

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Levels of Drywall Finishes

Paint is only as good as the substrate upon which it is applied. Because of this, an industry standard was adopted, with five levels of drywall finishing identified to ensure requirements are met before the final decoration is applied. There are key factors to consider with all levels of finishes, including job location, type and angle of surface illumination, and type of paint and methods of application to be used. Gypsum board or drywall finishes are rated level 0 to level 5 and are briefly described as follows:

Level 0 — Used in temporary construction or if a final coating is undetermined. No taping, finishing or corner beads are required. See *Figure 1*.

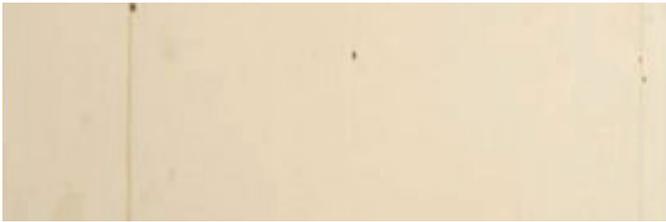


Figure 1

Level 1 — Recommended in areas that would generally be concealed from view or in areas that are not open to the public (examples: areas above ceilings, in attics or in-service corridors). Joint tape need not be covered with joint compound to fulfill the requirement of Level 1 finish. With level 1, the surface is left free of excess joint compound. In addition, ridges and tool marks are acceptable. See *Figure 2*.



Figure 2

Level 2 — Used in garages, warehouse storage areas and other similar areas where the final surface appearance is not of primary importance. Level 2 may be specified where moisture-resistant gypsum board is used as a substrate for tile. All joints and interior angles must be embedded in the joint compound and wiped with a joint knife leaving a thin coating of joint compound on all joints and interior angles. Joint compound is applied on all fastener heads and beads. The surface is left free of excess joint compound and ridges, and tool marks are acceptable for a Level 2 finish. Joint compound applied over the body of the tape at the time of tape embedment shall be considered a separate coat of joint compound. See *Figure 3*.



Figure 3

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Levels of Drywall Finishes

Level 3 — Typically used in areas to be decorated with a medium or heavy texture (hand or spray-applied) or where heavy-grade wall coverings will become the final decoration. This level of finish should not be used when smooth-painted surfaces or lightweight wallcoverings are specified. All joints and interior angles must have tape embedded in the joint compound and shall be immediately wiped with a joint knife or trowel, leaving a thin coating on all the joints and interior angles. One additional coat of joint compound shall be applied on all joints and interior angles. Fastener heads and accessories shall be covered with two separate coats of joint compound. All joints compound must be free of tool marks and ridges. Before final decorating, it is recommended that the prepared surface be coated with a drywall primer prior to the application of the final finishes. See *Figure 4*.



Figure 4

Level 4 — If the final decoration is to be a flat paint, light texture or light-weight wall covering, a Level 4 finish is recommended. All joints and interior angles must have embedded tape in the joint compound and shall be immediately wiped with a joint knife, leaving a thin coat of joint compound on all joints and interior angles. Two separate coats of joint compound shall be applied on flat joints, and one separate coat of joint compound shall be applied on interior angles. Fastener heads and accessories must be covered with three separate coats of joint compound. All joint compounds shall be smooth and free of tool marks and ridges. It is recommended that the prepared surface be coated with a drywall primer prior to application of the final finishes. In severe lighting areas, flat paints applied on light texture tend to reduce joint photographing, a defect in drywall taping and finishing that leaves the outline of the joint tape or joint tape edge visible on the finished surface. Paints with sheen levels other than flat, as well as enamel paints, are not recommended on this finish. Special attention should be paid to long corridors, large areas of wall and large/multiple windows when specifying Level 4, as these are potential areas of concern in achieving acceptable wall finishes and may need to be specified appropriately. See *Figure 5*.



Figure 5

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Levels of Drywall Finishes

Level 5 — The Level 5 finish is required to achieve the highest degree of quality by providing a uniform surface and minimizing the possibility of joint photography and/or fasteners showing through the final decorating. Level 5 is recommended for areas where severe lighting conditions exist and areas that are to receive gloss, semi-gloss, enamels or non-textured flat paints. Level 5 requires all the operations of a Level 4. Additionally, a thin skim coat of joint compound or material manufactured, especially for this purpose, is applied to the entire surface. Refer to the Technical Bulletin for 'How to paint Level 5 Smooth Wall'. A skim coat of joint compound is intended to conceal small imperfections in joints and on the surface of the gypsum board, as well as help conceal joints and create the appearance of flatness. A skim coat will also smooth the texture of the paper, minimize differences in surface porosity and create a more uniform surface to which the final decoration can be applied. See **Figure 6**.



Figure 6

Note that a Level 3 finish is the minimum requirement to achieve what may be considered a paintable surface. Consider these additional facts when painting drywall and have a clear knowledge of the level of drywall finish before proceeding with final decoration. Deep and dark colors should be avoided in high-traffic areas, as they are prone to marking. Flat paints hide imperfections and high gloss paints show imperfections. Latex primers are flat in appearance, while deficiencies in the drywall surface can be hard to detect, particularly under low light conditions.

Follow Us



DUNN-EDWARDS CORPORATION

4885 East 52ND Place, Los Angeles, CA 90058
(888) DE PAINT (337-2468) | dunnedwards.com

Dunn-Edwards® and The #1 Choice of Painting Professionals® are registered trademarks of the Dunn-Edwards Corporation.
©2019 Dunn-Edwards Corporation. All rights reserved. 08/19



THE #1 CHOICE OF
PAINTING PROFESSIONALS®