

HOW TO LAYER YOUR

Skincare



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— COSMETIC CLINIC —

How To Layer Your Skincare Products

As a general rule, layering your skincare products from thinnest to thickest is recommended. That means that the product with the thinnest consistency would go first (e.g. toner) and the product with the thickest consistency would go last (moisturiser).

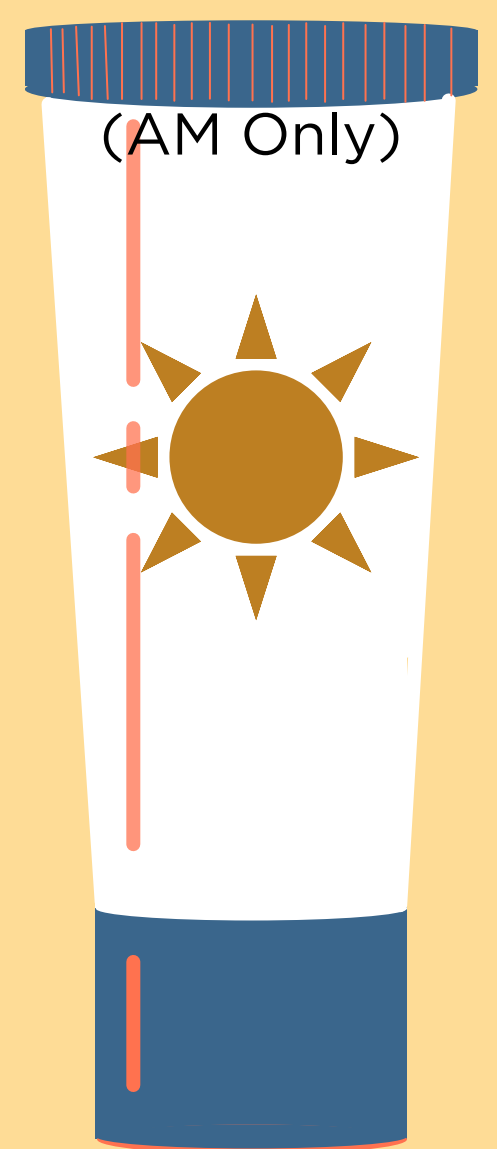
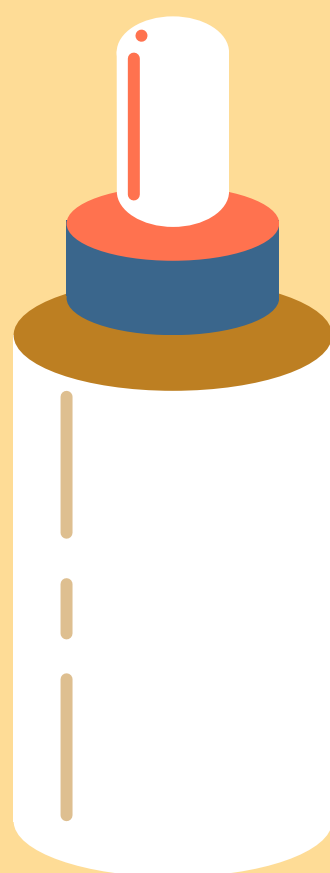
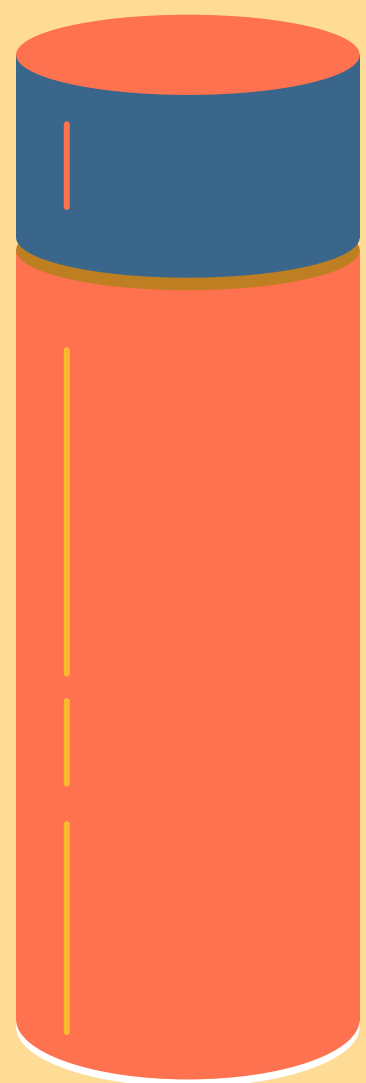
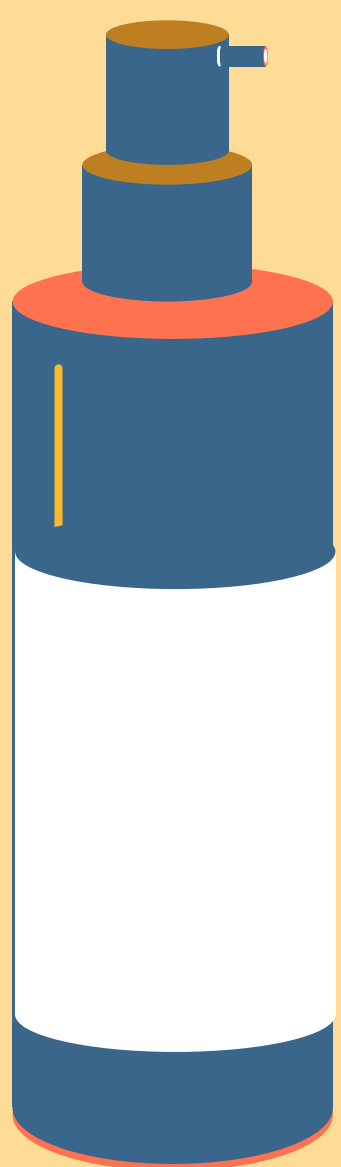
For example:

1. Cleanser
2. Toner (optional)
3. Serum (optional)
4. Moisturiser
5. Sunscreen (AM only)

THINNEST

To

THICKEST



1. CLEANSER

2. TONER

3. SERUM

4. MOISTURISER

5. SUNSCREEN

In reality, as long as all your skincare products can penetrate your skin (i.e. you're not trying to apply a water-based serum over an occlusive moisturiser), the order that you apply them doesn't matter too much.

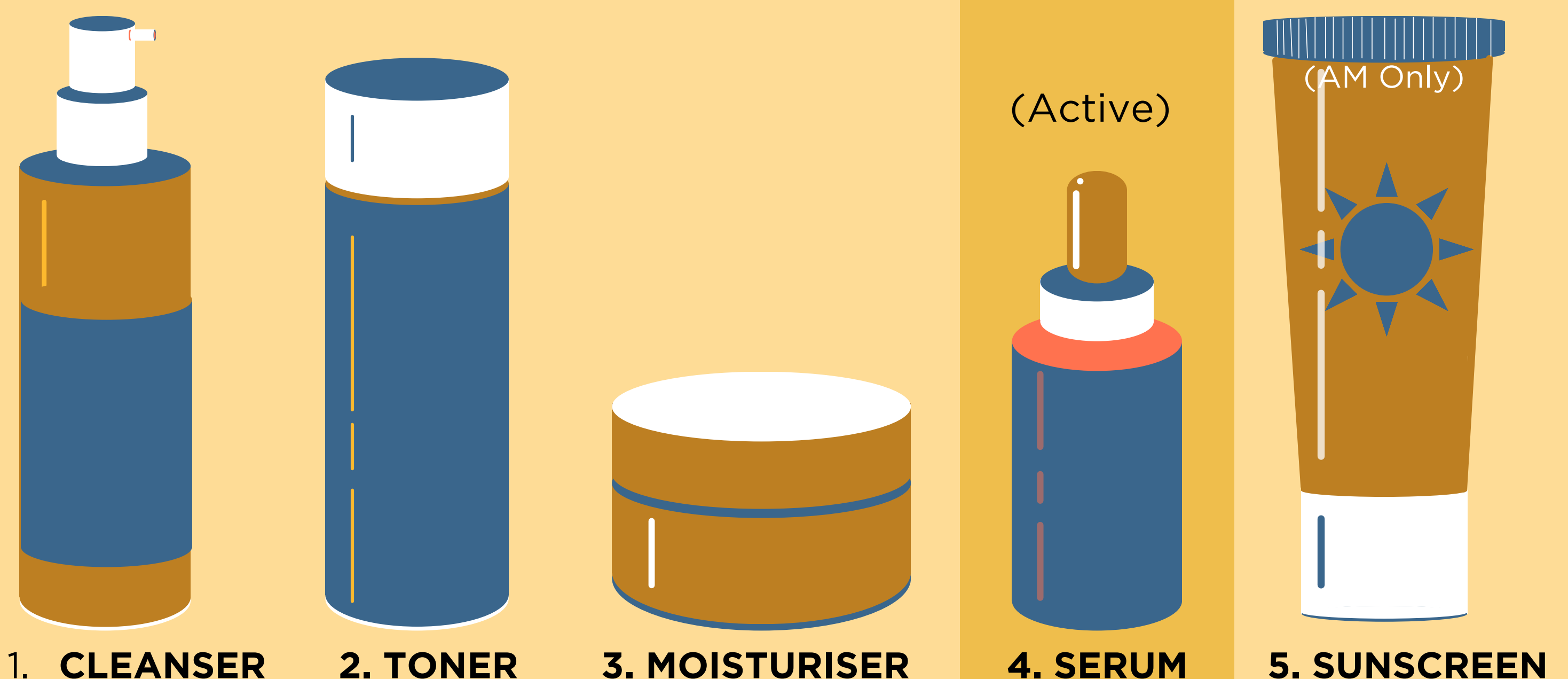
The only exceptions being cleanser, which should go first so you don't wash off all the products you've just applied (exception = short contact therapy), and sunscreen, which should be the last step in your AM routine.

While "thinnest-to-thickest" is the most recommended way to apply your products (and the easiest to remember) there are other layering techniques that you may wish to consider, like buffering, sandwiching, and short-contact therapy.

Buffering

Buffering generally refers to applying your moisturizer before an active ingredient in order to reduce the irritation potential of that active ingredient. It's often used to reduce irritation from acids and retinoids.

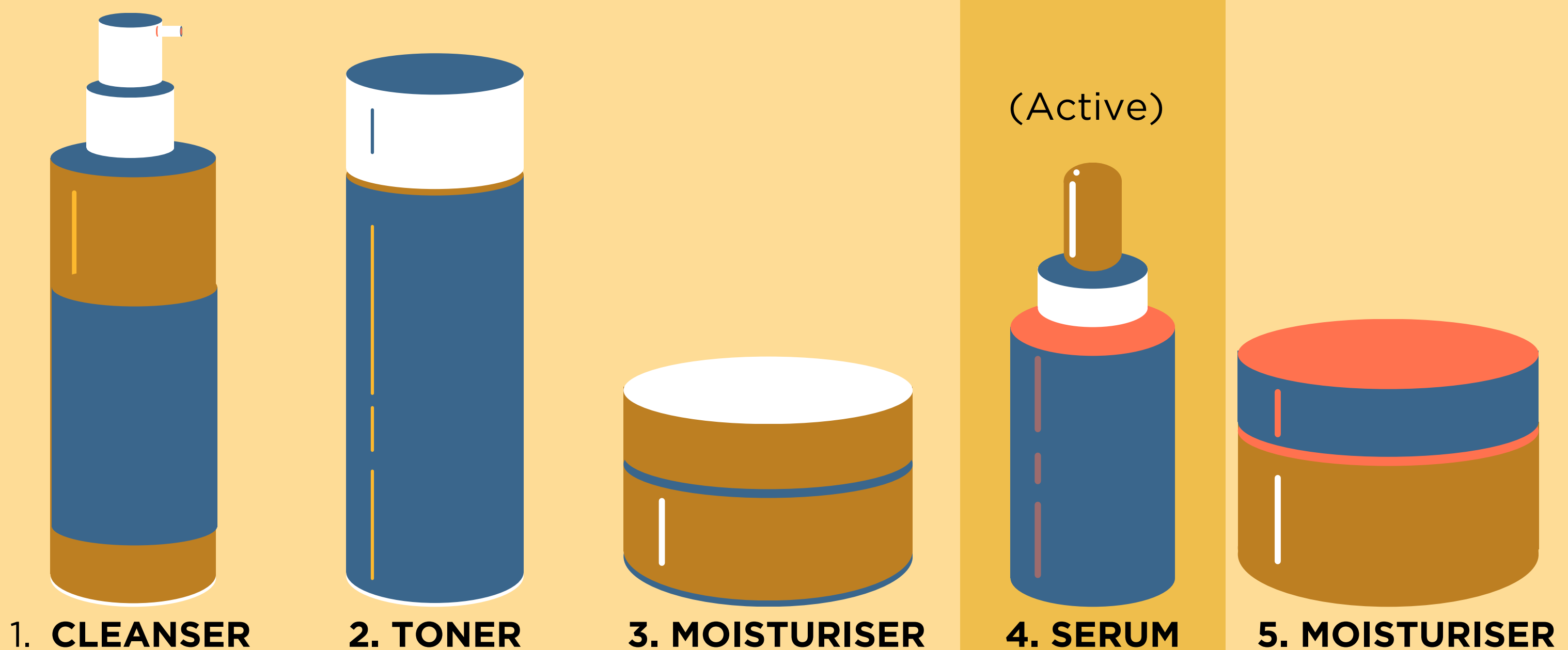
The idea is that it slows skin penetration. However, when your skin is well hydrated it may also be easier for active ingredients to penetrate (e.g. damp skin vs dry skin)



Sandwiching

Sandwiching is similar to buffering but you apply a moisturiser before and after your active ingredient. Again, it's usually used for actives that can cause skin irritation like acids and retinoids.

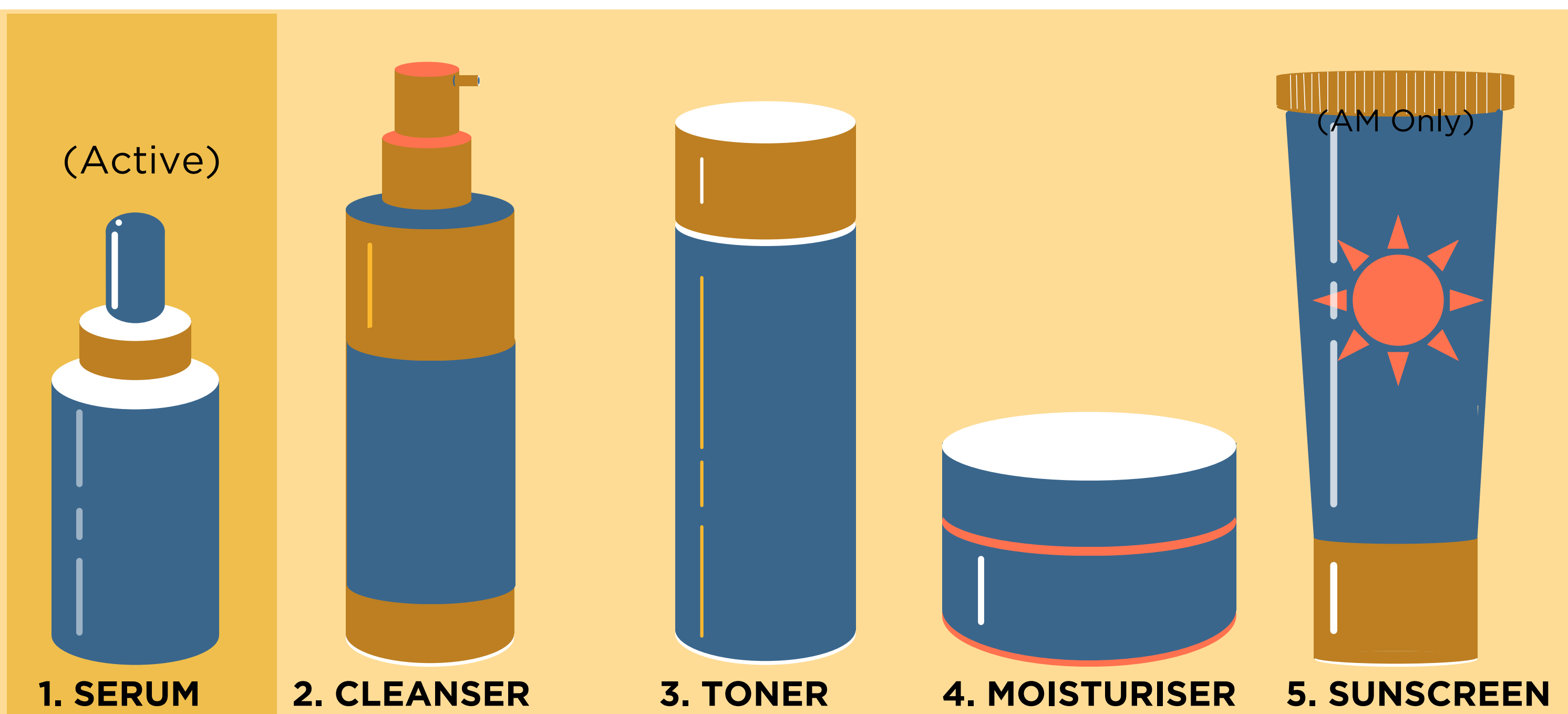
It can be a useful option if you have very dry and/or sensitive skin.



Short-Contact Therapy

Short contact therapy is where you apply an active ingredient, leave it on for a set amount of time (e.g. 5 mins) then rinse it off. It can be a wash-off mask, at-home peel, or a cleanser with an active that are designed to be washed off after a certain amount of time. However, you can apply the same principle to any irritating active ingredient - particularly if you're prone to skin irritation.

SHORT CONTACT THERAPY



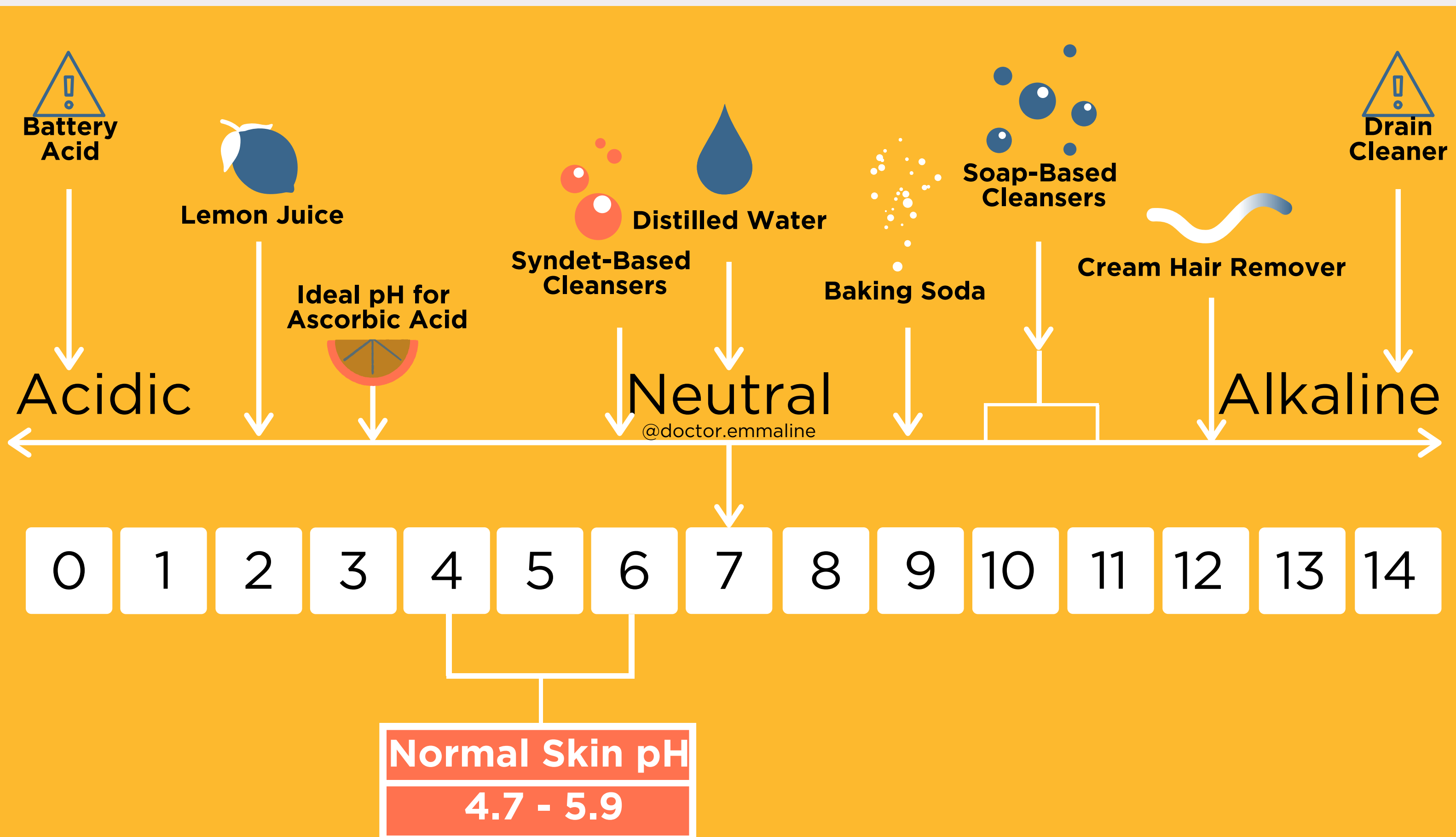
The Biggest Myths Surrounding Skincare Layering

You've probably heard many different 'rules' about which skincare ingredients you can and can't combine. The most common myths include:

- Skincare ingredients with different pH's shouldn't be combined as they will cancel each other out.
- Niacinamide can't be combined with acids as it will convert to niacin/nicotinic acid and cause facial flushing (niacin flush).

In reality, the only reason you may want to avoid combining skincare ingredients is if using the ingredients together is going to increase your risk of skin irritation.

Are Differing pH's An Issue?



First things first, your skin's natural surface pH is slightly acidic with a pH level anywhere between 4.7 - 6.0. Any skincare product you apply to your skin has to adjust to this pH and is usually formulated with this in mind.

When you hear people talk about differing pH levels in skincare, it's usually a misunderstanding about how skin care product formulation works. For example, a glycolic acid or vitamin C (as ascorbic acid) product will be more effective if the formula has a pH of 3.5 or less, NOT if your skin has a pH of 3.5 or less.

Any skincare ingredient that has a similar pH to your skin (e.g. niacinamide, retinol) won't make acidic products, like glycolic acid and vitamin C, any less effective than your own skin would.

The issue of pH differences only becomes a problem when formulating products that contain niacinamide and glycolic acid together.

Can You Use Niacinamide With Acids?

Niacin may be as effective as niacinamide, but it activates your skin's immune system (Langerhan cells) which leads to the release of substances (prostaglandins) that increase inflammation and blood flow to your skin.

This facial reddening is often referred to as 'niacin flush' and can cause an uncomfortable or tingling sensation.

Many people avoid layering niacinamide and acids for this reason. However, niacinamide is a very stable ingredient and it takes a very low pH, a very high heat, and a long time to convert niacinamide to niacin in laboratory experiments.

So, again, this is more of an issue when it comes to multi-ingredient product formulation than with layering niacinamide and glycolic acid together. If you're worried about niacin flush, be careful when using skincare products that contain niacinamide and glycolic acid in the same formula.

However, if you are layering niacinamide and acids together as two separate products, then it's unlikely you need to worry.

Skincare Ingredients That May Increase The Risk of Irritation When Combined

Some skincare ingredients can cause irritation and skin sensitivity and should be layered with caution - especially if you have sensitive skin or a damaged skin barrier.

Examples of skincare ingredients that commonly cause irritation include:

- Retinoids
- AHAs
- BHAs
- Vitamin C (as Ascorbic Acid)
- Kojic Acid
- Benzoyl Peroxide

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and product formulation will play a huge role in how irritating a skincare ingredient is. As will the overall condition of your skin.

These ingredients should also be introduced one at a time into your skincare routine.

Skincare Ingredients That Will Rarely Cause An Issue When Combined

In contrast to the above, some skincare ingredients are very unlikely to cause skin irritation and can actually help prevent it. This is mainly the case for soothing and hydrating ingredients like:

- Hyaluronic Acid
- Centella Asiatica
- Beta Glucan
- Panthenol
- Niacinamide (at lower %'s)
- Vitamin E
- Ceramides

It's unlikely that you would experience any irritation even if you layered all of these ingredients one after the other (product formulation depending).

Layering Issues - Damp vs Dry Skin

Another concern about layering skincare ingredients surrounds how each ingredient should ideally be used. For example, irritating active ingredients, like retinol and glycolic acid, should ideally be applied to dry skin while humectants, like hyaluronic acid, are ideally applied to damp skin and followed with an moisturiser/occlusive.

So for example, if you were looking to layer hyaluronic acid and glycolic acid you might be concerned about how to layer them while following these 'rules.'

The main reason that you are advised to use irritating ingredients, like glycolic acid, on dry skin rather than damp skin is because damp skin is more permeable – meaning that skincare ingredients find it easier to penetrate your skin's barrier.

That's great for most skincare ingredients, isn't it? After all, easier penetration means increased effectiveness, right?

Right! Except, increased effectiveness also means increased risk of irritation.

Humectants, like hyaluronic acid, aren't irritating and, because they draw water into your skin, the damper your skin the better!

It's particularly important to apply humectants to damp skin if you live in a dry climate. This is because they can only draw water from your environment if there is plenty of moisture in the air (a humid climate).

If there isn't much moisture on the surface of your skin or in your surrounding environment, humectants can only draw moisture from your dermis.

In most cases, this isn't a problem – your dermis has plenty of moisture to spare. However, if all the moisture being pulled from your dermis isn't locked in with a thicker moisturiser, it can escape from your epidermis and leave you with dehydrated skin.

So how can you get around the damp vs dry skin issue?
(let's use the example of hyaluronic acid and glycolic acid)

1. If your skin is not easily irritated, you could apply hyaluronic acid onto your skin that's damp after cleansing, then apply your glycolic acid and follow with a moisturiser.
2. If you're using a glycolic acid toner, you could apply that to your dry face, use a facial mist to add moisture, then apply your hyaluronic acid and lock it all in with a moisturiser.
3. If you have sensitive skin, you could look for a moisturiser that contains glycolic acid (you may even be able to find one that has both hyaluronic acid AND glycolic acid – which brings us onto point number 4...)
4. You could use a product that combines both ingredients for you.
5. You could use a glycolic acid serum AFTER your moisturiser – yes, that's right, active ingredients will still work if applied after moisturizer – this also has a 'buffering' effect which can help reduce skin irritation.

Can you *layer them together?*

INGREDIENT + INGREDIENT = CAN YOU LAYER?

Niacinamide + Salicylic Acid = **Yes**

- ### WHY?
- Act synergistically together to improve acne, oiliness, and enlarged pores
 - pH differences only really an issue when it comes to formulation (salicylic acid still effective at higher pH levels anyway)
 - Niacinamide is very stable and unlikely to convert to nicotinic acid (niacin flush unlikely)

Benzoyl Peroxide + Retinoids = **It Depends**

- Benzoyl peroxide breaks down into benzoic acid and oxygen when it's applied to skin.
- Most retinoids are unstable and easily degraded by air/oxygen
- Use at separate times of day instead.
- Adapalene is stable and fine to layer with BPO
- Encapsulated retinol & tretinoin may also be unaffected

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Retinol + AHAs = **With Caution**

- Retinol and AHAs act synergistically together to improve certain skin conditions BUT there is a very high risk of skin irritation and skin barrier damage.
- Only use in a multi-ingredient product and avoid this combo if you're a beginner or have sensitive skin.

Niacinamide + Vitamin C = **Yes**

- May act synergistically together to improve pigmentation and signs of aging.
- pH differences only an issue when it comes to formulation
- Niacinamide is very stable and unlikely to convert to nicotinic acid (niacin flush unlikely)

Skincare Ingredients That Work

better together

INGREDIENT	+	INGREDIENT	=	SKIN BENEFIT	WHY
Niacinamide	+	Salicylic Acid	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves Acne Reduces Pore Size 	Both reduce sebum production. Niacinamide reduces surface sebum levels and salicylic acid reduces sebum levels within the pore.
Green Tea	+	Caffeine	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antioxidant UVB Protection Improves Acne 	Caffeine enhances the antioxidant effects of green tea polyphenols to boost their free radical fighting ability.
Vitamin C	+	Vitamin E	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antioxidant Increases Collagen Production 	Vitamin C replenishes Vitamin E, increasing its antioxidant capacity. Vitamin E increases the action of Vitamin C four-fold (4x).
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Centella Asiatica	+	Vitamin C	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases Collagen Production 	Both increase collagen production two-fold (2x) on their own but three-fold (3x) when combined together.
N-Acetyl Glucosamine	+	Niacinamide	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces Pigmentation 	NAG prevents melanin production, while niacinamide prevents the spread of existing melanin.
Niacinamide	+	Retinol	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases Skin Cell Turnover Reduces Irritation 	Niacinamide increases skin hydration and strengthens the skin's barrier which helps prevent irritation from retinol & increases SCT.
Retinol	+	AHAs	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves Acne 	In certain products the combination of retinol & AHA improves acne without irritation & enhances effects of other acne treatments..
Niacinamide	+	Hyaluronic Acid	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased Skin Hydration 	Niacinamide increases ceramide production and strengthens your skin barrier while hyaluronic acid increases hydration within your skin cells.
Azelaic Acid	+	Retinol	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves Acne Improves Pigmentation 	AA can enhance the effects of retinol when used to treat acne. Both were better at treating pigmentation when used together than either were when used alone.
Niacinamide	+	Azelaic Acid	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves Acne Improves Pigmentation 	Azelaic acid inhibits tyrosinase to prevent melanin production while niacinamide prevents the melanin that does get produced from spreading to skin cells.

Glycolic Acid	+	Hyaluronic Acid	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hydrates Skin Reduces Irritation 	Hyaluronic acid can help prevent the irritation commonly experienced with glycolic acid via its hydrating effects.
Vitamin C	+	Azelaic Acid	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces Pigmentation 	Both inhibit tyrosinase and may enhance each others effects when used together.
Niacinamide	+	Benzoyl Peroxide	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves Acne Reduces Irritation 	Niacinamide increases skin hydration and strengthens the skin's barrier which helps prevent irritation from BPO.
Benzoyl Peroxide	+	Adapalene	=	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves Acne Improves Acne Scarring 	Adapalene's not easily degraded by air like other retinoids and is fine to use with BPO. Research suggests that this is an effective combo for treating pitted acne scars.

INGREDIENT

INGREDIENT

INGREDIENT

WHY

Ceramides	+	Cholesterol	+	Fatty Acids	=	<p>Better Skin Hydration</p> <p>A complete mixture of all three needs to be applied in order to repair skin barrier function and improve skin hydration.</p>
Green Tea	+	Caffeine	+	Resveratrol	=	<p>Reduced Facial Redness</p> <p>Each have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects which are boosted, and have shown to reduce facial redness, when combined together.</p>
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Vitamin C	+	Vitamin E	+	Ferulic Acid	=	<p>Increased Antioxidant Activity</p> <p>Vitamin E increases the action of Vitamin C four-fold (4x). When ferulic acid is also included, the action of vitamin C is increased eight-fold (8x).</p>
Centella Asiatica	+	Vitamin C	+	Glycolic Acid	=	<p>Increased Collagen Production</p> <p>Each increase collagen production two-fold (2x) on their own, three-fold (3x) when two are combined together and four-fold (4x) when all three are combined together.</p>
N-Acetyl Glucosamine	+	Niacinamide	+	Azelaic Acid	=	<p>Reduced Pigmentation</p> <p>NAG prevents tyrosinase maturation, while azelaic acid reduces the activity of tyrosinase (preventing melanin production). Niacinamide then prevents the spread of existing melanin.</p>