The **cuticle** is the outer covering. The scales of the cuticle may vary in number (how many there are), how much they protrude from the surface, and how they overlap. The shape and the cuticles of some species' hairs may contain pigment (color). The thickness of the cuticle may vary as much as 20 microns, which is important in distinguishing between hairs of different species and different people.

The **cortex** varies in thickness, texture, and color. The color and shape provide a more important way of distinguishing between hairs of different species but are often not useful in distinguishing between a human and a human. The cortex contains pigment granules. These give hair its color. The cortex is also usually continuous, while the medulla is not.

The **medulla** is a hollow tube that runs the length of the hair. In most cases it is present, sometimes it is fragmented. Sometimes the medulla is not continuous. In some cases it is fragmented or no medulla at all. Among Asians, medulla is usually present in all hairs, except for the Asian race human head hairs. Animal hair has a characteristically thicker medulla and cuticle than in a human, since their hair is their means of warmth.