



Creating Realistic Casualty Makeup Effects [by Stuart Bray](#)

A lot of people start out in makeup effects creating wounds and various casualty makeups. With relatively little kit, you can assemble some convincing effects. You may also wish to create makeup effects for fun at Halloween, to make a low-budget movie, enhance scenarios in first aid training or as a way of starting a portfolio of your makeup work.

Regardless of your kit or expertise with makeup, there are some really simple steps you can take to help create realism. Often people throw something together, smother it with fake blood and hope for the best. This method can work, but if you really want to create realistic effects then these five tips will make a big difference to your finished result.

1. Use reference

Pictures of the real thing are essential to get the look right. Guessing may be fun, but it won't inform you. It's important to spend some time accumulating reference, as it is the number one tool in your kit for creating convincing makeup effects. Try to get different images of the same injury types to give you an idea of common denominators as well as the variation.

2. Read up

It really pays to understand the injuries by reading up on them as well as just looking at pictures. The appearances of injuries depend on many variables, so if you can understand the cause of the appearance then you'll do a better job.

There are many free online articles that examine what happens with any given injury. If type 'pathology of....' in a search engine and enter 'gunshot wound', 'knife injury' burns', you'll find articles that discuss the nuts and bolts of what happens to the body in these circumstances. Medical and pathology books will also carry good information.

3. Give context

Okay, now you know what can happen and what it should look like. You decide you want to create a makeup effect. How else can you make it look realistic? Give the injury a context and imagine a specific cause. If you are just creating images for your portfolio, it will help the illusion if there is a circumstance in which the injury has occurred.

Your reference can tell you a lot more than just how the injury itself appears. Other effects resulting from the injury such as how fabric rips, where blood flows and collects, as well as environmental factors like correct placement of dirt, dust or soot all help to make the illusion complete. Burns, for example, can affect the clothing as well as the skin. In this case, scorch up some old clothing (not when it's being worn, obviously) and use this with your finished makeup.

4. Avoid excess

Resist the temptation to cram every conceivable wound you can think of onto you casualty. It won't show off your ability, as much as distract the viewer. When people start to do makeup effects, it's easy to get carried away to try and show everyone what you are capable of. The appearance of real injuries however don't occur to impress anyone-they are just the result of damage to the body. Very often they look understated and less theatrical than their made-up equivalents.



5. Act the part

It is pointless to go to great lengths to make someone up to look like they have been in a serious accident, and have them smiling and sat in pristine clothes. If you hurt yourself badly (and you're still conscious), chances are you would act like you were hurt badly. Many a good makeup is undone by incompatible facial expression.

Have your casualty understand the injury they are wearing, and then make sure they know how to act appropriately. After all, your intention is make somebody look like they are a casualty- not like they are wearing casualty makeup.

So, remember to **reference**, **read up**, **give context**, **avoid excess** and **act the part**. Following these simple steps will add authenticity and realism to your casualty makeup and scenario. Whatever your reason for creating casualty simulation, make realism your priority.

Happy sticking!
Stuart



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