they were trained, how long they've been grooming and what do they do for continuing education.** Groomers with the Certified Master Groomer (CMG) status can be relied upon to groom with a tested level of expertise, handling skills and breed knowledge. Most groomers have either been trained on the job or through a professional grooming school. Look for someone who has continued their education through seminars, certifications, competitions and shows. Years of experience should not be your sole criteria for selection. Someone with 20 years experience can simply mean they've been grooming poorly for 20 years. There are now several grooming associations. Ask to what associations they belong.
  6. **Ask to see pictures of grooms they've done.** Before and after pictures are wonderful testimonies of the groomer's skill. See some of mine at my website [www.heavenlyscentspetresort.com](http://www.heavenlyscentspetresort.com) or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/album.php?aid=55023&id=1632669234&l=ff58148ede>
  7. **Ask about your dog's breed and how many dogs they do like yours.** Professional groomers have been trained in all AKC breed profiles and will be able to offer you groom options ranging from show quality to more easily-maintained pet trims. Before a groomer ever touches your dog they will ask you very specific questions about the dog's life-style, how much home grooming you do between grooms, desired length of coat, tail, beard, ears, feet, and other special requests you may have. You should NEVER leave a groom shop surprised by what you get back.
  8. **Ask if health certificates or vaccination records are required.** You know the health of your dog but what about all the other dogs in the shop? A shop dedicated to health and wellness standards will do the work required to keep current vaccination records on all their customers.
  9. **Look for what else the groomer does within the pet industry.** Groomers who have other pet related interests often have a more compassionate heart toward animals and skills that make them better overall service providers. Look for their involvement in pet rescue, humane society volunteering, training, boarding, showing, search and rescue, pet first aid, 4H, job shadowing, advancement of the profession. Someone who answers they don't have time for any of this because they're too busy grooming dogs for pay is grooming too many dogs.
  10. **Ask them about their pets.** What do they have, how old, where and how are they kept, what challenges do they face in pet ownership. I only want someone crazy about dogs touching my dogs! If they don't have any, hmmmmm. Run.
  11. **Ask how many dogs are groomed daily.** A one or two person shop normally does between 6-12 dogs per day. More than that can result in a hurried, impatient atmosphere where injuries occur and frazzled nerves rule. Look at the level of calm, noise, handling and pace of the shop and ask if it is appropriate for your dog. Will you get the attention you need? Professional groomers can offer more solitary grooms for special needs dogs.

12. **Ask if they offer health alerts.** Most groomers are not medically trained but professional groomers are trained observers. Because they normally see your dog more frequently than your vet, they see changes and issues with ears, skin, feet, mouths, lumps, bumps, weight and ouchies. I've had the satisfaction of seeing things the owner had not and by alerting the owner ultimately saved the dog's life because they got to the vet in time.
13. **Trust your gut.** If there is anything that doesn't sit right with you, go somewhere else. But give the professional groomer an opportunity to make things right and especially avoid groomer hopping. It's just not good for a dog to hop from groomer to groomer due to your reluctance to talk things over with your groomer.

Pets have become members of our families and deserve the best from all your pet service providers. Do your homework when selecting a groomer and look forward to a great relationship with your groomer for the life of your dog.

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Heavenly Scent Pet Resort and Spa  
8246 N. Delaney Rd. Henderson, MI 48841  
8 miles north of Owosso  
989-277-0740  
[cvaughn@michonline.net](mailto:cvaughn@michonline.net)  
[www.facebook.com/heavenlyscentspetresort](http://www.facebook.com/heavenlyscentspetresort)