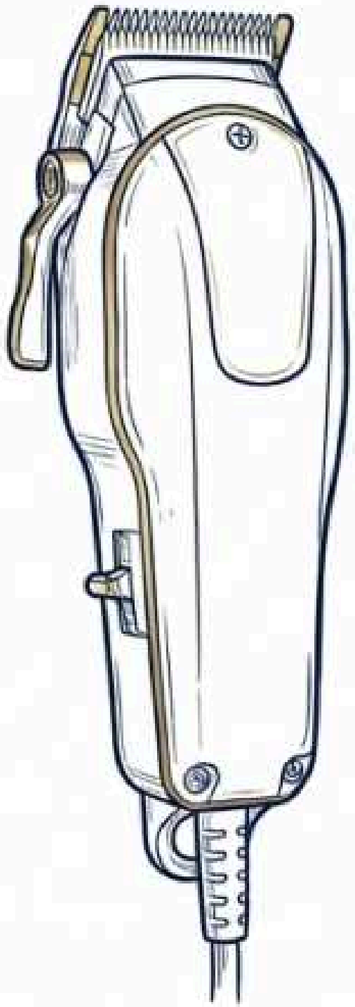
LIFE 101 B — Adult Haircuts
Extracurricular: Life Skills

Lecture 1: Clipper Guard Numbers: What “a Number Two” Really Means

A reading deck summarizing paragraphs 1.1 through 1.16.

Three Essential Questions



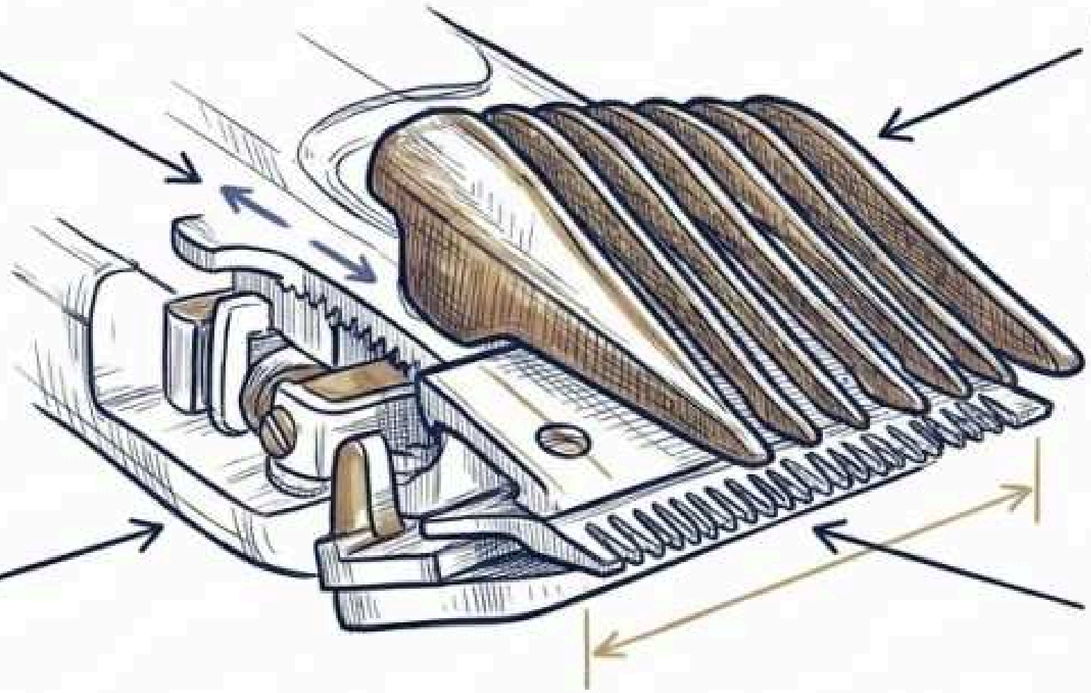
What is a clipper guard, and what does its number mean?

How long, in inches and millimeters, is each common guard?

What do half sizes and the small clipper lever do?

How Clippers & Guards Work

Moving Blade
(rapid side-to-side motion cuts hair between teeth)



The Guard
(plastic or metal comb holding the blade a set distance from the scalp)

Fixed Blade
(stationary)

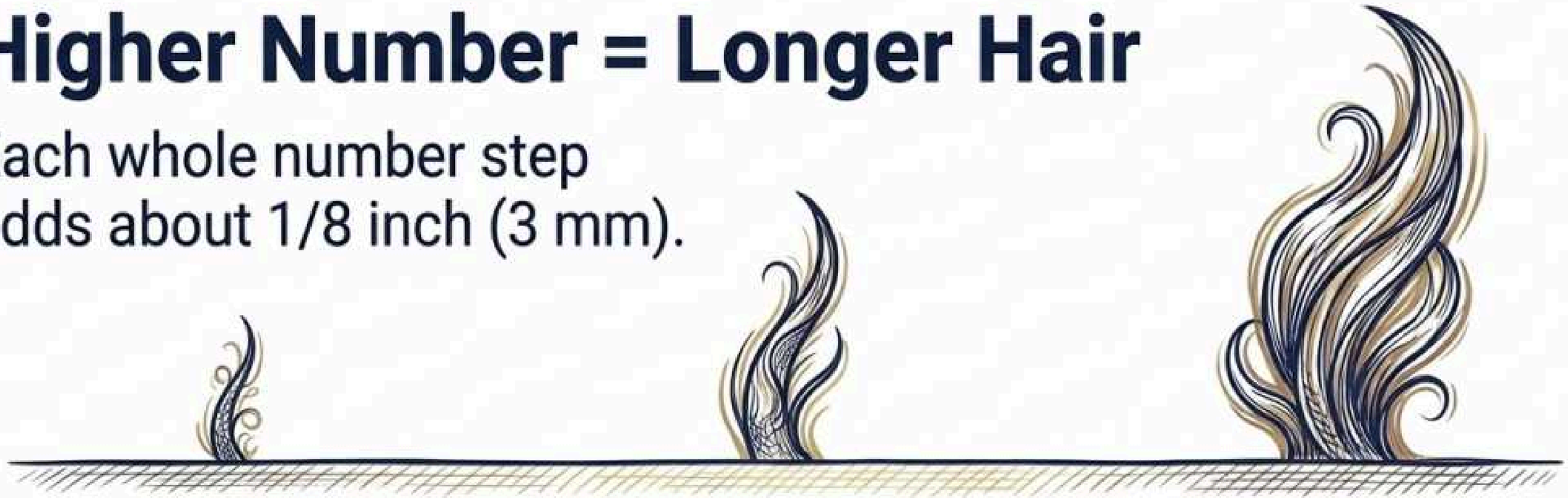
Bare Blade
(cuts very close to skin)

Hair shorter than the distance is untouched; longer hair is cut exactly to that length.

The Basic Rule of Numbers

Higher Number = Longer Hair

Each whole number step
adds about 1/8 inch (3 mm).

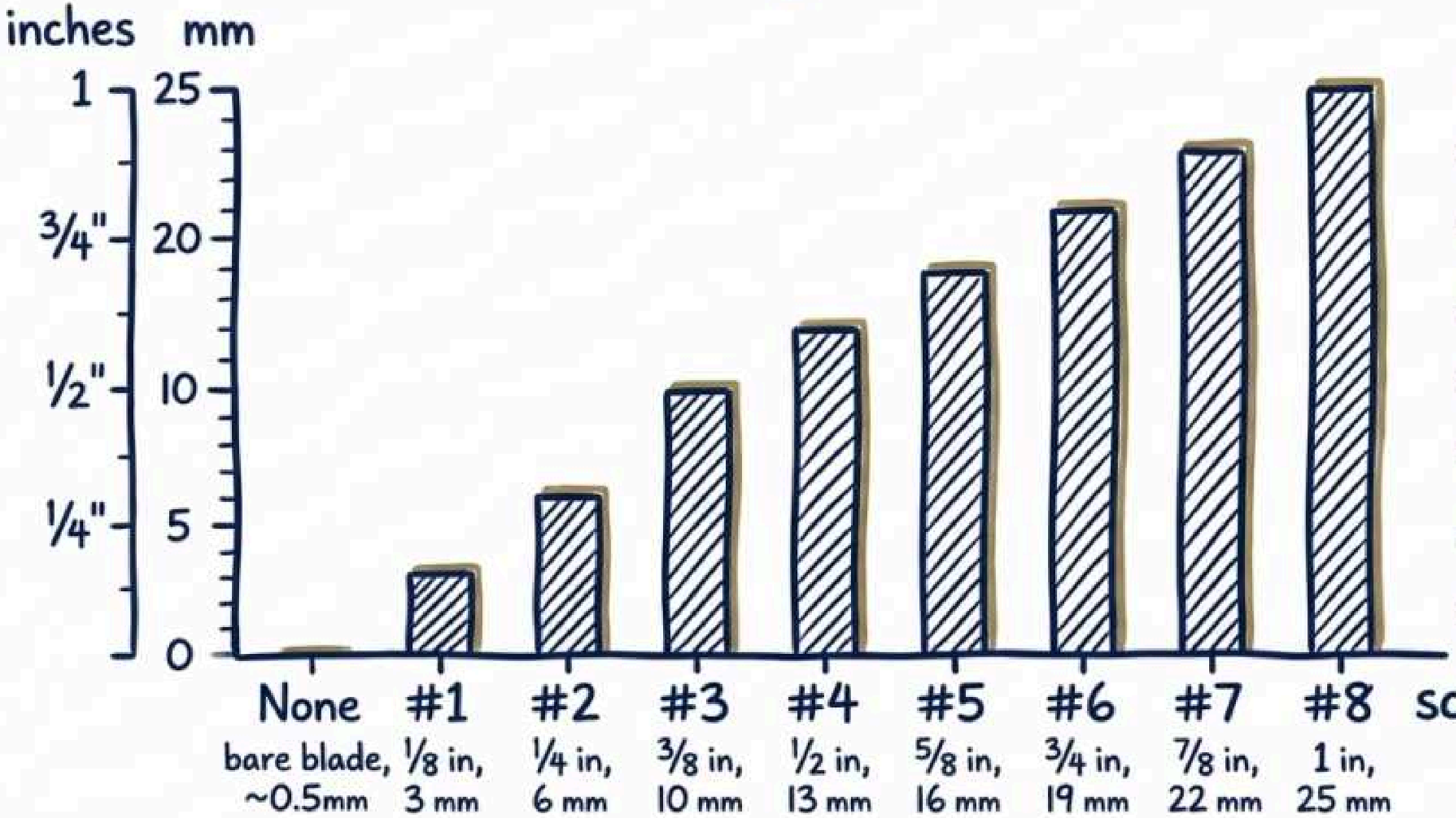


Number 1 leaves
about 1/8 inch
(3 mm).

Number 2 leaves
about 1/4 inch
(6 mm).

Number 8 leaves
about 1 inch
(25 mm).

The Complete Guard Ladder



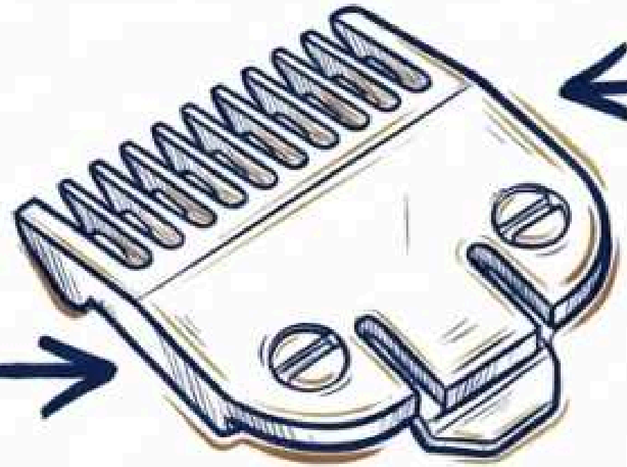
#1: ⅛ inch (3 mm)
#2: ¼ inch (6 mm)
#3: ⅜ inch (10 mm)
#4: ½ inch (13 mm)
#5: ⅝ inch (16 mm)
#6: ¾ inch (19 mm)
#7: ⅞ inch (22 mm)
#8: 1 inch (25 mm)

Going from #1 to #2 doubles the length. Going from #7 to #8 adds only one-seventh. One step matters most at the short end!

Below Number One: The Naming Dispute

The Guard: Leaves exactly 1/16 inch (1.5 mm).

Brand A (Wahl USA): Calls it #1/2 or #0.5.



Brand B (Wahl EU / Andis): Calls it #0.

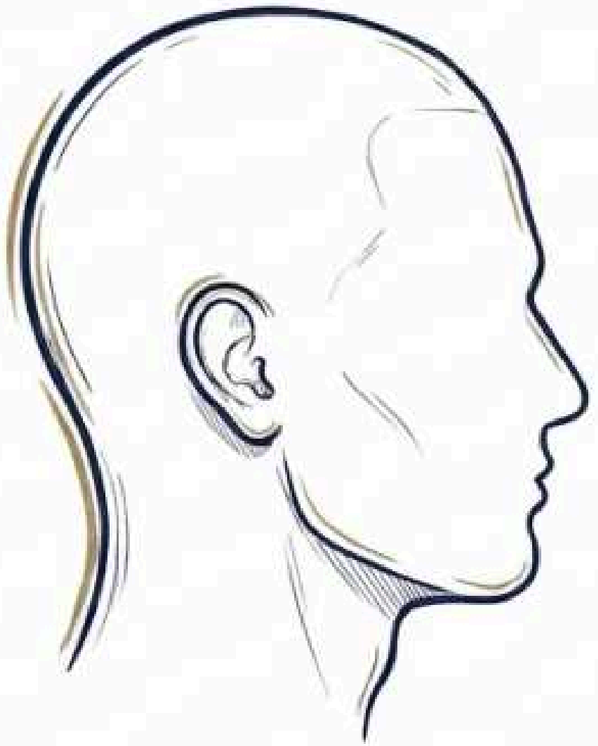
The Trap: Many say "a zero" when they actually mean no guard at all (bare blade).

The "Zero" Problem

Never use the word "zero" on its own.



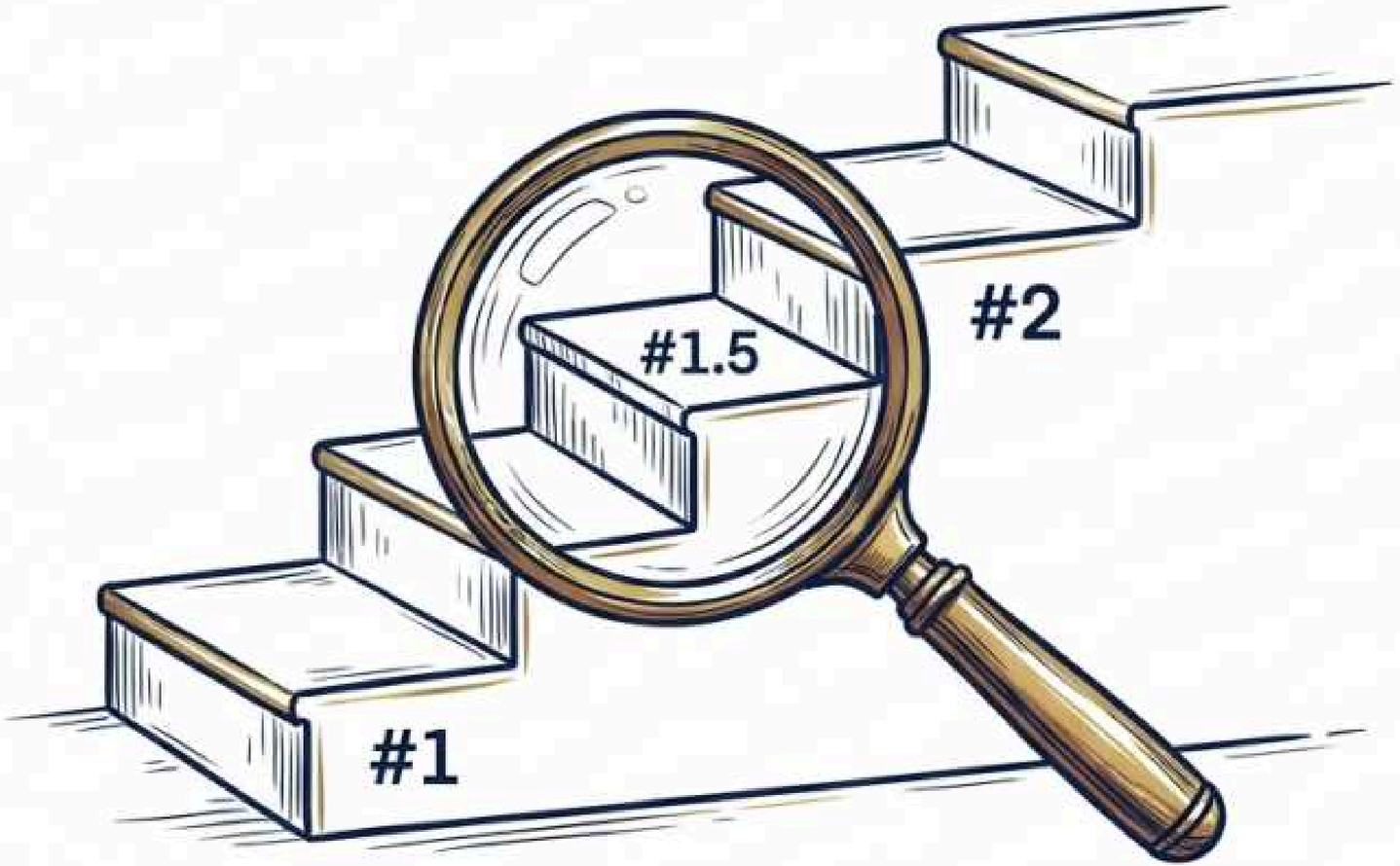
1/16 inch (1.5 mm): Say "the one-sixteenth guard" or "a half guard" for a dark shadow of stubble.



Bare Blade: Say "no guard" or "down to the skin" for a clearly visible bare scalp.

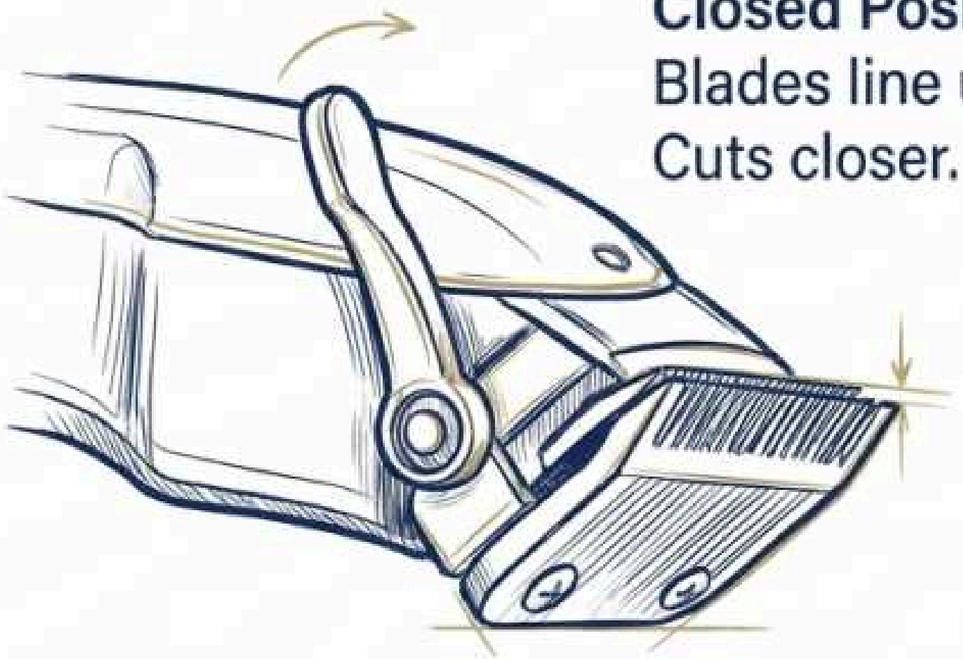
Half Sizes and Smooth Fades

1.7



- The In-Between: Number 1.5 (one and a half) leaves about 3/16 inch (4.5 mm).
- The Purpose: Small differences show the most at the short end of the scale.
- Application: Barbers use half sizes to smooth the step between whole guards when blending a fade.

The Taper Lever



Closed Position:
Blades line up.
Cuts closer.



Open Position:
Blade slides back.
Leaves hair longer.

- The Difference: About 1/16 inch (1.5 mm) of travel.
- Rule: Works with or without a guard. Leave the lever to the barber—just say the result you want.

Combining Lever & Guard

1.9

$$[\text{\#1 Guard} + \text{Lever Open}] = [\text{\#1.5 Guard} + \text{Lever Closed}]$$

Barber Math: A number 1 with the lever open comes out close to a number 1.5 with the lever closed. (The lever adds about the same step as a half size).

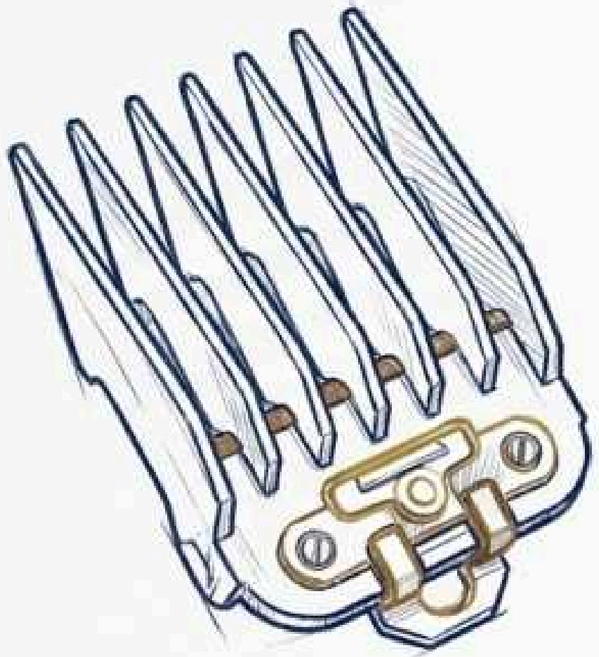
Bare Blade Specs (No Guard)
Closed: well under a millimeter (e.g., 0.5 mm).
Open: a couple of millimeters (e.g., 2.4 mm).

Tip: If you know you want "a two, lever closed," say exactly that.

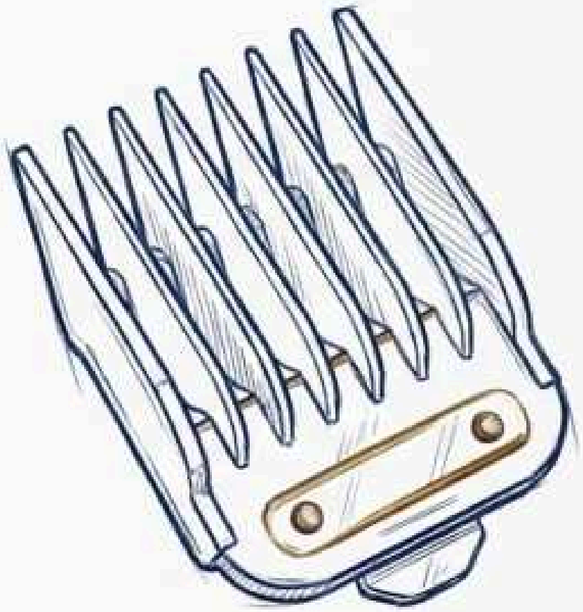
Brand Variations

1.10

Rule: Guard numbers are a convention, not a law. Actual lengths vary slightly by brand.



Brand A	Brand B
Wahl Standard:	Andis Chart:
1/4 inch is exactly 6 mm	Lists 1/4 inch as 6.3 mm
1 inch is 25 mm	Lists 1 inch as 25.5 mm

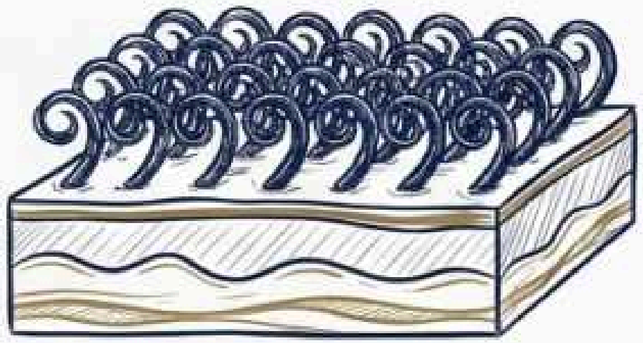


Result: A #3 from one brand may look slightly different from a #3 from another.

Hair Type Variables

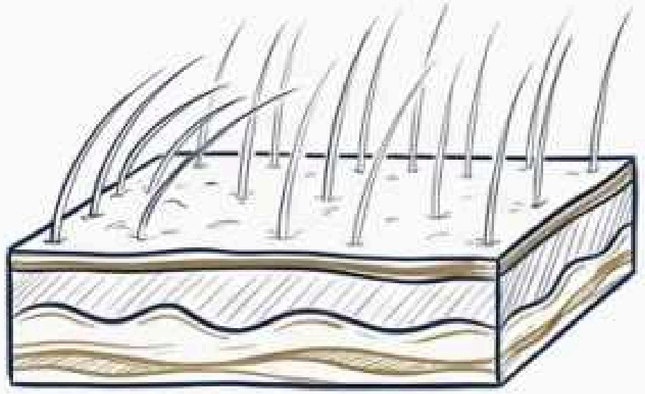
1.11

Factor 1: Curl and Wave.



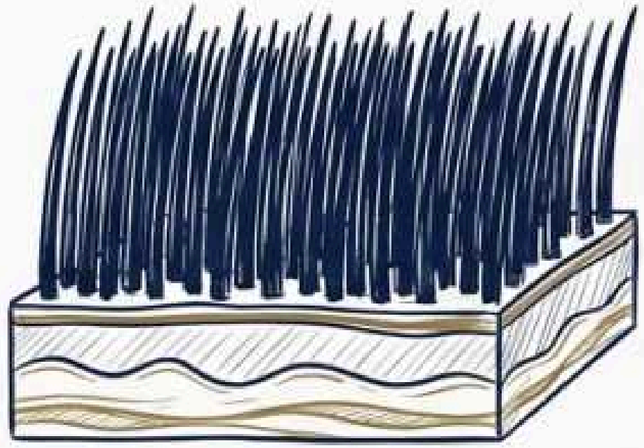
Bends back down after cutting; looks shorter than same guard on straight hair.

Factor 2: Growth Direction & Thickness.



Hair growing forward or at a cowlick looks different. Light or fine hair looks shorter due to lower contrast with the scalp.

Factor 3: Density.



Dark, thick hair looks longer and darker at the same number.

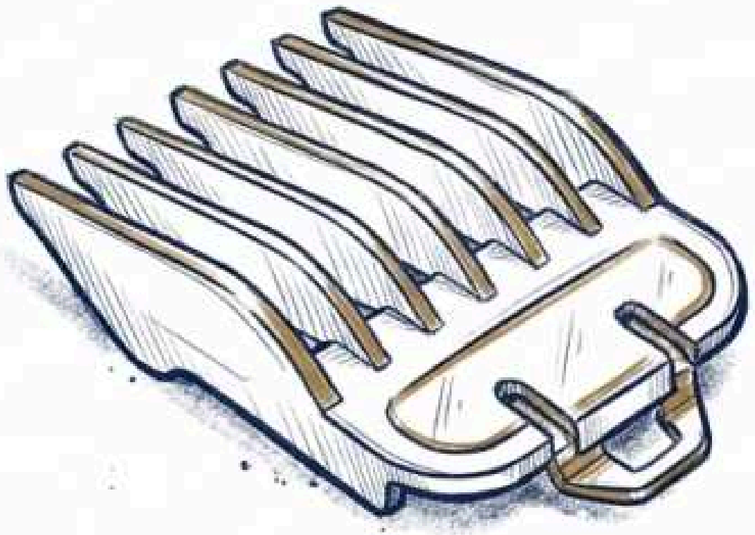
Rule: Use the number as a starting point; judge by how it looks on you.

Guards vs. Blades

1.12

Guard Numbers

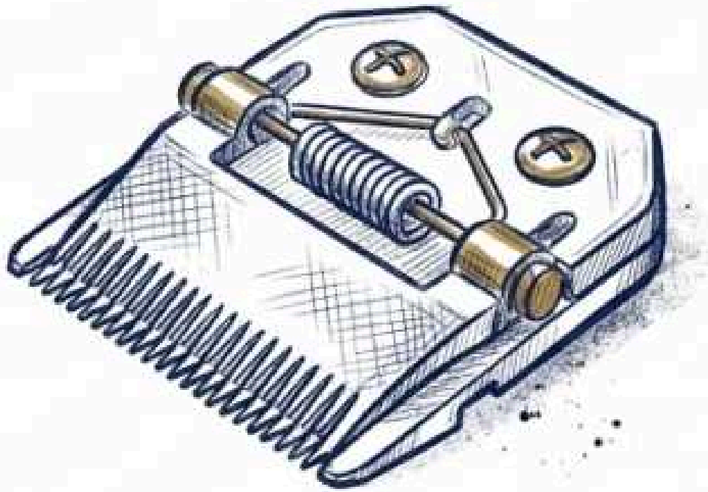
- Snap-on plastic combs.
- Higher numbers = longer hair.



VS

Blade Numbers

- Detachable metal blades.
- Confusingly, higher blade numbers usually cut shorter.



Your Role: Speak in guard numbers and inches. Leave blade sizes to the barber. Ask for the length it leaves if they mention a blade.

Choosing Your Number: Scalp Visibility

1.13



#4 and up: Starts to look like actual hair rather than stubble (crew cut territory).

#2 or #3: Reads as a short, even buzz (traditional buzz cut).

#1 or shorter: Shows the bare scalp clearly.

Tip: A barber can tell you exactly how a number will look on your specific head.

1.14

The Golden Rule



The Logic:

Hair can always be cut shorter, but it cannot be put back.

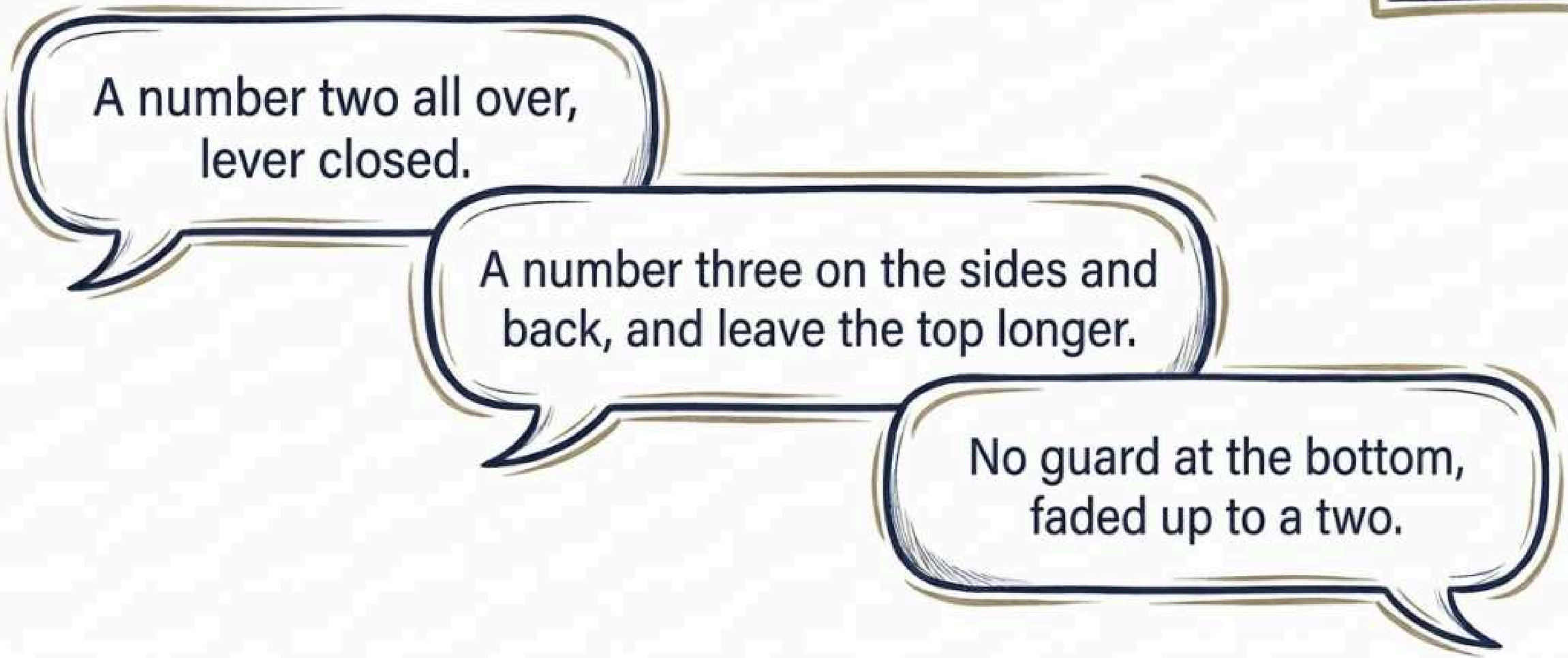
Start longer.

Application:

Unsure between a 2 and a 3? Ask for the 3, check the mirror, and ask to go down to a 2 if needed. Good barbers respect and expect this.

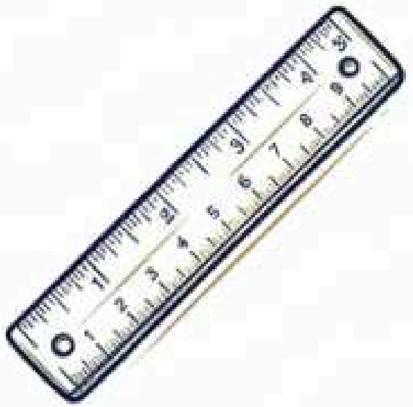
The Barber Script in Action

1.15



Insight: Notice that each perfect sentence dictates both how short it is and where the length goes.

Lecture 1 Summary



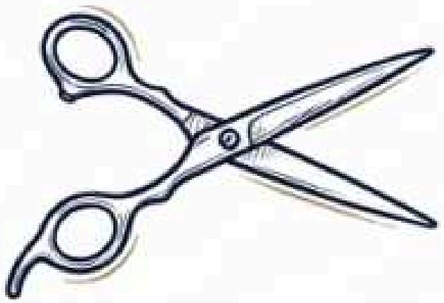
1. Distance: Guard numbers equal distance; about 1/8 inch (3 mm) per step. Higher = longer.



2. Ambiguity: ‘Zero’ is a trap. Say exactly what you mean (1/16 guard vs. no guard).



3. Fine-Tuning: Half sizes and the lever control the critical short end of the scale.



4. Adjustments: Brands and hair types vary. Start longer and adjust down.

Next Lecture: Length on Top (Inches, Fingers, and Scissors).