

Facial Cleansers and Skin Barrier Care

A practical guide to choosing and formulating gentle facial cleansers

by Joan Morais



Enzyme Cream Cleanser formulation example from the Pro Skin Course

IN THIS GUIDE

Explore the purpose of facial cleansing, the skin barrier, and five cleanser formats. Use the comparison chart and formulation checklist to connect ingredient choices with cleansing performance, rinsing, and skin comfort.

The goal is effective cleansing that leaves the skin comfortable and helps preserve its natural protective function.

Cleanse with the skin barrier in mind

A facial cleanser removes unwanted buildup while minimizing disruption to the skin. Choose the complete formulation around what it must remove and the needs of the person using it.

What a face cleanser does

Cleansers help remove dirt, excess sebum, makeup, and sunscreen. Surfactants help oily material mix with water so it can rinse away. Oil-rich cleansing systems use oils and emulsifiers to loosen residue and help disperse it during rinsing.

Preserve the natural protective lipids

The stratum corneum is the outermost skin layer. Its lipid matrix includes ceramides, cholesterol, and free fatty acids, which help regulate water loss. Removing excess surface oil should not require aggressive removal of the skin's protective lipids.

Harsh cleansing, hot water, or repeated scrubbing can contribute to dryness, tightness, and irritation. Oily skin also benefits from gentle cleansing. Assess comfort after rinsing and over repeated use.

Prepare for a serum or moisturizer

Removing surface residue gives a serum or moisturizer a clean surface to spread over and contact the skin. Absorption depends on the ingredient, finished formula, and skin condition. Apply products as directed; moisturizer on slightly damp skin can help retain moisture.

Build mildness into the complete formula

- Balance cleansing performance with the surfactant blend and concentration.
- Choose pH for the whole formula. A skin-like pH alone does not establish mildness.
- Evaluate the contribution of humectants and emollients in the finished rinse-off product.

FORMULATION NOTE

Texture and foam are sensory features. Confirm mildness through appropriate evaluation of the finished cleanser, including skin comfort and tolerance during its intended use.

Five cleanser formats at a glance

Use this chart to compare formats. The complete formula determines cleansing strength, skin suitability, and after-feel.

Format	How it works and what to check	Our learning example
Solid cleanser	Releases cleanser with water. Check cleansing strength, rinsing, hardness, and drying between uses.	Facial Cleansing Pods Facial Cleansing Pod LAB Class
Cleansing powder	Mixed with water immediately before use. Check particle texture, rubbing, and protection from moisture.	Cleansing Exfoliant Grounds Pro Skin Course
Gel cleanser	A gel-textured cleansing system. Check the surfactant blend, foam, viscosity, and comfort after rinsing.	Pore Clarifying Gel Cleanser Pro Skin Course
Enzyme cream cleanser	A creamy cleansing format with an exfoliation goal. Check the exfoliating system, stability, and skin tolerance.	Enzyme Cream Cleanser Pro Skin Course
Gel to milk cleanser	Transforms from gel to a milky emulsion with water. Check the transformation, cleansing, rinsing, and residue.	Plant Jelly Cleanser / Gel-To-Milk Pro Skin Course

FORMULATOR'S NOTES

- Solid cleansers: allow the product to dry between uses; keep it out of standing water.
- Powders: mix only the portion being used immediately and discard wet leftovers. Dry packaging is part of microbial protection.
- Enzymes, where used: follow supplier guidance for activity, pH, processing, and contact time. Verify performance in the finished formula.

Use the cleanser gently

Follow product directions, use lukewarm water and gentle fingertip massage, rinse thoroughly, and pat dry. Avoid unnecessary repeated washing or scrubbing. Follow with the next products in your routine.

Your cleanser formulation checklist

Use these checks when developing or comparing a facial cleanser.

- ☐ Define the skin needs and removal goal, including makeup, sunscreen, or excess sebum.
- ☐ Choose the cleansing system and concentration for effective cleansing and skin comfort.
- ☐ Confirm the pH, processing conditions, and compatibility of the full ingredient system.
- ☐ Assess texture, foam if relevant, rinsing, residue, and comfort during repeated intended use.
- ☐ Evaluate exfoliating particles or enzyme activity where relevant; consider skin tolerance.
- ☐ Assess microbial risk and protection, including moisture exposure during use of solids and powders.
- ☐ Complete appropriate stability, preservation, packaging, safety, and performance testing. Support product claims with relevant evidence.

LEARN TO FORMULATE

[Facial Cleansing Pod LAB Class](#) — learn a solid cleanser formulation.

[Professional Natural Skin Care Formulation Course](#) — explore Cleansing Exfoliant Grounds, Pore Clarifying Gel Cleanser, Enzyme Cream Cleanser, and Plant Jelly Cleanser / Gel-To-Milk.

CONTINUE READING

[The Sensitive Skin Guide](#)

[How to Support the Skin Barrier Through Cosmetic Formulation](#)

Educational formulation reference by Joan Morais. Follow supplier specifications and verify the preservation, stability, packaging compatibility, safety, performance, and claims of the finished product.