

ROUGH and TOUGH

how to:



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Drywall Taping

BY NEIL MATTHEWS

If you want to hear people groan, just mention DIY plastering.

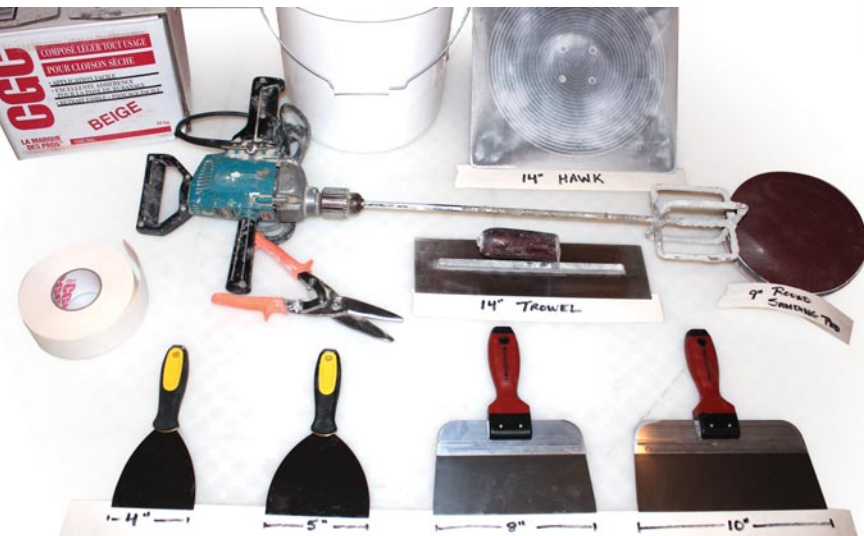
Just about everyone I've met in the industry over the years admit that drywall taping, or plastering, is one of the most dreaded jobs. Contractors will almost always sub out this part of the project to the professional plasterer so they don't have to deal with it.

Think about this: when was the last time you walked through a friend's new house and listened to them rave about the flawless butt joints in the drywall or the seamless inside corners? It doesn't happen. You will likely hear more about the cabinets and granite counters, the hardwood floors or the trim work. In my opinion, professional taping is an art form that takes years to perfect. It is one of the most time consuming and dirtiest jobs in the industry, and the guys that do it for a living get little recognition. They are definitely among the unsung heroes of the building industry in my book!

Plastering certainly takes time and practice to master but if you can get a grasp on the basics, and have a willingness to learn, it is an excellent skill to possess both personally and

professionally. Plastering pros will cite unending types of product and tool brands they prefer to use, and technique will be equally as varied, so it's easy to get confused about the process. I personally do all my own taping on renovation projects just so I can maintain and practise the skill. This being said, I am no "master taper," rather a journeyman ever trying to master and perfect this skill. All I can do here is show you what I have learned through years of trial and error. With practice you can develop and perfect your own technique.

There are four basic joint types to discuss here for new drywall taping only, those being the "Tapered Joint," "Butt Joint," "Inside Corners," and "Outside Corners" – all of which involve the taping aspect of the joint; the plastering coats required to build the joint; and, lastly, proper sanding techniques and product. For visual aid purposes, I have dyed the drywall mud with food colouring so each coat can be better distinguished.



Tools Required

- : mixing drill & paddle (using a regular drill will likely burn out the brushes)
- : 14" Hawk
- : 4", 5", 8" & 10" knives
- : 14" Trowel
- : tin snips
- : utility knife
- : Extension pole
- : 8" round sanding sponge attachment
- : angle sanding sponges

Trowel Pressure

It's very difficult to explain knife or trowel pressure. Use enough pressure to apply the compound without having ripples, but not so much pressure that you remove the layer completely. Practice on a joint using different pressures, and change the angle of the knife during the application so you can see how pressure and trowel angle work together. Also, try applying more pressure to one side of the knife to get a feel for feathering. Don't try to apply the mud perfectly in one motion. Remember, with each coat you are applying compound to the joint (it doesn't have to be pretty) and then troweling it into shape. Practice makes perfect here.

Tape Application

All Purpose Compound tends to be good for applying tape, as this type of mixture tends to be wetter, helping it to bond better with paper tape. Begin by applying compound to both tapered joints and butt joints in the drywall. Liberally load the joint (dry spots will cause the tape to bubble with additional coats, so try not to have holidays under the tape coat). Working quickly, stick the tape (folded side into the mud) in place by holding it where you need to begin, and touching it into place at about arm's length, 3-4 feet, apart. Using a 3" knife with moderate pressure on approximately a 45-degree angle, smooth the tape into place and remove excess mud. Repeat this process over the span of the joint. Allow all tape to dry for 24 hours before re-coating. Basements tend to be damp; a dehumidifier will help the drying process here.

DOs & DON'Ts

common mistakes

Don't work out of a bag or box of plaster. The mud will dry on the bag or box and flake back into the good mud as you close it up.

Do work out of a bucket. Keep the top laid in place as you are working to prevent it from drying up. This will also make mixing easy.

Do mix the mud before each coat; it will be far easier to work with.

Don't use dirty tools. Take the frustration out of the process by only working with clean tools.

Do sand and clean your trowels between coats. This is very important; I can't stress this enough. Clean the tools periodically as you are working, if required.

Don't put dried plaster back in the bucket of good mud, do not try to use lumpy or partially dried mud at all.

Do get rid of crud constantly throughout the process.

Don't sand joints between coats.

Do remove bumps and imperfections by scraping with a clean trowel before beginning the next coat. Applying coats over bumps will only create larger bumps.

Don't spend a lot of time trying to cover perfectly in one coat; perfection will be achieved over several coats, with each coat being thinner than the last.



Inside Corners

My preference in product here is paper/steel corners. It is far superior to using rolled tape, in my opinion. This product can be used for both inside and outside corners, helping to eliminate imperfections, waviness and gapping to create a more visually pleasing finished product. It is easier to run a trowel against, helps prevent over sanding and leaves you with a corner that is much easier to cut paint into at the ceiling.

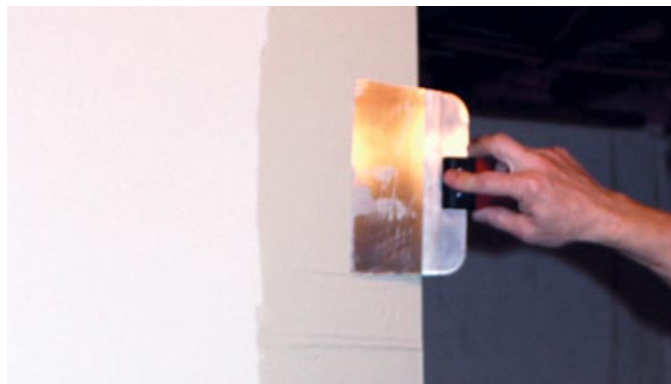
Simply pre-cut for length, load the corner with mud, and press it into place. Remove excess mud and let stand for 24 hours. When coating inside corners, just work with one side at a time. Apply three separate coats per side – two coats with a 4" knife and the final skim with a 5" knife. Two coats per side is industry standard, but that third coat will make much nicer corners with less sanding. Allow the compound to dry completely between coats before moving on to the second side. Trying to coat both sides at one time will only create a mess. Corner trowels are useless, don't waste your money.



Outside Corners

Gravity will be your enemy here. As opposed to applying the mud in a vertical motion, try applying the compound sideways, especially for the first coat, starting a little less than a trowel length away from the corner. Once the joint has been loaded, you can work in a vertical direction to shape and remove the excess.

The first two coats will be the heaviest filler coats. Apply two more thin skim coats, widening and feathering by about 1" with each coat. I refer to feathering as the removal of plaster and not leaving thick edges on your trowel lines. Don't allow the plaster to build up higher than the finished outside edge of the corner bead itself. The width of the final coat should end up at about 12" or so.



Tapered Joints

The tapered joint is the factory edge (long side) of the drywall sheet with a slight depression for taping purposes. When two edges are installed side by side you end up with about a 5 1/2" indentation. Start by using an 8" knife to apply compound over the tape. An 8" knife will allow you to comfortably span the depression in the drywall. The goal here is to fill the depression flush, completely removing excess compound on either side of the joint. As it dries it will shrink, requiring a second coat with the same size knife. Use the 10" knife to apply a third coat; this will widen the joint and allow you to feather the edges. Remember, with every coat you do in any application, you are simply loading the joint with mud then trowelling it back off, leaving a very thin coat as both build up and filling imperfections from the previous coat. The first coat is the thickest, with each additional coat getting progressively thinner. Keep the edges clean by applying more pressure to the edge of the knife. You will have to trowel the joint more than once to achieve this; trowel pressure and fluid motion will be the key here. Don't forget to scrape off high points of crud from the previous coat before you begin a new coat. Three coats will usually cover and fill the joint, but that's a bare minimum. Go for that fourth coat to really clean up and perfect the process! I always apply a fourth coat for several reasons: to widen and feather the joint further for ease of sanding, to ensure maximum fill of the joint, and to fill any minor deficiencies from the coating process. This final coat is basically an extremely thin coat that will usually be dry and ready to sand within a half hour. If applied properly, sanding the joint will be a breeze.



Butt Joints

A butt joint is either factory edges or cut edges with no tapered depression and tends to be the most difficult joint to deal with. You will notice that once plastered, they finish out at about twice the width of a tapered joint. This is because you have to build out the joint with the initial coat to cover the tape, and then over the next three coats the joint will be widened and feathered off in order to fool the eye into not recognizing the build up after paint. Using the 8" knife, apply enough compound to smoothly cover the tape completely. Once dry, you will use the 8" knife to apply the second coat, which will end up approximately twice as wide or 4" to either side of the first coat, feathering the edges back down slightly. With the third coat, load the joint with mud and again widen the joint by about an inch or so to each side, using more trowel pressure to remove or create a tight, thin coat. Repeat this process for the fourth and final coat.

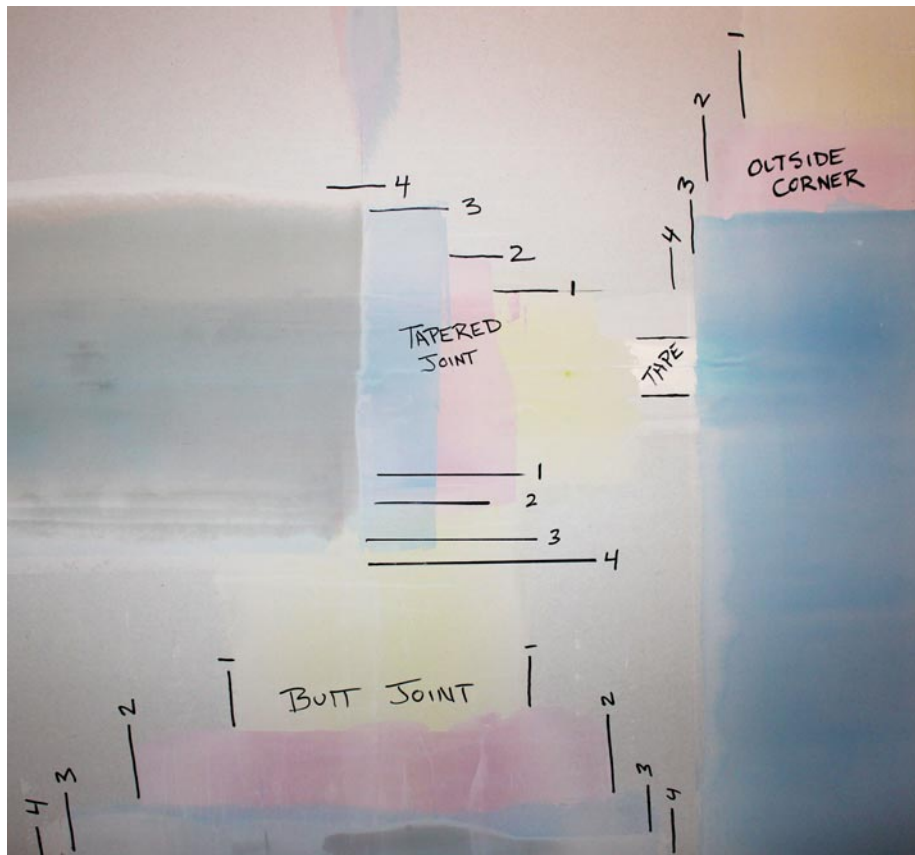


Nail or Screw Holes

Real simple. Apply mud by holding your knife in a horizontal position while working the knife vertically up to apply the compound into the dimple, then pulling back down to remove the excess completely. No need for build up here, only leave what is collected by the screw depression. If your knife hits a screw or you can still see it after the first coat, stop and sink it at that point or it will show through once sanded. As you can see in the picture above, the screw holes end up being longer with each coat, and only slightly wider. On final coat I like to connect them for ease of sanding. Instead of having to sand and feather each individual screw hole, it's far less labour intensive to sand in a line with only two sides. Three coats is industry standard, but again I will do the fourth to make the connection.

Sanding

The easiest way to mess up a great plastering job is to do a bad sanding job. The most common mistake here is over sanding. All you need to do is erase or get rid of ridges. As opposed to using a block sander, try using a 9" round sanding pad. The pad offers a larger sanding surface and is round, which prevents sanding grooves. This can be used on all joints with the exception of inside corners. Again, only light sanding should be required or you will sand right through to the tape. Hand detail inside corners with fine to medium grit foam angle sanding block, applying edge pressure as required. Do not use a square edge block, it will cause sanding grooves. After primer has been applied, touch ups can be done before the final coat of paint. 🏠



As seen here, the distance from the joints can be significant once all the coats of compound are applied.