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Painting a Room

Before You Start:

- Buy the Right Paint**

Choose the highest-quality paint that your budget allows. If you buy the finest-quality paint and apply it properly, you won't have to paint again for six or seven years. Many experts prefer oil-based paint for trim and floors, and water-soluble latex for walls and ceilings. If you're in doubt about which kind of paint to use, consult the paint store or home center where you plan to buy your paint.

- Determine the Correct Amount of Paint**

Given your room dimensions, most paint stores will help estimate how many gallons of paint and primer you'll need. In general, you'll need enough for one coat of primer and two coats of paint. The primer should be tinted to match the paint if the room is going from a light color to a dark one.

One Day to One Week Before You Start:

Plan to devote a full day to the four P's: protecting floors and furnishings, patching holes, prepping walls, and priming.

- Setup**

Assemble all of the tools and materials you will need for the job on a table before you begin working. See our [painting supplies checklist](#) for a complete roster.

- Safeguard Belongings**

Remove small objects from the room; gather large ones in the center and cover with a plastic drop cloth. Unscrew switch and outlet face plates. Lay masking paper over wood floors and tape it down at the edges. Protect carpeting with canvas drop cloths.

- Fill Holes**
With a flexible putty knife, apply spackling paste to nail holes in the wall and wood filler to small cavities in trim (overfill slightly, as compounds will shrink). Let dry completely, and then sand using a medium-grit paper on walls and a coarse-grit one on wood.

- Repair Wall Crevices**
Cover crevices in the wall with self-adhesive fiberglass-mesh joint tape. Apply a thin layer of joint compound over the tape with a flexible taping or joint knife; work quickly to smooth before the paste dries. Lightly sand with a fine-grit paper.

- Fill Cracks Between Trim and Walls**
To fill cracks between the baseboard -- or any trim -- and the wall, apply latex caulk (which can be painted over) with a caulking gun, following the manufacturer's instructions. Immediately after applying caulk, use a damp sponge to even it out and wipe off excess. (It is impossible to do this after caulk dries.)

- Clean and Prime**
Peel back drop cloth and vacuum the room and wash walls with a sponge and warm water. Tape off the ceiling, then apply your a coat of primer. Priming ensures better adhesion of the paint to the walls, and increases its durability.

Painting Day:

- Decant Paint**
Flatten a cardboard box and place it under paint containers to give floors an extra layer of protection. Mix paint with a wooden stir stick, and then pour some into a smaller plastic vessel, filling about halfway.

- Dip Your Brush**
Insert the bristles about 2 inches into the paint, and then tap them against the sides of the container to remove excess. This minimizes the risk of drips.

- Cut In**
Paint part of a corner or around the trim (don't worry about taping yet) with a 2-inch angled brush. This is called "cutting in." To avoid the marks that appear when paint starts to dry, do only 4-foot sections at a time before continuing on to the next section.

Roll on Paint

Pour paint into the reservoir of your roller tray. Dip in one edge of the roller, then move it back and forth on the tray bed until it's saturated but not dripping. Paint a 2-foot-wide V on the wall, and, without lifting the roller, fill it in with tight vertical strokes -- this will ensure even coverage. Repeat, working top to bottom, until you've completed the wall. We recommend painting your walls before taping off the trim, since you'll be painting this later. Apply at least two coats to both, allowing four hours of drying time in between.

Finish Trim and Baseboards

Let wall paint dry overnight, then tape off the trim (all window edges, doorways, ceilings, molding) with painters' masking tape. (For proper adhesion, burnish tape with your fingertips as you go.) Apply paint with an angled 2-inch brush.

Paint Doors

Remove all hardware, then sand and prime the surface. With a 3-inch roller, paint one area of the door, such as an inset panel, then immediately brush over it with a 3-inch brush. Continue working in sections until you've finished the body of the door, then do the stiles and rails (the vertical and horizontal framing, respectively).

Paint Window Frames and Trim:

Once your last coat of paint has dried (see the instructions on your paint can for guidelines) you can paint the window frames and trim. This task requires a lot of detail work, so set aside a day to complete it. (Aluminum and plastic window frames don't need to be painted.)

Prepare Windows

Line the perimeter of each pane with painters' tape, leaving 1/16 inch between the edge of the tape and the muntins (the strips of wood or metal that separates and holds panes of glass in a window). (When painted, this will create a seal that prevents moisture from getting in and rotting the wood.) Remove locks and other hardware, and clean wood with a tack cloth.

Tape Off Trim

Apply painters' tape flush against the trim, protecting the painted wall.

Paint the Window Frames and Trim

Use a 1-inch angled brush to paint the muntins and an angled 2-inch brush to do the frame and trim, taking care to fill in your seal.

Remove Excess Paint from Windows

To clean off paint that has seeped underneath the tape, spray a single-edge razor blade with glass cleaner -- this will prevent scratches -- and gently scrape the panes. (Using a razor blade on some new windows will void the warranty; double-check yours to be sure.)

Cleanup:

Assemble Supplies

Keep these items in your cleaning arsenal: liquid dish soap for washing brushes, a brush comb for removing persistent particles, sponges and rags for wiping surfaces, glass cleaner, and a razor blade for scraping windows.

Storing Extra Paint

Transfer leftover paint to smaller airtight plastic containers. (Paint kept in opened cans is prone to drying out.) Make labels with the name of the room the color was used in, and keep the paint on hand for touch-ups.

Washing Brushes

Run each brush under lukewarm water, then add a few drops of liquid dish soap and continue rinsing. Dislodge dried bits with a metal brush comb. Wrap bristles in paper towels (to maintain their shape), and lay flat to dry.