



# Levels of Gypsum Board Finish

Southern Wall Products, Inc. offers the following information through the courtesy of AWCI

LEVEL*	JOINTS	INTERIOR ANGLES	ACCESSORIES	FASTENERS	SURFACE
<p><b>#0</b></p> <p><i>This level of finish may be useful in temporary construction or whenever the final decoration has not been determined.</i></p>	No taping, finishing or accessories required.				
<p><b>#1</b></p> <p><i>Frequently specified in plenum areas above ceilings, in attics, in areas where the assembly would generally be concealed or in building service corridors, and other areas not normally open to public view. Accessories optional at specifier discretion in corridors and other areas with pedestrian traffic. Some degree of sound and smoke control is provided; in some geographic areas this level is referred to as "fretaping." Where a fire-resistance rating is required for the gypsum board assembly, details of construction shall be in accordance with reports of fire tests of assemblies that have met the fire-rating requirement. Tape and fastener heads need not be covered with joint compound.</i></p>	Tape set in joint compound	Tape set in joint compound			Tool marks and ridges acceptable. Surface free of excess joint compound.
<p><b>#2</b></p> <p><i>Specified where water-resistant gypsum backing board (ASTM C 630) is used as a substrate for tile; may be specified in garages, warehouse storage, or other similar areas where surface appearance is not of primary concern.</i></p>	Tape embedded in joint compound and wiped with a joint knife, leaving a thin coat of compound over tape.	Tape embedded in joint compound and wiped with a joint knife, leaving a thin coat of compound over tape.	Shall be covered by <b>one</b> separate coat of joint compound.	Shall be covered by <b>one</b> separate coat of joint compound.	Surface shall be free of excess joint compound. Tool marks and ridges are acceptable. Joint compound applied over the body of the tape at the time of tape embedment shall be considered a separate coat of joint compound and shall satisfy the conditions of this level.
<p><b>#3</b></p> <p><i>Typically specified in appearance areas which are to receive heavy- or medium-texture (spray or hand applied) finishes before final painting, or where heavy-grade wallcoverings are to be applied as the final decoration. This level of finish is not recommended where smooth painted surfaces or light to medium wallcoverings are specified.</i></p>	Tape as in level #2, then covered with <b>one</b> separate coat of joint compound.	Tape as in level #2, then covered with <b>one</b> separate coat of joint compound.	Shall be covered by <b>two</b> separate coats of joint compound.	Shall be covered by <b>two</b> separate coats of joint compound.	Joint compound shall be smooth and free of tool marks and ridges. Note: It is recommended that the prepared surface be coated with a drywall primer prior to the application of final finishes. See painting/wallcovering specification in this regard.
<p><b>#4</b></p> <p><i>This level should be specified where flat paints, light textures, or wallcoverings are to be applied. In critical lighting areas, flat paints applied over light textures tend to reduce joint photographing. Gloss, semi-gloss, and enamel paints are not recommended over this level of finish. The weight, texture, and sheen level of wallcoverings applied over this level of finish should be carefully evaluated. Joints and fasteners must be adequately concealed if the wallcovering material is lightweight, contains limited pattern, has a gloss finish, or any combination of these finishes is present. Unbacked vinyl wallcoverings are not recommended over this level of finish.</i></p>	Tape as in level #2, then covered with <b>two</b> separate coats of joint compound.	Tape as in level #2, then covered with <b>one</b> separate coat of joint compound.	Shall be covered by <b>three</b> separate coats of joint compound.	Shall be covered by <b>three</b> separate coats of joint compound.	Joint compound shall be smooth and free of tool marks and ridges.  Note: It is recommended that the prepared surface be coated with a drywall primer prior to the application of final finishes. See painting/wallcovering specification in this regard.
<p><b>#5</b></p> <p><i>This level of finish is highly recommended where gloss, semi-gloss, enamel, or nontextured flat paints are specified or where severe lighting conditions occur. This highest quality finish is the most effective method to provide a uniform surface and minimize the possibility of joint photographing and of fasteners showing through the final decoration.</i></p>	Tape as in level #2, then covered with <b>two</b> separate coats of joint compound.	Tape as in level #2, then covered with <b>one</b> separate coat of joint compound.	Shall be covered by <b>three</b> separate coats of joint compound.	Shall be covered by <b>three</b> separate coats of joint compound.	A thin skim coat of joint compound, or a material manufactured especially for this purpose, shall be applied to the entire surface. The surface shall be smooth and free of tool marks and ridges.  See note in level 4.

\*Minimum level of finish is described.

## Introduction

In 1988, as a means of resolving a common problem, four major trade associations concerned with the manufacture, erection, finish, and decoration of gypsum board wall and ceiling systems developed an industry-wide, Recommended Levels of Gypsum Board Finish.

The document was intended to assist specification writers, architects, contractors, and building owners to more precisely describe the finish of walls and ceilings prior to the application of paints and other finishes, to encourage competitive bidding of suitably finished surfaces, and to enhance the appearance of the final decorative treatment and thereby enlist a satisfied client.

The original document was updated and revised in 1996.

This document takes the section of the 1996 document that discusses the specific criteria required to achieve individual levels of finish and presents them in a non-text format. The information contained in the document is technically identical to the original; however, it is formatted, solely for appearance purposes, into a matrix or grid simply to improve its readability. The scope, terminology, comments and resources sections are reproduced in their entirety from the original document.

## Scope

This document describes various levels of finish of gypsum board surfaces prior to the application of specific types of final decoration. The recommended level of finish of gypsum board wall and ceiling surfaces varies with the final decoration to be applied and can also be dependent on their location in a structure and the type of illumination striking the surface. Each recommended level of finish is described with typical applications.

## Terminology

The following definitions are applicable to this document.

**Accessories:** Metal or plastic beads, trim, or moulding used to protect or conceal corners, edges, or abutments of the gypsum board construction.

**Critical Lighting:** Strong sidelighting from windows or surface-mounted light fixtures. Syn severe lighting. See "Comments" Section of this document.

**Joint Photographing:** The shadowing of the finished joint areas through the surface decoration. Syn telegraphing.

**Drywall Primer:** A paint material specifically formulated to fill the pores and equalize the suction difference between gypsum board surface paper and the compound used on finished joints, angles, fastener heads, and accessories and over skim coatings. See "comments" section of this document.

**Skim Coat:** A thin coat of joint compound, or a material manufactured especially for this purpose, applied over

the entire surface to fill imperfections in the joint work, smooth the paper texture, and provide a uniform surface for decorating. Excess compound is immediately sheared off, leaving a film of skim coating compound completely covering the paper.

**Spotting:** To cover fastener heads with joint compound.

**Texture:** A decorative treatment of gypsum board surfaces.

**Texturing:** regular or irregular patterns typically produced by applying a mixture of joint compound and water, or proprietary texture materials including latex base texture paint, to a gypsum board surface previously coated with drywall primer. See "comments" section of this document.

## Comments

**Critical (Severe) Lighting Areas.** Wall and ceiling areas abutting window mullions or skylights, long hallways, or atriums with large surface areas flooded with artificial and/or natural lighting are a few examples of critical lighting areas. Strong sidelighting from windows or surface-mounted light fixtures may reveal even minor surface imperfections. Light striking the surface obliquely, at a very slight angle, greatly exaggerates surface irregularities. If critical lighting cannot be avoided, the effects can be minimized by skim coating the gypsum board surface, by decorating the surface with medium to heavy textures, or by the use of draperies and blinds which soften shadows. In general: gloss, semi-gloss, and enamel finishes highlighted surface defects; textures hide minor imperfections.

## Manufacturer Recommendations:

The recommendations of individual manufacturers of gypsum board, joint tapes and compounds, accessories, drywall primers, wall coverings, adhesives, texture materials, and paints may vary from what is recommended herein and as such are not a part of this recommended specification.

**Drywall Primer:** Applied as a first coat to the entire prepared gypsum board surface with brush, roller, or spray prior to decoration. Where final appearance is critical, the application of high quality, high solids, and drywall primer will minimize most decorating problems.

**For finish paints:** A good quality, white latex drywall primer formulated with higher binder solids, applied undiluted, is typically specified for new gypsum board surfaces prior to the application of texture materials and gloss, semi-gloss, and flat latex wall paints.

An alkali and moisture-resistant primer and a tinted enamel undercoat may be required under enamel paints. Consult with the finish paint manufacturer for specific recommendations.

**For wall coverings:** White, self-sizing, water based, "universal" (all-purpose) wall covering primers have recently been introduced into the marketplace for use on new gypsum board surfaces. These products are claimed to minimize damage if wall coverings are subsequently removed, bind poor quality latex paint, allow hanging over glossy surfaces and existing vinyl, hide wall colors, and to be water washable.

**Texturing:** Texture material is applied by brush, roller, spray or trowel, or a combination of these tools, depending on the desired result. Textured wall surfaces are normally over painted with the desired finish; over painting of textured ceiling surfaces may not be deemed necessary where an adequate amount of material is applied to provide sufficient hiding properties. A drywall primer may not be required under certain proprietary texture materials; consult with the manufacturer of the texture materials for specific recommendations.

**Tool Marks and Ridges:** A smooth surface may be achieved by lightly sanding or wiping joint compound with a dampened sponge. Care shall be exercised to ensure that the nap of the gypsum board facing paper is not raised during sanding operations. For additional information on the finishing of gypsum board surfaces consult ASTM Standard C 840.

## Resources

Designers and specifiers are encouraged to consult the following reference documents:

ASTM C 840, GA-216, GA-505, Master Painters Glossary

Contact one of the following associations for additional assistance with copies of this recommended specification:

The Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries International

Ceilings & Interior Systems Construction Association Gypsum Association

Painting and Decorating Contractors of America

## Notice

All of the statements, opinions, specifications, and recommendations on levels of gypsum board finish contained in this publication are for general information purposes only and are not intended to imply that these are the only materials, procedures, processes, or methods which are available or suitable.

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