

Working in a Nail Salon*

Vuong Cao



BEFORE YOU READ: Have you ever been to a nail salon? How much did it cost? Did you leave a tip? How do you think the nail technician gets paid?

My Job Closed at First

I'm a nail technician, and my job has changed a lot as a result of Covid-19. I still remember on March 13, 2020, when we had to lockdown for four to six weeks to try to control the pandemic. For many reasons, that was a terrible time for me, but worst

of all: I couldn't go to work because the governor ordered all non-essential businesses to close.

Then We Re-Opened

The nail salon reopened in May, but the job feels different. The main problem is that I have very few customers. I used to have 20-30 customers every day; now I have fewer than ten a day. Some days, we have no customers at all. Because I get paid per customer, there are many days when I make very little money.

The other problem is that I am constantly worried about being exposed to the virus because I am in close contact with clients, and I handle items (like cash) that could carry germs. Even though I wear a mask or face shield at all times, there is still the risk of infection. Most clients come into the nail salon with a mask. However, some clients enter the nail salon without masks, and they feel angry when we ask them to wear one. One time, a client yelled that he would not wear a mask because he thought he wasn't sick and he didn't need to wear it. I was scared of him because he was so mean. Finally, he left angrily.

How Do You Get Paid?

Salary – You get paid a certain amount. That amount stays the same even if you work more than your regular hours.

Per hour – You get paid for the hours you work plus time-and-a-half if you work more than 40 hours in a week.

Per “gig” – You get paid per client or per delivery or per piece. Your pay is not connected to how many hours you work.

* Two versions of this article are available: advanced intermediate (pp. 8-9) and beginner (p. 7).

Still Hoping to Be Able to Support My Family Again

I hope everyone can be vaccinated soon so that everything can go back to normal. When that happens, I should be able to earn more money. Before the pandemic, I earned enough money to help my family out. Since Covid, I have not been able to help my family as much. I will feel better if I can help my family more.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What has the pandemic been like for Vuong? Share at least three specific details of his experience.
2. Study the yellow box on p. 8. What kind of a worker is Vuong? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the different ways of getting paid? Learn more by doing your own research online or by interviewing people you know. Use the grid below to organize your thoughts.



HaLaVuong Cao has been taking ESL and GED classes at the Fort Smith Education Center in Fort Smith, Arkansas, since he emigrated from Vietnam in May 2019. He is grateful for the opportunities he has had to learn and make friends at school.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Salary		
Per hour		
Per "gig"		