

Worksheet 7-8: Improving Observation Skills—Appearance and Hygiene

A client's personal appearance and hygiene could be an indicator of the client's self-image, mood, health, or cognitive status. *However, the mere presence of any unkempt/untidy factors listed in the answer table does not necessarily correlate to deficits in mental functions or social skills and does not necessarily need to be documented.* For example, a client coming to therapy directly from a landscaping or construction job may be wearing garments with large dirt stains or tears. You might even have once had a piece of spinach inadvertently stuck in your teeth! It is also important not to make value judgments based on one's personal fashion preferences, moral standards, or religious beliefs (Morreale & Borcharding, 2013). The occupational therapy practitioner must distinguish between factors, such as a client who may have a long beard to meet religious requirements versus a client who has suddenly stopped shaving due to depression, defiance against his parents' wishes, or not understanding a job's dress code. If a client arrives with make-up applied only to one side of face or with lipstick circling her nose, clinical reasoning will ascertain if these behaviors are influenced by particular deficits, such as left neglect or perhaps a psychotic episode. As another example, a teenager wearing flannel pajama pants at a coffee shop may consider himself fitting in with peers, whereas an 80-year-old adult would likely consider the teen's fashion choice as inappropriate for outside of the home. However, observations such as a client with disordered clothing, needle track marks, or a skeletal appearance may be quite noteworthy. Clinical judgment is always needed to determine behavior patterns, how your observations may be pertinent or significant to the client's present circumstances, and what should be noted in the client's chart.

Good Hygiene/Well-Groomed Appearance	Poor Hygiene or Health Factors, Unkempt/Untidy Appearance
Clean face and skin, no visible dirt or food particles present	Visible dirt or food on face/skin, presence of soap or make-up residue, strong body odor
Hair clean, combed, neatly styled	Hair greasy, dirty, uncombed, matted, presence of lice
Clean teeth, no food particles noted in mouth	Food particles stuck in teeth; gum disease; missing, discolored, or loose teeth
Clothing without wrinkles, neatly pressed, intact	Clothing wrinkled, torn, number/size of holes, presence of multiple lint balls, or large hanging threads/missing buttons
Clothing clean, without stains	Clothing unclean (i.e., has food, grass, or dirt stains; bugs)
Clothing fits properly	Clothing ill-fitting: described as inability to fasten buttons or zipper due to clothing not fitting, clothing several sizes too big, undergarments visible, skirt dragging on floor, etc.
Buttons lined up properly, fastenings closed, shoelaces tied	Fastenings open or misaligned, shoelaces untied or missing
Clothing right side out	Clothing disordered, inside out, or backward
Hat centered on head, socks pulled up	Hat worn backward or falling off, socks down to ankle
Clothing matches and is complete and appropriate for occasion, weather; attention to detail with accessories	Missing an item, such as a sock or shoe, clothing does not match or is not appropriate for weather or occasion.
Clean shaven, facial hair neatly trimmed	Stubble (i.e., several days facial hair growth), length of beard/mustache, blood present from shaving cuts
Make-up neatly applied	Make-up streaked; lipstick, eye liner, or shadow grossly uneven or beyond typical boundaries
Nails clean, neatly shaped, and polished	Visible dirt beneath nails, length or unevenness of nails, brittleness or fungus present
Smooth, intact skin	Flaky skin, rough/scaly patches, thick callous, open sores, acne, rash, presence of needle track marks, scars from self-mutilation/cutting, nicotine stains
Weight in proportion to height	Weight not in proportion to height (i.e., skeletal, morbidly obese), note specific weight and height
Other:	
Other:	