

Perfectly Pink & White

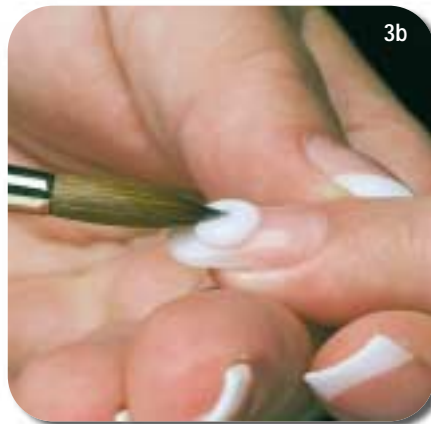
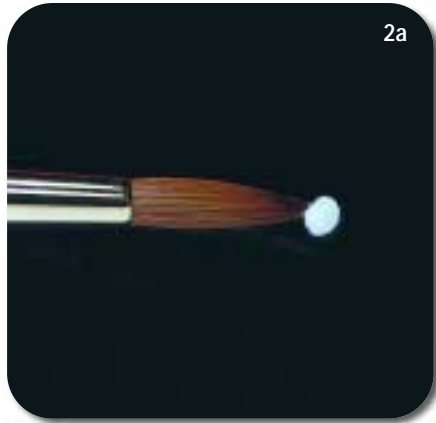
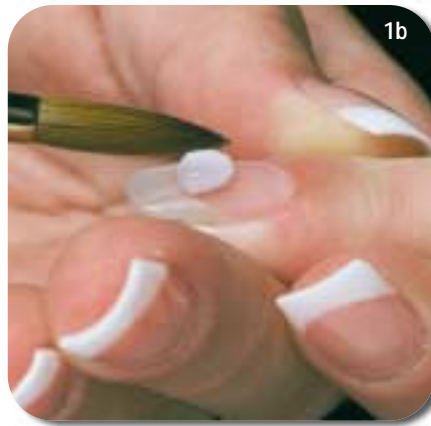
A flawless French is possible, if you understand your products.

By Vicki Peters

CHOOSING A PINK-AND-WHITE ACRYLIC SYSTEM CAN BE AS DIFFICULT AS DECIDING WHICH OUTFIT TO BUY IN A STORE FULL OF TOP FASHIONS. To find a pink-and-white system that works for you, you may have to test several different kits just as you would try on several different outfits before finding the perfect fit. You can easily spend hundreds of dollars on trial-and-error before finding the right system. Set speed, liquid-to-powder ratio, color durability and workability all play a part in a pink-and-white system. Here's some basic information to help you organize your search.

CHRISTOPHER VOELKER





MAGIC LANTERN

Set Time

Each acrylic product has a different set time classified as slow, medium or fast. The average set time (from the time you combine the liquid and powder to the time you're able to file) is two minutes. However, the set time will vary depending on the size of your brush, how much liquid you use and the amount of product you pick up.

Remember that the product sets sufficiently in two minutes that it's hard enough for you to

file and finish the nails. But, the acrylic continues to cure over the next 24 hours, and as it cures, it shrinks. That's why acrylic nails tend to feel tight the first day after application. In a day or two, your client will get used to them.

The liquid-to-powder ratio along with the chemicals in the acrylic dictate the set time. So if you're struggling with your application and the product is drying faster than you can handle, you may want to switch to a

slower-setting product for better control or try a bigger brush that holds more liquid.

Liquid-to-Powder Ratios

Most manufacturers suggest a ratio such as 2 to 1 or 1 to 1 for the mix of liquid to powder in an acrylic system. For best results, follow each manufacturer's directions explicitly. Use the brush that comes with the system, pour liquid into the dappen dish, dip your brush and wipe it out to the exact level specified in the directions to get the perfect ratio. Because artistically we're all different, we have different techniques that will produce different results. However, if we do the best we can to follow the directions on liquid-to-powder ratios, we'll achieve similar results.

So what exactly does ratio mean? A 2 to 1 liquid-to-powder ratio means two parts liquid for every one part powder. A 1 to 1 liquid-to-powder ratio means equal parts of liquid and powder. No, you don't need to find tiny measuring cups, but you do need to practice and get to know your product. Start with a fairly dry brush and pick up a ball of acrylic—a 1 to 1 ratio, maybe. Watch the ball on the brush (*Photos 1a and 1b*). Does the liquid quickly seep into the powder? Are there particles of powder that never absorb any liquid? Now, completely saturate your brush in the liquid—a 3 to 1 ratio. Don't wipe any of it out. Pick up the same size ball of powder and watch the ball on the end of your brush (*Photos 3a and 3b*). Does it immediately drip off the end of your brush?

Once you're familiar with a product, using the correct ratio

Try Before You Buy

It's important to try before you buy, so buy a small starter kit or try a set of nails using a co-worker's products. Play with the product and see how workable it is for you before investing big bucks in a complete system. Ask these questions first:

1. Is it a fast/medium or slow set?
2. What colors are available?
3. How accessible is technical support?
4. Are there any classes in your area?
5. How much does the system cost?
6. Is there a distributor in your area or can you order online or direct?

while you build the nail will become second nature (*Photos 2a and 2b*).

Poor liquid-to-powder ratio is the cause of the tiny bubbles that appear in the whites of your nails. They weaken the nails. They collect dirt and create little black specks in your white tip (they're in your pinks too, but you just can't see them as easily).

When you saturate your brush with liquid, tiny air bubbles collect in its bristles. When you use a liquid-to-powder ratio that's too dry, those bubbles can escape into the product as you build the nail

To prevent this, submerge the brush deep into the liquid and flatten the brush on the bottom of the dappen dish. Wipe the brush and remove all of the liquid. Then, dip it again to get the appropriate amount of liquid. The wetter the consistency, the better able you are

to pick up a ball of product that's bubble-free.

If you see bubbles in your finished nails, file and finish the nails, clean them and apply one layer of brush-on glue. Let the glue dry and buff. The glue will settle into the bubbles you've popped open from filing. It won't add strength but will prevent the bubbles from collecting dirt. Applying a top coat or a gel sealant will work the same way.

Creating Color

Some techs think that in order to create a fabulous pink-and-white nail you need pink powder, white powder and some liquid. What they don't realize is that there's a rainbow of pink and white colors to choose from. It's like selecting a pair of blue jeans. You can choose from acid wash, faded, dark or sandblasted blue denim.

The color spectrum for a pink-and-white nail is endless. Pink is not always necessarily pink. It can be red/pink like a sunburn, blue/pink like bubble gum or peach/pink like a kitty cat's nose. There are also differences in the density of the pink powders. Some are translucent

so you can see the natural nail plate through the product, while others are opaque. For clients with discolored nail beds you'll want to choose an opaque powder, and for clients who want a more natural look the translucent powders may be ideal. The opaque powders are also perfect when you need to fake the length of the nail bed. Because the product isn't see-through, you can extend the pink acrylic over the natural smile line and create the illusion of a longer nail bed.

Just as with the pink powder, there are many shades of white powder. White can be soft white, bright white or competition white. You should probably have two or three white color options available for your clients. I've heard from many natural nail clients that they won't wear acrylics because the white part looks too fake. This is because they've seen pink and whites created with the stark white powder. They've probably seen pink and whites with a more natural white, but didn't recognize them as being acrylic nails.

When you're using bright white powder, the product



You can see the differences in the pinks and whites when you compare different nails side by side. Notice how opaque the pink is on the nail on the right, while the middle nail looks the most natural.

consistency may appear slightly different because it's made with more pigment, but don't let that fool you. It looks different, but the application and set time are exactly the same.

In addition to pink and white powders, you can use clear or natural powders to create the classic French look. What manufacturers call clear powder is not necessarily clear. Most clears have some pink pigment in them. If you're looking for a product that's completely clear, look for "crystal clear." You can use clear powder instead of pink if the client has nice color to her nail plates—plus you don't have to worry about pulling the clear over the white tip and muting the smile line.

Natural powder, a muted

However, darker blue and purple liquid can make the white tip powder a more extreme white. If you have a dark liquid, you may need to use a soft white to achieve less bright whites.

When Color Goes Bad

A good acrylic line will stay fresh and keep its color for months. If you find that yours doesn't, and you continually have to replace dull, dingy acrylic, you may want to consider switching acrylic companies.

White powder will yellow or become dingy before pink, clear or neutral. Replacing the white tip periodically with a backfill will prevent yellow tips. Be sure to replace all the white



A slight variation in brush size or shape can affect the liquid-to-powder ratio.

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clear, is ideal for creating acrylic pink and whites that give the illusion of natural nails. Using natural powder on the free edge and clear powder on the nail bed creates a natural-looking nail with a clean, crisp smile line.

The best way to test colors is to apply a small ball of product on a mirror, let it dry and cover it with a top coat, which will illuminate the color.

Liquid can sometimes affect the color outcome of your nails. Most acrylic liquid is some shade of blue or purple. The blue and purple colors in the liquids help stabilize the long-term color of the acrylic.

evenly on all 10 nails so they match.

The pink will eventually lose its color too. A good habit to develop during a fill is to file off the top surface of the pink and replace it with a small ball of pink. Pull the ball up to the smile line. This keeps the pink looking fresh.

Using a UV top coat, gel sealer or regular fast-drying top coat will also help keep the top surface of the acrylic from discoloring.

The Right Brush

For the best results, use the brush that comes with the system or is recommended by the

manufacturer to work with the system. It all goes back to the liquid-and-powder ratio. Each manufacturer perfects its system's liquid-to-powder ratio using a specific brush. Using a different brush will throw that ratio off, and the company's technical support won't be able to help you. So give your favorite brush a rest until you've conquered application with the brush recommended by the manufacturer. After you gain confidence with the new system and understand its liquid-to-powder ratio, you can switch back to your favorite brush and compensate for the change.

Finding the product that works for you should be your goal. Sales pitches, hype and cute packaging can entice us to purchase kits at classes and shows, but do your homework first. If you're having challenges, call the manufacturer's hotline and network with others who use the same acrylic system. Sometimes you have the right system but you're just not using it correctly. Sometimes you don't, and then it's time to find one that works for you. ↓

Nailpro education director Vicki Peters is a licensed nail technician; author of educational books, CDs and tapes; and director of the Nailpro nail competitions.