

The Secret of Combing

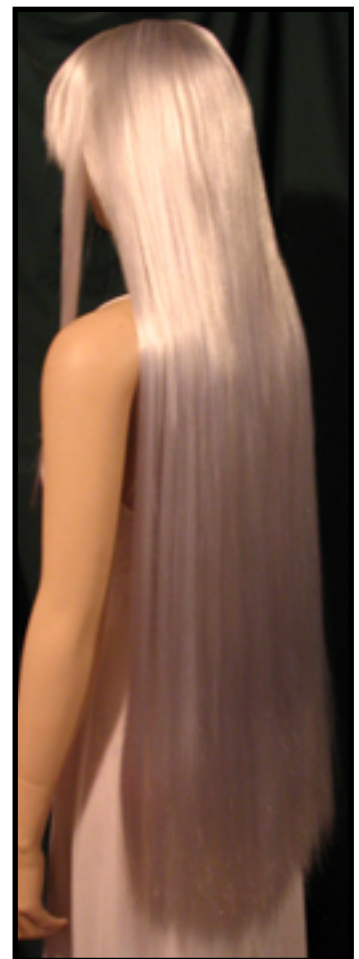
What is the secret of combing?

Some would say it's a good comb. Others may tell you it's all about wig conditioner. Then there's also the group who believes that it all depends on what type of wig you started with. Well, these are all good points, and important in their own right, but they are not "the secret".

Nope, the secret of combing, good combing, the type that never leaves the wig looking worse than when you started, and can, in fact, resurrect a wig from the dead, is *love*.



This wig was not well-combed during the cutting stage. The result is a shaggy, matted appearance.



Overcombing left the ends of this wig frizzy and damaged.

Chapter 3: The Secret of Combing

Introduction

“Love? Seriously? Isn’t that kind of cheesy?”

I could smite you for your wig blasphemy, but I am feeling benevolent, and shall let the matter pass. For now.

Yes, the secret of good combing is love. More specifically, it is a combination of patience, care, understanding, and a gentle touch.

I have had over a dozen apprentices come to work with me in the past five years, and with the exception of only two of them, they all failed this lesson. The reason was that they simply did not *care* enough about each wig to give it the affection it needed during the combing stage. No matter how many times I tried to impress upon them that they really needed to work on their combing, it never seemed important enough to them. It was as if they felt that it was beneath them. Afterall, they were regularly doing much more complicated techniques, why bother going back to the basics?

So they’d tear through the fiber like they were raking leaves, wouldn’t comb while they were cutting, or would try to muscle tangles out and turn the wig into a frizzy mess.

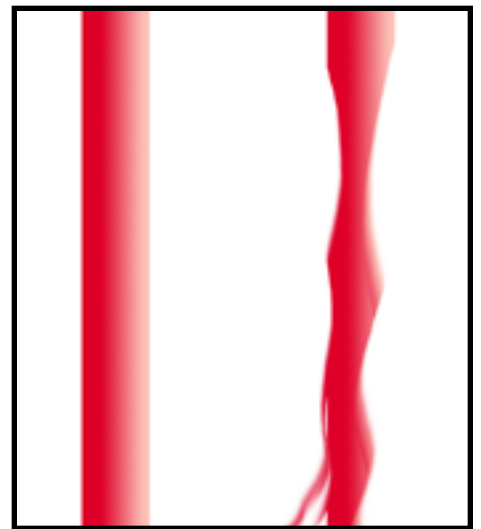
One girl was so bad about this, that she banned from combing all together. Every wig or extension she combed was destroyed beyond repair.

The two apprentices who never had trouble with combing both had long hair. I think life experience probably had some influence there.

However, whatever length your own hair is, it’s still not a wig. Human hair bounces back from combing or brushing much better than synthetic fiber does. In fact, brushing your hair is good for it, as it helps distribute scalp oils, and removes loose hairs.

When you brush or comb a wig, all you’re doing, (if you’re lucky...) is lining up the fiber. The risky part is when the fibers aren’t lined up in the first place. Then you’re stretching the plastic; causing irreparable damage. Once you stretch or deform a fiber, you can’t make it go back to it’s original shape.

The stretched fibers are what create the frizzy appearance of over-brushed wigs. The fibers have been pulled and curled like ribbons on a birthday present. Individually, they can be dealt with by trimming them out. But when you have thousands of them, it’s a totally different situation. If you’re “lucky” enough that the frizz is all at the bottom, your best bet is to trim the bottom 2 or three inches off of the wig. In very bad cases, it’s spread throughout the entire wig, and then your options become much more grim: total fiber replacement, or the trash can.



Close-up of fiber damage: On the left is an undamaged synthetic fiber. It’s a straight tube with a perfectly round diameter.

On the right is a fiber that has been stretched.. The round shape has been deformed into a more angular, random shape. Fiber shaped like this is more likely to become entangled in the fibers around it, and looks frizzy and dull.

Chapter 3: The Secret of Combing This Ain't Your Momma's Comb!

“Why is this comb a detangler comb? Won't any comb work?”

Other combs may work, but not as well. A good detangler comb has three important properties:

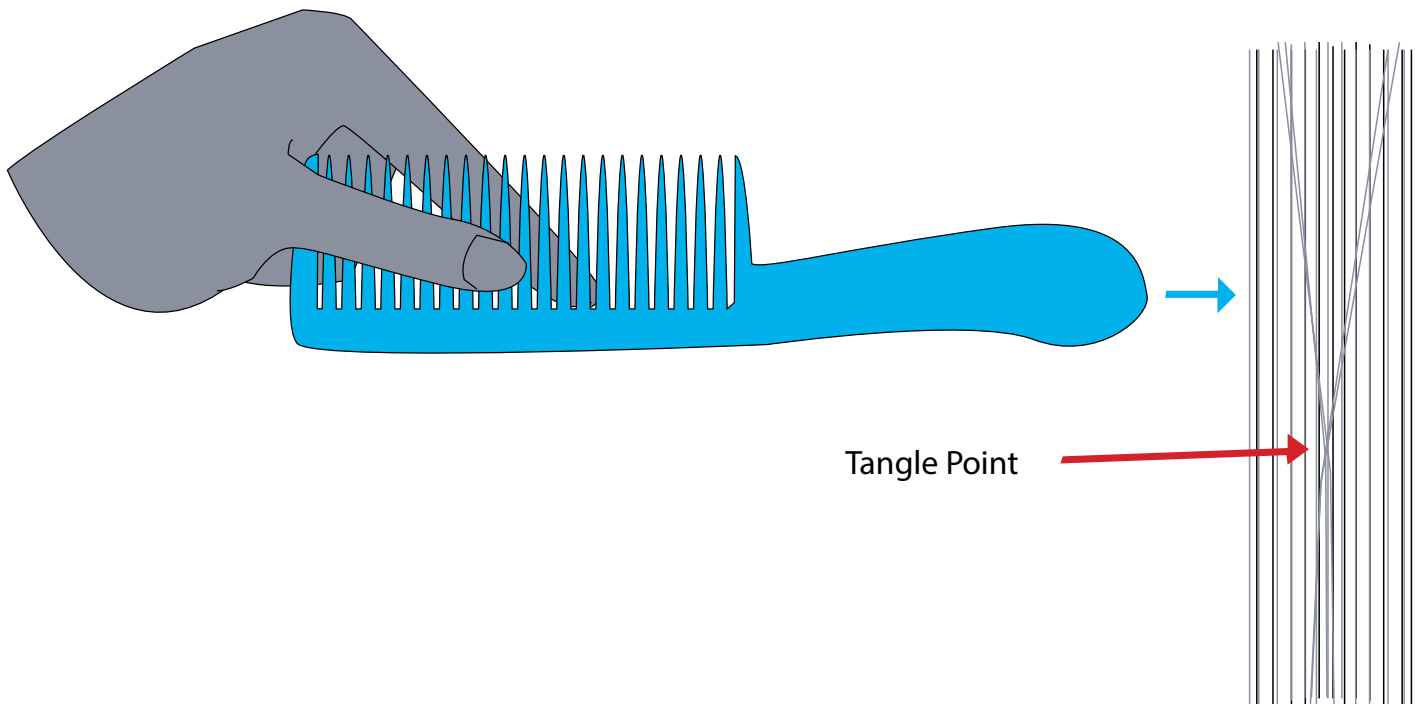
1. Large, widely spaced teeth
2. No plastic “flux” on the teeth.
3. A flat, curved handle.



Of these three properties, the handle is the most important part. That's because it is the tool of the “tap, tap, tap” detangling method.

“Uh, the what?”

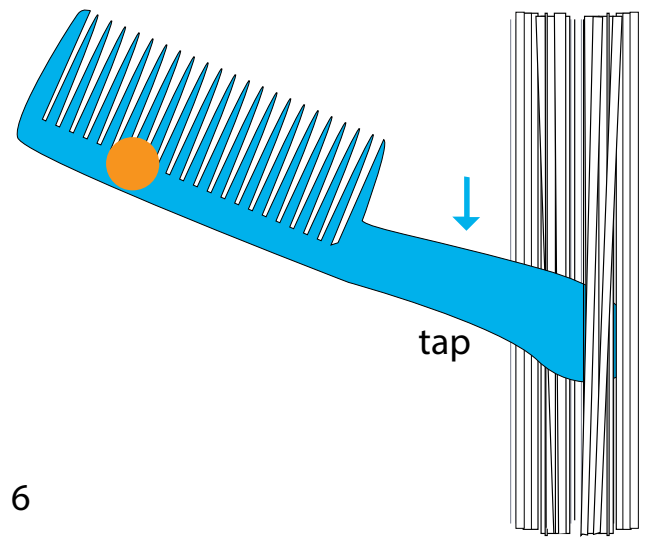
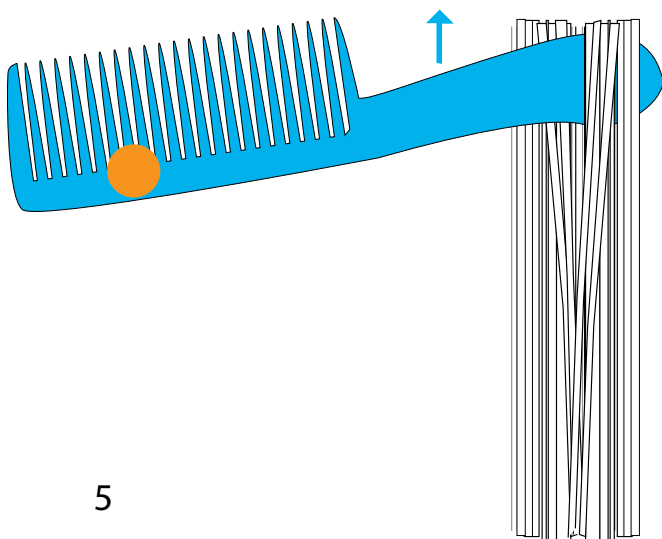
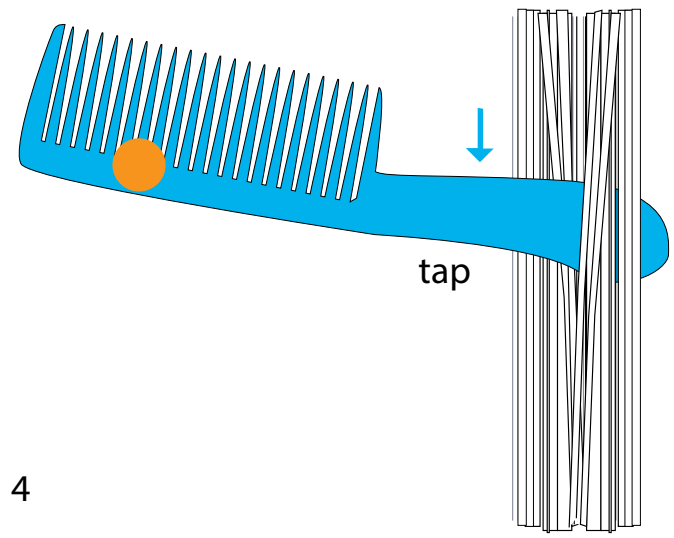
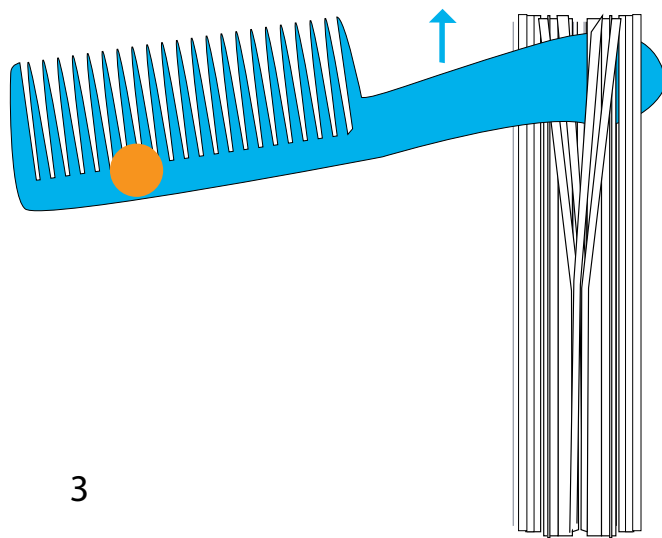
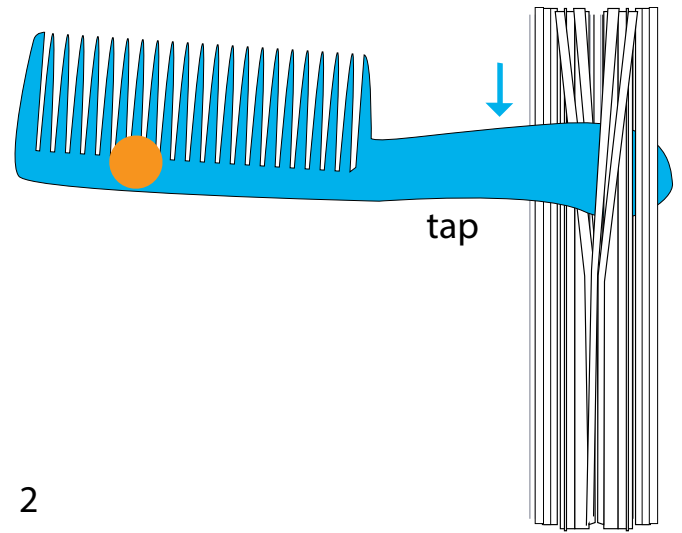
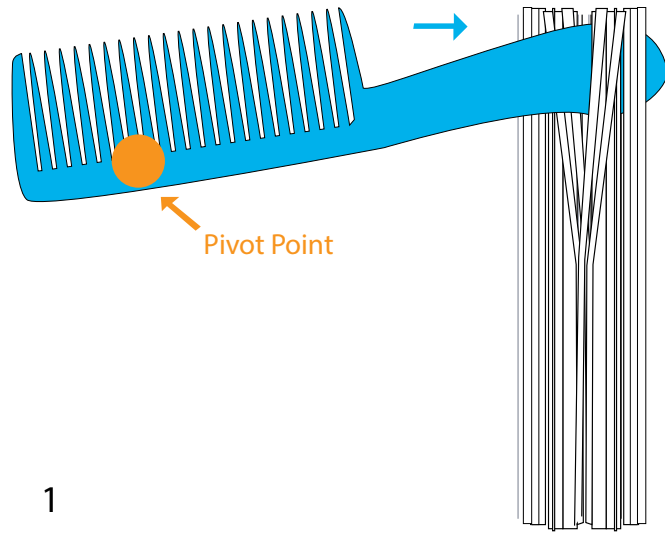
Tap! Tap! Tap! Most of the basic methods I teach have some sort of mnemonic associated with them to make them easier to remember. In the case of detangling, it's “tap, tap, tap”. This refers to the motion you'll make with the handle of the comb as you work it through the fiber.



Most tangles are not the result of an actual knot, but just a place where some of the fibers have become intertwined. (Especially in long wigs.) To untwist them, we use gentle, direct pressure from above the point where they are wound. The handle of the comb is inserted into the fiber above the tangle, and lightly tapped downward under its own weight. ►

Chapter 3: The Secret of Combing

This Ain't Your Momma's Comb!



Tap, Tap, Tap: Basic Detangling

1. Begin with the comb handle lifted up. The dot in the illustration is the “pivot point”. This is where you should be holding the comb with your thumb and forefinger. Hold the comb lightly, not in a deathgrip.
2. Let the handle fall down under its own weight. It will hit the tangle point with a quick “tap”, and you may feel it begin to loosen.
3. Lift the handle to it's original position, not removing it from the fiber.
4. Drop the handle again, this time it should have a little further to fall, so the “tap” will be a bit stronger.
5. Once again, lift the handle to it's original position above the tangle.
6. Give it another “tap”. Most tangles will give way by the third tap, although some are a bit more persistent. If the tangle is not seeming to move at *all*, or feels like it's getting tougher, pull the handle out right away. That means you have an actual knot in the fiber. The only way to get this out is to cut it out.

Once you have worked all of the major tangles out, you may comb the rest of the fiber with the teeth of the comb.

“Wouldn't using my fingers be easier?”

Using your fingers is a sure way to turn simple tangles into *knots*. When you use the handle of the comb, not only are you using something that is going to easily slide past the plastic fiber, but you're also creating only a tiny impact area. (Look at the handle of your comb head on, it's only about ¼ inch thick.) The quick, direct impact focuses the energy above the intertwined fibers, and that's it.

When you stick your fingers in there, you're moving way too much fiber at one time and creating variable resistance that turns your hand into a loom. While running your fingers through a wig won't harm it, trying to detangle with them is not a good idea.