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Paint a Room Properly: A Weekend Guide

In one weekend, paint a room with clean lines and an even finish — no streaks, no tape bleed, and no mid-job trip back to the shop.

3-day guide · 6 chapters · Self-Directed Learning Framework

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was built with the Self-Directed Learning Framework (SDLF): every chapter gives you a short starting action, the one idea you actually need, a fully worked example, a checklist, and exercises on your own room — no filler, no re-reading required.

Work through the chapters in order — the order matters more here than in most guides, because each step depends on the previous one having dried. Day 1 is measuring, prep and masking; Day 2 is the actual painting; Day 3 is second coats, touch-ups and cleaning up. Always follow the safety and ventilation instructions on your specific paint tin.

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CHAPTER 1 OF 6 · DAY 1 · 25 MIN

Measuring Up and Buying the Right Amount of Paint

> **Outcome:** "I know exactly how much paint, in which finish, my room needs."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Measure the length of each wall and the height of the room with a tape measure, and write the numbers down. Two minutes of measuring prevents the two most common mistakes in the whole job: buying too little, and discovering it halfway through the second wall.

The minimum you need to know

Wall area is the room's perimeter multiplied by its height, minus roughly 1.8 m² for each standard door and 1.5 m² for an average window. One litre of wall paint covers about 10–12 m² per coat, and you should plan for two coats on anything but a same-colour refresh. Finishes matter: matt hides wall imperfections but marks easily; eggshell or satin wipes clean and suits halls, kitchens and children's rooms; gloss belongs on woodwork, not walls. Buy all of it in one purchase so the batch numbers match — two tins bought weeks apart can differ visibly on the same wall.

Worked example: a 4 m × 3 m room with one door and one window

Perimeter is (4 + 3) × 2 = 14 m. Multiplied by a 2.5 m ceiling height that's 35 m². Subtract 1.8 m² for the door and 1.5 m² for the window: 31.7 m² of actual wall. Two coats means 63.4 m² of coverage, and at 11 m² per litre that's 5.8 litres — so a 5 L tin plus a 1 L, bought together. The ceiling is 4 × 3 = 12 m², two coats = 24 m², about 2.2 litres of ceiling paint. Now the shopping list is a calculation rather than a guess, and it includes the thing everyone forgets: enough for the second coat.

Checklist

- ☐ Every wall measured and written down, plus ceiling height
- ☐ Perimeter × height calculated, doors and windows subtracted
- ☐ Total multiplied by two for two coats
- ☐ Litres calculated at roughly 10–12 m² per litre per coat
- ☐ Finish chosen deliberately for the room's use, not by habit
- ☐ All tins bought in one purchase with matching batch numbers
- ☐ Ceiling paint calculated separately from wall paint

Exercises

1. Calculate the paint needed for the room you intend to paint.
2. Write the full shopping list, including brush, roller, tray, filler, sandpaper, tape and dust sheets.
3. Check the coverage figure printed on the tin you're buying and redo the sum with the real number.

CHAPTER 2 OF 6 · DAY 1 · 40 MIN

Prep Is 70% of the Result

> **Outcome:** "My walls are filled, sanded and clean — ready to take paint evenly."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Run your hand slowly across one wall, eyes closed. Every bump, hole and rough patch you can feel will still be there under the new paint, only more visible. Circle each one lightly in pencil as you find it.

The minimum you need to know

Paint hides colour, not texture. Filler goes into holes and cracks slightly proud of the surface, because it shrinks as it dries; once properly dry, sand it flush with 120-grit paper. Grease and dust stop paint bonding, so kitchen and hallway walls need sugar soap or a mild detergent solution and a rinse, and everything else needs at least a damp cloth — then time to dry completely. Old glossy paint needs a light sand all over, not to remove it but to give the new coat something to grip.

Worked example: one wall with three different defects

A picture-hook hole: press filler in with a flexible knife, leave it slightly proud, let it dry the full time on the tub, then sand flush. A hairline crack above the door frame: rake it open slightly with the corner of the knife first, because filler needs depth to grip — a crack filled without raking reopens within a year. A greasy patch around the light switch: sugar soap, rinse, dry. Then the whole wall gets a quick pass with 120-grit on a sanding block and a wipe with a damp cloth to lift the dust. Forty minutes of work, and it's the whole difference between a wall that looks painted and one that looks finished.

Checklist

- ☐ Whole wall checked by hand, defects marked in pencil
- ☐ Holes and cracks filled slightly proud of the surface
- ☐ Cracks raked open before filling
- ☐ Filler fully dry before sanding — not touch-dry
- ☐ Sanded flush with 120-grit on a block, not loose paper
- ☐ Greasy areas washed, rinsed and dried
- ☐ Dust wiped off with a damp cloth before any paint goes on

Exercises

1. Find and mark every defect in your room, then count them — most people find more than they expected.
2. Fill and sand one wall completely.
3. Run your hand over it again with eyes closed and confirm you can't feel where the defects were.

CHAPTER 3 OF 6 · DAY 1 · 30 MIN

Masking and Protecting Without Tape Bleed

> **Outcome:** "My edges are protected and my tape won't bleed."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Stick a strip of painter's tape along one skirting board, then run the back of a plastic scraper or your thumbnail firmly along its top edge. That sealing pass is the entire anti-bleed technique, and almost nobody does it.

The minimum you need to know

Bleed happens when paint creeps under a tape edge that was never sealed. Two fixes, used together: press the edge down hard, and — the trick decorators use — paint the sealed edge first with the colour that's already underneath the tape, so anything that bleeds is invisible; once that's dry, your new colour physically cannot get past. Use proper low-tack painter's tape rather than masking tape, and pull it off while the final coat is still slightly tacky: fully dried paint tears along the tape line instead of releasing.

Worked example: masking a skirting board under a wall you're repainting

Run the tape along the top of the skirting and seal the upper edge with a scraper. Now brush a thin line of the skirting's own colour along that top edge and let it dry twenty minutes — any bleed that occurs is skirting-coloured paint on skirting, which is invisible, and it has also sealed the gap. Then paint the wall down to and slightly over the tape without worrying about the line at all. Peel the tape back on itself at roughly 45 degrees while the wall paint is still tacky. The line is sharp because no wall colour ever reached underneath.

Checklist

- ☐ Low-tack painter's tape used, not masking tape
- ☐ Tape pressed and sealed along its painting edge with a scraper or thumbnail
- ☐ Sealing coat of the underlying colour applied along the tape edge and dried
- ☐ Floor covered with dust sheets, not newspaper
- ☐ Sockets and switches loosened or taped, with the power off at the consumer unit
- ☐ Furniture moved out or moved centrally and covered
- ☐ Tape removed at 45° while the final coat is still tacky

Exercises

1. Mask one skirting board using the sealing-coat method and one using tape alone.
2. Paint above both, then compare the two lines once dry.
3. Mask the rest of the room using whichever method the comparison convinced you of.

CHAPTER 4 OF 6 · DAY 2 · 35 MIN

Cutting In: Edges and Corners by Brush

> **Outcome:** "I can paint a clean line along ceilings, corners and frames with a brush."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Load an angled 50 mm brush by dipping only the bottom third of the bristles, then tapping — not wiping — each side against the inside of the tin. An overloaded brush is why most beginners' edges run.

The minimum you need to know

Cutting in means brushing a band about 5 cm wide along every edge so the roller never has to reach them. Work in stretches of 60–90 cm and keep a wet edge: always start the next stroke in fresh paint and pull it back into what you just did, so the joins disappear. Make the first pass a few millimetres short of the line, then go back over it with light pressure so the bristle tips fan out and meet the edge exactly — the second pass is what makes the line straight, not a steady hand.

Worked example: cutting in one wall's ceiling line

Start in a corner. Brush a band 5 cm deep and about 80 cm long, deliberately staying 3–4 mm below the ceiling. Immediately return along the same stretch with light pressure, letting the fanned tips ride right up to the ceiling line. Move along and start the next 80 cm inside the wet end of the last one, never on dry paint. Do all four ceiling edges, then the internal corners, then around the window and door frames. The wall now has a painted frame on every side, and the roller work that follows never needs to go near an edge.

Checklist

- ☐ Angled brush, loaded on the bottom third only and tapped, not wiped
- ☐ Working in 60–90 cm stretches
- ☐ First pass a few millimetres short of the line
- ☐ Second light pass bringing the bristle tips to the line
- ☐ Each new stretch started inside the previous wet edge
- ☐ All ceiling lines, corners and frames cut in before any rolling
- ☐ Band wide enough (about 5 cm) that the roller never reaches the edge

Exercises

1. Cut in one full wall's ceiling line and check it from across the room.
2. Do a second wall and compare — the second is always straighter, which tells you this is practice, not talent.
3. Cut in around one window frame, where the shapes are more awkward.

CHAPTER 5 OF 6 · DAY 2 · 35 MIN

Rolling Walls Evenly

> **Outcome:** "I can roll a full wall with no visible lines, patches or roller marks."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Roll the loaded roller slowly up and down the tray's ramp half a dozen times until the sleeve is evenly covered all the way round. A roller loaded on one side only is exactly what produces stripes.

The minimum you need to know

Work in sections of roughly one square metre, and load the wall before spreading it: an upward stroke first (a downward first stroke drips), then a large W or N to distribute the paint, then straight passes to even it out. Never let a section dry before the next one joins it — a lap mark is permanent once dry. Two thin coats always beat one thick one, and the final light passes over a finished wall, with an almost unloaded roller, are what remove texture differences.

Worked example: rolling one three-metre wall

Start at the bottom left. Roll upward, then a large W across roughly a square metre, then fill that square with vertical passes. Immediately begin the next square, overlapping the wet edge by a few centimetres. Work across in a band, then start the band above it, always joining wet to wet rather than returning to a patch that has started to set. When the whole wall is covered, go over it once more with light, top-to-bottom strokes and an almost dry roller — this laying-off pass evens the texture. Then stop and wait the full recoat time printed on the tin; rolling over half-dry paint pulls it straight back off the wall.

Checklist

- ☐ Roller sleeve loaded evenly on all sides before touching the wall
- ☐ First stroke of each section upward, not downward
- ☐ Working in roughly one-square-metre sections
- ☐ Every new section joined to a wet edge, never a drying one
- ☐ Whole wall finished with light laying-off strokes in one direction
- ☐ Two thin coats planned rather than one thick one
- ☐ Full recoat time from the tin respected before coat two

Exercises

1. Roll one wall using the W method and the laying-off pass.
2. Deliberately leave one small section to dry before joining it, look at the lap mark, then note never to do it again.
3. Roll the remaining walls, timing yourself per wall so you can plan the second coat.

CHAPTER 6 OF 6 · DAY 3 · 25 MIN

Second Coats, Touch-ups and Cleaning Your Kit

> **Outcome:** "The job is finished properly and my brushes and rollers are usable next time."

Micro-start (under 12 minutes)

Before touching anything up, turn the main light off and shine a torch or phone light along each wall at a shallow angle. Every thin spot and missed patch appears instantly — flat daylight hides all of them.

The minimum you need to know

Recoat times on the tin are minimums, not suggestions: a second coat applied too early lifts the first. Touch-ups have to use the same applicator and the same batch, feathered out thinly, because a dabbed touch-up dries with a different texture and ends up more visible than the flaw it covered. Water-based paint washes out with warm water and a little detergent, worked until the water runs clear; solvent-based needs white spirit. A roller sleeve left unwashed for an hour is a roller sleeve you've thrown away.

Worked example: finishing the room on Sunday morning

Torch-check all four walls and mark the thin spots with small pieces of low-tack tape. The tin says four hours recoat and it's been overnight, so coat two goes on the two walls that need it, using the same W-and-lay-off technique. Peel the remaining masking tape while that coat is still tacky. Once everything is properly dry, feather the few remaining touch-ups with a brush rather than dabbing them. Then clean: rollers and brushes under warm water until it runs clear, spun out, brushes reshaped and dried flat; tray liner binned; leftover paint sealed by tapping the lid down flat all round, and the tin labelled with the room name and the date for the inevitable future touch-up.

Checklist

- ☐ Walls checked with a raking light before deciding on a second coat
- ☐ Full recoat time elapsed before coat two
- ☐ Touch-ups feathered with the same brush or roller and same batch
- ☐ Masking tape removed while the final coat is tacky
- ☐ Brushes and rollers washed within the hour, until the water runs clear
- ☐ Brushes reshaped and dried flat or bristles-down
- ☐ Leftover tin sealed properly and labelled with room and date

Exercises

1. Do the torch check on every wall and mark what you find.
2. Apply the second coat only where the check says it's needed.
3. Clean the whole kit and store it, then note how long the job actually took compared to your estimate.

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