

FINISHING & DECORATING GYPSUM PANELS

IMPROVING CONTRACTOR SUCCESS

The growth of sustainable building design in high value spaces elevates benchmarks for achieving quality at the jobsite. While these environments use natural and critical lighting and higher-sheen/gloss paint to help reduce energy costs, their specifications can present challenges to the drywall construction trade. The following industry best practices, balanced by selecting appropriate finishing products, can help improve finishing success. However, these practices can also help manage expectations of owners, builders and design professionals and reduce potential callbacks that delay building schedules and impair profitability.

JOBSITE STANDARD SPECIFICATIONS

Best practices for aesthetic and performance benchmarks include establishing and demonstrating an approved finishing system. USG recommends the industry follow the Gypsum Association's *Recommended Levels of Finish for Gypsum Board, Glass Mat, and Fiber-Reinforced Gypsum Panels* (GA-214).

JOBSITE MOCK-UP

A jobsite mock-up is required for all appearance areas finished to a Level 3, 4 or 5 as described in GA-214, Section IV Levels of Finish. The design professional shall specify the mock-up procedure and mock-up construction details within the project documents unless waived in writing.

Where specified, the mock-up shall be of sufficient size to represent the requirements found in the specified Level of Finish, the location within the building, and may include texture and/or other decorative finishes such as a final paint, wall covering, trim, or other wall treatments. Lighting conditions representative of those present when the building is occupied (natural or artificial) should be incorporated into the mock-up details.

The completed mock-up shall provide a visual project standard that will enable the architect, general contractor, sub-contractor, and building owner to agree upon the final appearance prior to beginning any widespread finish work.

INSPECTION CRITERIA

These criteria are applicable both to the jobsite mockup and to the finished project. The normal viewing position shall be at a minimum distance of five (5) feet (1.5 m) perpendicular from the surface and viewed at any angle. Inspection lighting conditions are described as those in place when the project is finished. This includes, but is not limited to; design lighting (e.g. wall washers, spots and floods, etc.) and natural lighting. Consideration shall be given to window treatment and/or any other decorative finishes that could affect lighting and viewing. Details regarding inspection methods and procedures can be found in Drywall Finishing Council literature, *Method For Inspecting Interior Joint Treated Gypsum Panel Surfaces*.

Note: Adhesive masking tape manufacturers offer a wide range of masking products for different surfaces each having their own specific application guidelines. For more information, contact the masking tape manufacturer.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Controlling and maintaining environmental conditions is key to minimizing potential problems during finishing and decorating operations. Temperature, humidity and airflow should remain constant, and match occupancy conditions as closely as possible. Uncontrolled environmental conditions, (i.e., changes and/or fluctuations in temperature, humidity and airflow) can have a profoundly adverse effect on system performance.

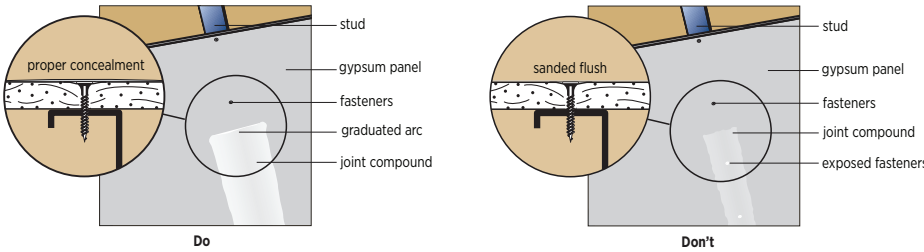
PROPER CONCEALMENTS

Using fill and finish coats of joint compound to properly conceal gypsum panel joints, fasteners and trim makes it impossible to achieve a flat plane on a finished surface. However, a properly finished gypsum panel wall can minimize the appearance of joints, fasteners and trims. Finishing and properly concealing joints and fasteners rely on two techniques: (1) using graduated arcs to prevent recesses or ridges, and (2) not applying joint compound flush or flat to the panel surface.

**JOBSITE STANDARD SPECIFICATIONS
CONT.**

PROPER CONCEALMENTS

Recesses or ridges can result in distinct shadows in critical light or other adverse visual conditions. Applying joint compound flush or flat to the surface does not properly conceal the panel and increases the likelihood of joints and fasteners showing through the decorated finish.



SANDING

To minimize sanding apply joint compound over joints, fasteners and accessories as smoothly or without defects as possible. Once the joint treatment phase is complete and the joint compound is thoroughly dry, some sanding of the joint compound may be required. Note: DO NOT sand compound flush to panel surface as this will expose areas previously concealed. When sanding areas finished with joint compound avoid roughening the panel face paper. Roughened paper contains raised fibers that are conspicuous after painting. If the paper is roughened accidentally, repair the damage by applying a small amount of joint compound with a broadknife. Avoid using excessively coarse or larger-sized abrasive media (or grit) that may leave visible scratches in the joint compound after painting. Remove all sanding dust prior to applying any surface treatments.

WET SANDING

Wet sanding with a damp sponge is the preferred alternative to conventional dry sanding, especially when minimal sanding is required. Note: Wet sanding methods are not intended to remove large amounts of joint compound or compensate for poorly finished joints. Wet sanding produces no dust, which may eliminate the need to use a dust collector or respirator. It requires minimal clean-up and is less likely to scuff or damage the gypsum panel face or surface. Wet sanded areas may be more easily concealed with paint finishes than dry sanded areas.

DRY SANDING

Either manual or power equipment can be used for dry sanding, which uses abrasive-faced material to remove joint compound from gypsum panel joints, fasteners and trims. Sanding materials with abrasive media or grit sized as fine as possible, but which still allow an acceptable sanding rate are preferred. There are three major types of sanding materials: sand paper, mesh, and film; all offer a variety of grades. Good results can be achieved by using 150-grit sandpaper or finer; 220-grit abrasive-mesh or finer; 80µm (micron) sanding film or finer. When dry sanding, USG recommends using a sanding tool equipped with a HEPA vacuum to remove dust.

**SURFACE TREATMENT FOR PAPER
FACED GYPSUM PANELS**

Option A: Primer-Surfacer

For best results, apply USG Sheetrock® Brand Tuff-Hide™ Primer-Surfacer over a properly concealed GA-214 Level 4 Gypsum Panel Finish.

Note: Where glass-mat and fiber-reinforced gypsum panels are installed, one or two skim coats of joint compound may be required before application of USG Sheetrock® Brand Tuff-Hide™ Primer-Surfacer in order to achieve an acceptable appearance. Jobsite mock-ups shall be used to determine acceptance of the finish within the building. See Jobsite Mock-Up requirement.

Option B: Skim Coat & Primer

Apply a skim coat of conventional weight USG Sheetrock® Brand All Purpose Joint Compound over a properly concealed GA-214 Level 4 Gypsum Panel Finish. Apply a coat of USG Sheetrock® Brand First Coat™ Primer over the entire surface prior to the application of decorative finishes.

SURFACE TREATMENT FOR PAPER FACED GYPSUM PANELS CONT.

SKIM COATING

Do not use USG Sheetrock® Brand Topping Joint Compound or other specialty finishing compounds, or any powder joint compounds (drying or setting types) as a skim coat material (See Skim Coating below for details).

NOTE: Where glass-mat and fiber-reinforced gypsum panels are installed, two separate skim coats of joint compound may be required before application of USG Sheetrock® Brand First Coat™ Primer in order to achieve an acceptable appearance.

Jobsite mock-ups shall be used to determine acceptance of the finish within the building. See Jobsite Mock-Up requirement.

Under critical lighting conditions, fasteners, gypsum panels and joints may be visible when decorated using non-flat paints or finishes with sheen/gloss. This is caused by a difference between the surface texture of the gypsum panel face and the smoothed and finished joint compound. Sanding the panel face may also raise the nap of the panel surface and accentuate this difference. Skim coating the entire surface will minimize these imperfections.

Purpose: The best method to prepare any gypsum drywall surface for painting is to apply a skim coat of joint compound. This leaves a film thick enough to fill imperfections in the joint work, smooth the paper texture and provide a uniform surface for decorating. There is no specific mil thickness that constitutes a proper skim coat.

The objective of the application is to achieve total coverage of the entire surface with the skim coat. This is typically accomplished by delivering the compound to the surface and using a drywall broad knife to force the compound into the surface pores and imperfections, immediately shearing off excess compound from the surface. A skim coat will not approximate a plastered surface. Once the skim coat dries, the gypsum panel surface may show through and the treated joints, filled voids and spotted fastener heads will likely be visible.

Skim coating with joint compound: Use any USG Sheetrock® Brand ready-mix all purpose joint compound. When properly prepared as a skim coating material, the all-purpose joint compound can be used in a skim coating operation. Do not use any USG ready-mix specialty products such as Taping, Topping, Finishing, or any powder joint compound (drying and setting type) as a skim coating material.

Skim Coat Material: A properly prepared skim coat material is described as having a "trowelable consistency," with the intent that the viscosity of the joint compound such that it can be applied by a trowel or broadknife. Other tools may be used to deliver the skim coat material to the wall surface so long as the "trowelable consistency" is maintained.

Skim Coat Operation: When applying a skim coat, cover the entire surface with joint compound. Then, immediately shear-off excess compound using a drywall broad knife to force compound into surface pores and imperfections. The skim coat should be installed at trowel-applied consistency and allowed to dry thoroughly before lightly sanding any minor imperfections. Once the surface is smooth and free of tool marks and ridges, lightly brush to remove sanding dust. A skim coat will not approximate a plastered surface. Additional factors not covered in this publication may also affect the finished appearance of any surface.

PRODUCT INFORMATION

See usg.com for the most up-to-date product information.

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SAFETY FIRST!

Follow good safety and industrial hygiene practices during handling and installation of all products and systems. Take necessary precautions and wear the appropriate personal protective equipment as needed. Read Safety Data Sheets and related literature on products before specification and/or installation.

800 USG.4YOU
800 (874-4968)
usg.com

Manufactured by
United States Gypsum Company
550 West Adams Street
Chicago, IL 60661

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