

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

How to Paint Level 5 Smooth Wall

What is Level 5 Smooth Wall?

Drywall finishes come in many textured styles including knockdown, orange peel and other visual affects. Textured drywall surfaces not only enhance the decorative beauty of an interior wall, but can more easily hide and blend any minor surface imperfections making for a more uniform looking finish when painted.

Level 5 smooth wall, as described in the most recent version of *GA 214-10: Recommended Levels of Gypsum Board Finish*, is an installation that requires all joints and interior angles have tape applied and embedded in joint compound. The walls are then coated with an additional skim coat to further hide any tape lines or fasteners. The skim coated wall is sanded to a near perfect, smooth finish. Because there is no textured effect to break up the smooth surface area, critical lighting situations present uniformity challenges in higher sheen paints.

Additionally, some drywall compounds used as a skim coat to prepare the smooth surface are pigment rich. A pigment rich drywall compound provides for very easy sanding, but can fracture when masking tape and plastic sheeting is used to protect painted surfaces. In essence, the adhesion of the tape, when pulled, is stronger than the cohesive strength of the drywall skim coat. The result is the appearance of poor paint adhesion, when in fact it is the skim coat that has fractured, and is being pulled from the surface.

Best practices and tips when painting level 5 smooth wall:

1. Properly dust and wipe drywall surface to remove excessive sanding dust. If skim coated wall continues to dust while attempting to wipe clean, the compound used is likely pigment rich and will require special attention. An oil-based drywall primer/sealer is the best choice if allowable.
2. When applying a water-based primer/sealer, thin the material with (10%) clean water to improve the primer's penetration. By penetrating more easily into the skim coat, the primer actually serves as the binder to help reinforce the cohesive strength of the compound.
3. When possible, recommend a dead-flat top coat to minimize any sheen uniformity issues resulting from critical lighting situations, especially on high ceilings.
4. If any taping and plastic sheeting are needed to protect painted skim coated walls, allow the primed and top-coated drywall surface to cure for seven days prior to applying any type of tape. For best results, use only 3M 2080 Scotch Blue Painter's Tape.

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