

VSB Stage Make-up Instructions

What's the point?

In order to present your best face to the audience (and adjudicators), it's important to understand how stage lighting affects your face. The bright stage lights not only heat up the stage for performers, they also lighten your skin tone, flatten your bone structure and wash out your features like eyes and lips. You need the right makeup to compensate for light-washing, allowing your features to take centre stage so you can capture and engage the attention of your audience with your facial expressions.

Before you start

Years of backstage experience have taught me that before you start preparing your hair and makeup it's best to gather everything you need. Don't forget face cleaning wipes and Q-tips to help correct any mistakes. It's best to have a mirror with you too, as not all competition venues have theatrical change room set ups. You may find yourself putting on your makeup in a hallway or cafeteria and need to be prepared.

Hair

Make sure you know what height your ponytail should be and whether or not to include a part. Start by brushing/combing/picking out your hair so that it's completely tangle free. The needs here can be different depending on your hair type. Do what's best for your hair to minimize damage.

When your hair is ready, you will want to dampen your roots with either a spritz of water or a spray style leave-in conditioner. Use the tail end of your comb to straighten your part. Once you've done this take your back-comb brush or fine-tooth comb and pull hair into your ponytail. Keep going until your hair is smooth and tight. Fasten with a hair tie that matches your hair colour. Slather on some firm hold hair gel to coat the hair, leaving the ponytail dry. Use your hand to smooth out the gel for an even coat – don't forget the baby hairs around your hairline. Finally Spray with firm hold hairspray to finish. If you are adding a bun to your hair, continue to the next step.

Pro Tip: Use a hair straightener in sections on your ponytail to give your hair a finished look.

Making a Bun

Once your ponytail is set, pull through the centre of your bun form. There are several ways to do this next step, but this is my favourite: Pull the form about halfway down the ponytail. Use one hand to hold it here and the other will wrap a small section of your ponytail around the bun form, tucking it in under the centre. Continue this until the form is covered by hair. Now roll the bun form down the ponytail, pausing as needed to pull it tight – this will give you a firm bun that won't bounce around on stage. Once your bun is in place, use long pair pins – catching the edge of the bun and then directing the pin along the scalp and under your ponytail's hair tie. You will need at least 8 pins to firmly hold your bun in place. Finish by covering your bun with a hairnet that matches your hair colour. The audience won't see this, but it will prevent little wispsies from escaping your bun – and those can definitely be seen by the audience! Finish with more hairspray and complete by adding your costume accessories.

"You need the right makeup to compensate for light-washing, allowing your features to take centre stage so you can capture and engage the attention of your audience with your facial expressions."

Preparing your skin

To make the most of your makeup you need to prepare your skin. After all, you will be sweating and working hard in the hot stage lights and want to minimize touch ups as much as possible! Start by washing your face and moisturizing. I recommend also using a primer lotion that matches your skin-type for that extra longevity.

Concealer and Foundation

If you have blemishes or uneven spots on your skin use concealer or colour corrector to even them out. Once you've finished this, it's time for foundation. Make sure you've chosen a foundation that matches your skin tone. For stage you will want a full coverage style of foundation. There are different ways to apply concealer, but my favourite is with a makeup sponge. Some makeup sponges work best when damp, so run it under the tap and then use a paper towel to squeeze out excess water. Add foundation to the sponge and dab around face to the different areas and then start smoothing it out. I like to use dabbing motions for this and once the coverage is there, I swipe any splotches moving out from the centre of the face.

Contour

Contour is very important for stage. It catches the lights and creates emphasis for your features. You want to have the application just a little stronger than you would for regular wear. You can choose powder or cream contour sets. My favourite is a dual contour stick set from NYX. It has a mat dark side and a shimmer light side. Using the dark, swipe a line under your cheekbones, across the top of your forehead, and under your jawline. Then move to the nose swiping down either side and under the end. Now switch to the light colour and swipe the top of your cheekbones, above your jawline, centre of your chin, above your upper lip and along the length of your nose. Finally make a "W" between your brows. Now use your sponge or large makeup brush and blend it all.

Blush

You want to choose a fairly bright blush – remember that the stage lights will wash out most of it, so make sure it's a strong application. You want to use a large blush brush and apply the blush on your cheekbone between where you added your dark and light contour colours. Smile to make the apples of your cheek more prominent. Start there and sweep up and outward toward your ears.

Eyebrows

Not Everyone fills in their eyebrows daily, but this is a very important step for stage makeup – after all, so much of your expression comes from your eyebrows! There are several different options for eyebrow products including pencils, gels, powders and applicators like angled brushes, mascara-like brushes and more. Your decision will depend on how full and tame your eyebrows are as well as preference for application style. My favourite is a pencil along the shape of the eyebrows and then finish with a mascara style filler gel.

Pro Tip: You want to choose your brow makeup to match your hair when it's wet, as your hair will look wet with all the gels and sprays.

Eye Shadow

For eyeshadow, you will want a light medium and dark. I have worked at studios that use creams and browns and others who use white, grey, and black. Check and see if your studio has a preference. Start with your lightest shade and cover your full lid from lash to brow. Next you will use the medium shade to fill in your crease and blending upward to about halfway to brow – you want to have less in the inner eye and more as you move outward. Now use a small brush and add a small amount of your darkest colour to deepen the crease and extend to the outer eye. Blend, but try to keep it in the zone.

Eye Liner

Start with your white liner on the inner eye and bottom water line (the pink part just above your lower lashes). Use your black liner starting on your upper lid about a finger's width from your inner eye and extend to the outer edge. Now move to the bottom, starting at the out edge you want to extend the line about one third of the way across. This technique gives the audience the illusion of larger eyes.

Lashes

False eyelashes – you either love them or hate them, but you cannot deny that they have a major impact when included in your stage makeup routine. Start by applying black mascara to your eyelashes, both top and bottom. Next measure your falsies against your top lid. You want them to fit from about a finger's width from your inner eye to the outer edge. Use clean scissors to trim. Now apply a light coat of glue to the edge of your falsies, blow on them or wait until the glue starts to dry and becomes tacky. Now using either your fingers or eyelash tweezers, apply to your upper lid, flush with your lash line. Be sure to press the ends down. Hold for at least 10 seconds to set the glue. You should now be good to go.

Pro Tip: If putting on mascara makes your eyes twitch, look down and apply to the top of your lashes.

Lipstick

Generally, your lipstick colour will be selected by your teacher or studio director. If using a creamy lipstick, it's best to start by using a matching lip liner to create an edge around your lips, then use a lip brush to fill in the colour. Personally, I prefer lip stains for performance as they are less likely to come off or smear in that difficult group lift. For this just use the wand to apply, paying attention to your edges. Use a Qtip to clean up any mistakes and then finish with the included gloss.

Finishing Powder and Setting Spray

The final step is optional but highly recommended, especially if you have more than one performance in the day. Using a large fluffy brush apply loose powder to your full face. Follow with a few spritzes of setting spray.

Voila, you are ready to head to the rehearsal hall. Check out our next edition for expert tips to get your body warmed up and ready for your best performance yet!



Using the right tools can make a huge difference. Here the makeup artist is using eyelash tweezers to apply the false lashes.



Stage makeup should be bolder than regular applications.



Use a hair net on your bun to keep your wispsies under wrap.