



How to Paint a House Right!™



Interior Painting 5-Step Series

Source: <http://www.howtopaintahouseright.com/>

Step 1: Prepping a Room

Ready to paint a room? Cool! The first step is to “prep” the room. This includes clearing out furniture and other items, placing drop cloths, caulking cracks, filling nail holes, sanding, taping, and priming. You can achieve excellent results if you follow these instructions.

Time required:

2 hours for an average size bedroom

Equipment list:

- [Vacuum cleaner with brush attachment](#)
- [Step ladder](#)
- [Stool and tool box combo](#) (optional)
- [Screwdriver](#)
- [Hammer to pull nails](#)
- [1-inch putty knife](#)
- [Multipurpose painter's tool](#)
- [Razor knife](#)
- [Dripless caulk gun](#)
- [1-gallon bucket](#)
- [Sanding sponge](#)
- [Dust mask](#)
- [Drop cloths \(9' x 12', 12' x 15', 4' x 12'\)](#) **NOTE:** Spills and big drips *can* leak through canvas drop cloths. Wipe them up immediately with a rag.

- [Hand masker](#)
- [Paint brush for priming](#)
- [Mini-roller for priming](#) (optional)

Materials:

- [Lightweight spackle](#)
- [Spray-on texture \(for large holes\)](#)
- [Paintable silicone caulk](#)
- [1-inch white masking tape](#)
- [1.5-inch white masking tape](#) (optional)
- [1-inch blue painter's tape](#)
- [1.5-inch blue painter's tape](#)
- [Masking paper](#)
- [Painter's plastic](#) (optional)
- [Latex primer](#)
- [Oil-base primer](#) (if needed)
- [Respirator](#) (if using oil base primer)
- [Rags](#)
- [Lead-testing kit](#) (for pre-1978 houses)

Instructions

1. Clearing the Room

Clearing the room is an important first step. Ideally you can remove EVERYTHING and store it elsewhere while you paint. Make every effort to do this, even if you have to stack the furniture in the living room or hallway, because it will pay dividends in time saved. However, if you absolutely are not able to clear the room completely, then you will have to move what remains to the center of the room and cover it with plastic. Position the furniture so you still have access to the light fixture, which you will need to brush around when you are “cutting in” with the ceiling paint.

Next, give the room a cursory cleaning. Clear all cobwebs from the corners and [vacuum](#) out the closet, especially the shelves where dust gathers. Give the trim a quick vacuum with the brush attachment to clear old dust.

Take the pictures off the walls. If you are going to put them back where they were, you can leave the hangers in place and just paint over and around them, although this is not ideal because it messes with your roller. It is best to remove all nails and screws before painting.

Use your [screwdriver](#) to remove the switch plates from the light switches and outlets. Put the plates and screws in a safe place if you are going to re-use them (I recommend getting nice new ones because the old ones will look dingy against the fresh paint).

Take down the curtains and curtain rods. It's best to remove the curtain-rod holders from the wall, but if you want to leave them in place, you will need to cover them with tape later.

Once the room is cleared and all the stuff is off the walls, completely cover the floor with [drop cloths](#). This presents a problem to some people because they don't have any real canvas drop cloths. So they buy little plastic drop cloths that catch on your feet and are slippery too. Or they use old bed sheets that aren't thick enough to prevent dripped paint from seeping through to the carpet. My advice? If you consider yourself an enthusiast DIY painter, investing some money in a few high quality canvas drop cloths: two big guys ([9' x 12'](#) and [12' x 15'](#)) and a "runner" ([4' x 12'](#)). Then you're set for life.

The big guys will cover the middle of an average-size room, and you can run the "runners" along the walls and into tight spaces and hallways as needed. Supplement this with whatever else you can gather, but if you use bed sheets, double them up. A better option is to use old mattress pads (single-bed size; check with your local university housing department at the end of the school year to get some). Mattress pads are usually thick enough to absorb dripped paint before it seeps through.

2. Filling Nail Holes

Once you've got your drop cloths down, it's time to fill all nail holes with [lightweight spackle](#) (and check the ceiling too, should there happen to be any holes up there). For little thumbtack and nail holes, you can just rub some spackle into the hole and then clear any excess off the wall around the hole. Making a "spackle ghost" is a handy way to dispense spackle. See the video to learn how to do that.

Bigger holes (half inch) can be filled using some spackle on a [putty knife](#). If you have holes bigger than a half-inch wide to fix, you might need some patching tape and joint compound. Follow the instructions on the package to cover the hole with tape and give it a few coats of joint compound.

If the trim is to be painted (as opposed to natural wood, which you will tape off later), you'll want to fill or refill any nail holes you can see. By "trim" I mean windows, door casings, baseboards, and crown molding if you have that. Often the original spackle will have cracked and shrunk into the hole a bit, and now is the time to fix that. If you're painting newly installed trim, or painting your old, cheap-looking 1970s natural-wood trim, this is an important step to get right.

When spackling nail holes in the trim, make sure you push as much [spackle](#) as possible into the hole with your finger tip. Then push some more in, until you're sure the hole is completely filled all the way to the bottom and then some. Stuffing spackle into the hole this way causes the spackle to actually push itself back *out* of the hole when drying over the next half hour or so. That's what you want.

This slightly raised spackle allows you to lightly sand the spackle down until it is even with the surface of the trim. The alternative is to not put enough spackle into the hole, and not push it in hard enough to completely fill the hole, so that when it dries it actually shrinks back *into* the hole to fill the dead space. This requires you to either apply a second coat of spackle and sand it, or accept the slight depression of the nail hole. Most people choose the latter and still live happy lives, but if you know how to do it right you can get a smoother, silkier look.

Be careful not to leave excess spackle caked around the hole; wipe it away with your finger as much as you can without disturbing the hole. Less to sand.

NOTE: If you have old, natural-wood trim (of the cheaper variety) that you would like to revitalize with fresh paint (yes!), see my video on painting your natural-wood trim (coming spring 2014).

3. Sanding

After the spackle has dried, it's time to sand the trim. Use a medium- or fine-grit [sanding sponge](#) (or 180 or 220-grit sandpaper, although I prefer the sponges for most applications because the squared edges make it easier to get into corners and cracks). Even if you didn't fill any nail holes, you still need to give the trim a quick cuff to rough up the enamel enough to accept a new coat of paint.

If you filled any large holes in the walls, sand them smooth. Really large holes on textured walls might require you to touch up the texture. If it's orange peel, get a little can of [spray-on texture](#)—they work great. If it's skip-trowel texture or Mediterranean, use joint compound on a 6-inch blade. Scoop some texture onto the blade and “skip” it along the surface to match the look of the existing texture. It's not difficult.

Once you are done sanding, [vacuum](#) all the trim with the brush attachment so it's ready for caulking. The reason it's important to have spackled, sanded, and vacuumed all the trim *before* caulking is because dust will stick to new caulk and it's almost impossible to get off, meaning you end up painting on top of the dust, which is never a good idea. So get all the dusty work out of the way before you caulk.

WARNING: If your house is pre-1978, buy a [lead-test kit](#). If the results are positive, consult with an expert. Never scrape or sand lead paint without proper training!

4. Caulking

If you're painting your natural-wood trim, see that video because you've got a lot of caulking to do. If the trim has already been previously painted, look over all the joints where the wood meets the wall and or one piece of wood meets another and caulk anywhere the original caulk has separated. Check all the joints in the window and door casings, baseboards, and crown molding. Use a [dripless caulk gun](#) and [paintable caulk](#) to neatly fill these joints, then wipe away any excess with your finger.

If you have a hairline crack in the drywall, rub a small amount of [caulk](#) into the crack. Using caulk is a better option than spackling because caulk will remain flexible and won't re-crack as quickly (but often it will re-crack because hairline cracks are usually related to the foundation settling). Make sure you don't leave ANY caulk out on the wall because it will shine through the finish coat. Wipe away any excess with a wet finger or [rag](#).

Be very precise with your caulking in general. Always run a wet finger along the bead after caulking to rub the caulk in and smooth it out so that any evidence of it will disappear when the paint is applied on top. Carry a small [bucket](#) of water and a rag with you to help manipulate the caulk. Wetting your finger before rubbing the caulk into the joint helps keep it smooth.

Let the caulk dry for at least a day before the next step, masking and taping.

5. Masking (Taping)

“Masking” is the process of applying a combination of tape and masking paper to areas of the room that need to be protected. I strongly recommend you buy a [hand masker](#) and [blade](#), especially if you're going to be doing more painting than just one room. Hand maskers cost a little dough but are worth every penny.

If your room has nice, natural wood trim that is staying natural, you'll want to run [1.5-inch blue “painters” tape](#) all the way around it. Try to run the tape straight and press it down *very* firmly with the tip of your finger, especially the edge of tape that meets the painted area, because you don't want paint leaking underneath and making a ragged edge. Ragged edges are the bane of the DIY painter, but they can be remedied if you really press that tape edge down firmly, then press it down *again* immediately before painting if any time has passed that might have allowed the tape to release a little. This is very important. Clean lines make a big difference in the final outcome of an interior paint job. Ragged lines can ruin everything.

Which isn't to say blue tape is your panacea, because it's not. Sometimes the best option is to cut a line carefully with a brush. A good example is where the wall paint meets the ceiling paint (assuming the ceiling is white and the wall a different color). People will often paint their ceiling, let it dry, then try to tape it off before cutting in the top of the wall. Never tape your ceiling like that—it doesn't work. You can cut a straight-looking line against the ceiling without tape, I promise, if you follow the technique described in [step 3: painting the walls](#).

Put an “awning” of [masking paper](#) and [tape](#) across the top of each window to shield it from getting speckled. Other items on the walls, like thermostats, fuse boxes, etc., will need to be masked off with tape and paper. Put a piece of [1.5 inch tape](#) over the outlets and light switches to protect them. (You only need worry about the part that will be visible when you put the switch plate back on.) Make sure you put a little awning of paper/tape over the top of any door handles to protect them from splatter.

It's important to do a good job masking the baseboard. If you have painted baseboard, you will need to run paper and tape precisely along the top of it to protect it while you roll the walls.

If, on the other hand, you have baseboard trim that you are *not* going to paint, such as natural wood or rubber mopboard, here's a important tip: You want to run the tape *up onto* the wall just a hair. Nobody will ever notice that tiny bit of unpainted wall (1/16th-inch max), but they sure will notice any paint that has bled onto the natural trim or mopboard. Often the key to painting straight lines is just knowing which way you can cheat them so nobody notices. For more tips, see the video on how to paint straight lines.

Make sure you tuck all your drop cloths in underneath the paper/tape combo that you put on the baseboard so the floor is fully protected. If you don't have any baseboard or mopboard, you'll need to just tape off the floor directly.

6. Priming

Now that you've got the room fully masked and all your drop cloths in place, it's time to do any necessary priming. Usually a good [latex interior primer](#) will work fine for any holes you spackled on the walls. If you have stains to cover, or bare wood to prime (or if you're painting your natural-wood trim), you'll probably want a good [stain-blocking oil-base primer](#). (Latex stain-blocking primers are also available. They are pretty good but not quite as good as oil. However, if fumes are an issue, by all means use latex stain-blocking primer.) Wear a [respirator](#) and open the windows when working with oil primer because breathing the fumes directly will quickly make you dizzy.

When priming patches on the wall, be fairly surgical about it. Don't slop primer around because it can show up later by shining through the finish coat. If you have large areas to prime, a [mini-roller](#) can help, and using a mini-roller has the added advantage of helping the primer blend into the finish coat (brush strokes in the middle of the wall can sometimes stand out later). Am I being too picky? The thing is, it's just as easy to paint your house right as it is to paint it wrong, so you might as well do it right.

Okay, when you're done priming, clean up the outfit, or, if you're going to be doing more priming later, see my video on [storing your brushes and rollers overnight](#). Congratulations, you're done prepping the room, and frankly, that's usually the hardest part of this whole process—everything else is mildly enjoyable because you're seeing solid results. Now get ready for [step 2: painting the ceiling](#).

[Step 2: Painting the Ceiling](#)

Ready to paint your ceiling? The first step is to make sure everything is out of your way so you don't trip on it while looking up at the ceiling! Then it's just a matter of cutting in (edging) and rolling. You can achieve excellent results if you follow these instructions.

Time required:

2 hours for an average size bedroom

Equipment list:

- [1-gallon bucket](#)
- [3-inch angled paint brush](#)
- [5-gallon bucket](#)
- [Roller handle](#)
- [Roller grid](#)
- [2-4 foot extendable roller pole](#)
- [4-8 foot extendable pole for vaulted or high ceilings](#) (optional)
- [Roller cover](#) ([3/8-inch](#) for “smooth wall”; [1/2-inch](#) for textured; [3/4-inch](#) to [1 1/4-inch](#) nap required for heavy texture or painting a popcorn ceiling)
- [Rags](#)
- [Multipurpose painters tool](#)
- [1-inch putty knife](#)
- [Step ladder](#) or [stool](#)

Materials:

- One gallon high quality latex “ceiling paint,” flat sheen, for an average size bedroom; use eggshell wall paint if you want a slightly shiny ceiling that can be cleaned.

Instructions

First, open your gallon of paint and pour 3/4 of it into a [5-gallon bucket](#) with a [roller grid](#) in it. I recommend against using a roller pan because they are easy to step on, and roller pans just don’t hold enough paint to get the job done without stopping to refill, something you’d rather not do because you don’t want to give the ceiling any time to start drying before you’re done rolling—in other words, it’s important to keep a “wet edge” as you roll the ceiling. So roll out of a [5-gallon bucket](#) with a [roller grid](#).

You should be left with about 1/4-gallon in the paint can. Take that and your [paint brush](#) and cut in the edge of the ceiling all the way around the room. Cut your swath about 4 inches out onto the ceiling—that’s enough for you to get in close with the roller. If the walls are going to be a different color, you only need to bring the ceiling paint about 1 inch down onto the wall. But make sure you do that. Don’t leave any part of the ceiling unpainted. Of course, if the walls will be the same color as the ceiling, you’ll need to brush down onto the wall about the same distance as you are on the ceiling—about 4 inches.

As you move along, be careful to always “lay off” your final brush stroke back into your wet edge before moving to the next section. This helps your brush strokes always blend together and prevents your brush from making “start marks,” which are streaky and ugly. See the video for more information on laying off back into your wet edge.

Once you’re done going around the length of the ceiling, brush around any light fixtures or anything else on the ceiling. Again, just paint about 4 inches out and don’t leave any start or stop marks with the [brush](#).

Now it’s time to roll. You’ll need a [roller cover](#) on a [roller handle](#). You’ll also want a stout [extendable roller pole](#). A [1/2-inch roller cover](#) will work on most textured ceilings, but popcorn ceilings are far easier if you use a [1 1/4-inch cover](#).

The first thing you need to decide is what direction you are going to roll. You want to keep it consistent on the entire ceiling. Most people agree that the best strategy is to roll toward (parallel with) the prevailing source of natural light, such as a big window. This prevents any roller lines from showing up. If you roll perpendicular to the prevailing light source, the roller lines can create a slight shadow. All that said, roller lines are really only an issue on smooth ceilings. Textured ceilings are unlikely to show any lines, especially if you are using flat ceiling paint.

In any case, pick a direction, then go to the leftmost forward corner in the room. It’s difficult to describe how best to roll the paint on—see the video for that—but the bottom line is that it consists of two steps: rolling the paint on (I call this “laying it on”) and then smoothing it out with a final roll (I call this “laying it off”). You need to lay it on and lay it off in sections as you go so that nothing has time to dry. In other words, you keep a “wet edge” the entire time. This means you are never rolling against any paint that has had time to dry, because if you are, then essentially that’s like rolling on a second coat of paint, and you might end up with overlap marks.

If possible, it is best to do your roller strokes the entire width of the ceiling. However, often the ceiling is too wide to do that without “walking” the roller along, a practice I don’t recommend because it’s difficult to keep steady pressure on the roller while walking. In the video I show how to divide the room into a left side and a right side and do half at a time, always laying off the final strokes toward the middle so they blend together. I like to do this on any ceiling wider than 10 or 12 feet because I always like to roll from a stationary position.

Okay! Once you’ve rolled the ceiling, you need to let it dry at least an hour before you can start [step 3: painting the walls](#). Two hours is better. You don’t want the wall paint to “reactivate” the ceiling paint when you are cutting in (edging) against the ceiling. Better to wait until the ceiling is fully dry.

[Step 3: Painting the Walls](#)

Ready to paint your walls? Then you have the color picked out, and that's probably the hardest part of the whole thing! With the room already prepped and the ceiling painted, it's just a matter of cutting in (edging) the walls with a brush and then rolling out the main areas. You can achieve excellent results if you follow these instructions!

Time required:

4 to 6 hours for an average size bedroom

Equipment list:

- [1-gallon bucket](#)
- [3-inch angled paint brush](#)
- [5-gallon bucket](#)
- [Roller handle](#)
- [Roller grid](#)
- [2-4 foot extendable roller pole](#)
- [4-8 foot extendable pole for vaulted or high ceilings](#) (optional)
- [Roller cover](#) ([3/8-inch](#) for smooth walls; [1/2-inch](#) for textured walls; [3/4-inch](#) may be required for heavy texture)
- [Rags](#)
- [Multipurpose painters tool](#)
- [1-inch putty knife](#)
- [Step ladder](#) or [stool](#)

Materials:

- One or two gallons high quality latex paint in eggshell or satin sheen for an average room. Measure square footage and divide by 275 to determine quantity. Remember you may need to apply a second coat for optimal coverage.

Instructions

Open a gallon of paint and pour 2/3 of it into the [5-gallon bucket](#). If you have two gallons or more of paint, pour the remaining cans into the 5-gallon bucket and "box" (mix) them all together with a stir stick, just in case there is any variation in color between the cans (even a slight difference could show up if you switch cans in the middle of a wall).

Once you've got your paint set up, it's time to cut in the room (some people call this "edging"). You can work out of the paint can if you want. I prefer to work out of a separate [1-gallon bucket](#), or "cutting pot."

The most likely scenario is where the walls are a different color than the ceiling, and you will need to cut a straight line where they meet. The [3-inch angled tip brush](#) is perfect for this. Don't make the mistake of thinking that a smaller brush will cut straighter lines, because it won't. A larger brush holds more paint, is more solid, and doesn't waver as much. You only use the very tip of a few brush hairs to cut the line anyway, no matter what size brush you are using.

Pick a corner of the room and start brushing. As you go, always smooth out your brush strokes by doing your final stroke *back into* your wet edge (see video). This helps your brush strokes all blend together and avoids creating streaky "start marks." Dip your brush frequently and use a good amount of paint to get good coverage and avoid streaking. Cut down about 4 or 5 inches from the ceiling onto the wall, and make sure you feather out the bottom edge.

A lot of people have a hard time cutting (edging) a straight line against the ceiling. It can be tough if you have textured walls because the inside corner where the wall and ceiling meet isn't straight, it's usually kind of bumpy. Those irregularities are the primary reason that trying to tape off the ceiling with [blue tape](#) won't work. The paint will bleed and make a ragged line. Plus the tape doesn't stick well to the ceiling because it has been freshly painted.

Here's the secret to cutting a straight line—or one that *looks* straight—between the wall and ceiling: Always cut the paint just a tiny bit up *onto* the ceiling, rather than letting the line waver down onto the wall. A person standing in the room won't be able to notice if the paint runs a hair onto the ceiling because they won't be looking directly up at it. From the middle of the room it will look perfectly straight. However, if the line wavers even slightly down onto the wall, it will stand out.

When I say a "tiny bit," I mean like 1/32 of an inch. That's all it takes to perform this trick. Run it any more than that onto the ceiling and it only gets more noticeable, and you'll need to come back with the ceiling paint later and fix it.

When you reach each corner, you might as well cut in the corners too. Brush the inside corner on each wall about 4 inches out. Remember to always do your last stroke back into your wet edge to avoid streaking and start marks. Use a good amount of paint. These corners tend to soak it up for some reason.

Finish going around the room like that, cutting in the ceiling and then cutting in the corners as you reach them.

You will also want to brush lightly along the top of the baseboards. Don't use as much paint because you don't want it leaking through the masking onto the baseboard. Just "dry brush" an inch or two along the tops of the baseboards to get a light first coat on there. The roller will be able to get down there and finish the job.

You'll also need to cut in around any objects on the walls such as thermostats, etc. You should have these taped off with [blue tape](#) (see Step 1) so it won't take long to cut in around them.

Now it's time to roll. Screw the [roller handle](#) onto the [extendable roller pole](#). Put the [roller grid](#) in the [5-gallon bucket](#) and get the [roller cover](#) good and soaked. Start on the far side of the first wall and start rolling the paint on in long strokes. I call this "laying on" the paint, and it's the first step in rolling a wall. You'll need to keep dipping frequently when you start out because the roller is not wet yet. Don't be afraid to roll a good amount of paint on this first pass. Be neat with your roller strokes, but you don't need to worry about being super precise yet. Just get a good coat of paint rolled onto the entire wall from end to end.

Now it's time to "lay off" the paint. This basically means you go back to the side where you started and do a series of final, even roller strokes to smooth out the paint and make it look uniform. Make these final strokes straight up and down, from the ceiling down to the baseboard (which you should *gently* bump against). Lay off the paint like this all the way across the wall. Now you have a smooth, uniform finish with a tight "stipple" rather than paint that looks smeared and loose.

When you're done, go to the next wall and repeat this two-step process. Lay it on, lay it off. If you feel the paint setting up before you are able to lay it off, you might need to divide larger walls into sections and lay on/lay off one section at a time, but always try to keep a wet edge across the wall. Obviously, textured walls will be more forgiving than smooth walls. **It's even possible to do the lay on/lay off in very small sections as you go if you feel the paint is setting up on you too quickly. Do what works, and don't allow the paint to dry before you do your lay off.**

If you don't get good coverage, you might need to do a second coat. Cut in (edge) the walls again. You can stay about a quarter-inch down from the ceiling since you already cut that line straight—keep the brush bristles a little below the line so you can move quickly. Cutting in again around windows and doors should also go fairly quickly since you don't need to use as much paint on the second coat. In general the second coat goes quicker than the first coat—especially if you did a really good job on the first coat—but take your time and do it right!

[Step 4: Painting the Trim](#)

Ready to paint the trim? With the ceiling and walls painted, brushing the trim is the next step in transforming your room and giving everything a nice, finished look. You can achieve excellent results if you follow these instructions.

Time required:

2 to 5 hours for an average size bedroom

Equipment list:

- [2.5-inch angled tip paint brush](#) (or use [3-inch](#))
- [1-gallon bucket](#)
- [Hand masker](#)
- [Blade for hand masker](#)
- [Multipurpose painter's tool](#)
- [1-inch putty knife](#)
- [Rags](#)
- [Step ladder](#) or [stool](#)

Materials:

- One gallon high quality semi-gloss latex paint (often called enamel).
- [1-inch white tape for hand masker](#)
- [9-inch paper for hand masker](#)
- [Blue painter's tape](#)

Instructions

Start with the windows if they are to be painted. You've already prepped the wood by filling the nail holes, sanding, etc. Now you'll want to tape off the glass with [1.5-inch blue painters tape](#). A lot of people wonder how best to tape off glass. Basically you trim the tape in each corner at a 90-degree angle with a [razor knife](#), which eliminates the need of tearing tape to any precise length. I demonstrate a quick and easy way in the video.

Another way it to press a sharp [multipurpose painter's tool](#) into the corner of the glass against the tape and tear the tape against the blade. This requires a bit more practice and a sharp tool.

The main thing to remember when painting trim is that you need to avoid leaving "start marks" with your [paint brush](#). This means that you follow a two-step process similar to the process used when rolling walls: First spread the paint on an entire "leg" of the window (or door casing). This is what I call "laying it on." Second, smooth the paint out with two final brush strokes, each starting in the corner of the opposite end (aligned with the joint) and going toward (and slightly past) the middle of the leg, where you gently lift the brush like a plane taking off from a runway. I call this "laying it off."

By always doing your final two strokes into the middle like this, you blend your brush strokes together and don't leave any ugly, streaky start marks in the middle of the trim.

You'll need to cut straight lines (some call this "edging") where the wood meets the wall on the edges of windows and door casings (assuming the wall and trim are different colors). This can be a tricky line to make straight. In my opinion taping the wall is a poor

choice because usually the wall is slightly bumpy with texture or other non-uniform features, and you're going to get a ragged line no matter how hard you push down the tape. Plus you'll be taping on a wall you recently painted, and in my experience tape does not stick well to fresh paint. Paint takes several weeks to cure, during which time the oils and detergents in the paint slowly evaporate and the paint hardens. But if you just painted the wall a couple days ago, that process hasn't happened yet, and the surface has a tiny bit of oily residue on it—almost imperceptible, but enough to prevent tape from sticking as well as you would want it to when cutting a straight line.

But here's the secret to making this line look straight without using tape: Always cheat the line *toward* the trim. In other words, never let your trim paint creep out onto the wall even a tiny bit, because that waver onto the wall will be very noticeable to somebody standing in the middle of the room. By always keeping the trim paint a hair back away from the wall, you give the illusion of straightness from out in the room. Sure, if somebody walks up and stares directly at the edge of the trim, they might be able to see a little wavering, but nobody is going to do that. They'll be looking at it from out in the room.

The other trick to cutting this line straight is to keep using the [3-inch angled tip brush](#) (or [2.5-inch angled tip brush](#)) that you used to cut in the room. Don't get suckered into thinking that a smaller brush is better for precise line cutting, because it's not, in my opinion. I think a larger brush is more solid and easier to move along in a straight line. You only use the very tips of the bristles to cut the line no matter what size brush you are using, so go for the overall stability of a hefty brush to help you paint a straight line.

Once you paint the windows and door casings, it's time for the baseboard. First, you will need to mask the carpet or flooring beneath the baseboard with your [hand masker](#) using [9-inch paper](#) and 1-inch tape ([white tape](#) for carpet, [blue tape](#) for hardwood or tile floors). See the [video](#) for tips on doing this effectively so you won't have paint leaking onto the carpet.

Making a straight line where the baseboard meets the wall can be tricky. Once again, it's a matter of knowing which way you can cheat the line so it will give the illusion of straightness. In this case you do the opposite of what you did on the window and door casings and run the trim paint just a hair *up onto* the wall. In other words, never leave any wall paint on the top edge of the baseboard, because the baseboard is usually viewed from above and the wall paint will stand out. However, if you run the paint just a hair up **ONTO** the wall (like 1/32 of an inch), nobody will be able to see that unless they get down on their knees and stare. So by cheating the line up onto the wall just 1/32 or 1/16 of an inch, you can have some wavering in the line but still make it look pretty straight, as long as the entire top edge of the baseboard is painted.

If you have other funky trim elements like chair rail, crown molding, columns, etc., brush them the same way you brushed the windows and door casings, by always starting your final strokes at an edge or corner and laying it off just past the middle before lifting the brush off gently. If you have trim that is too long for that technique, just keep laying on

short sections, then do your final lay-off stroke *back into* your wet edge before moving on to the next section. This will allow your brush strokes to always blend together with your wet paint and you won't be leaving any streaky start marks in the middle of the trim.

One last important note: Throughout the entire trim-painting process, bring a damp [rag](#) along for fixing obvious mistakes in your lines. Wrap the rag around the blade of your [1-inch putty knife](#) or [multipurpose painter's tool](#) and clean mistakes that way; often you can turn a slight waver into a straight line with ease. I've always thought the difference between a good painter and a bad painter is that a good painter takes the time to fix his mistakes. And in most cases, it's easiest to fix them before the paint dries with a damp rag wrapped tightly around the blade of a multipurpose painter's tool or putty knife.

Step 5: Clean up and Touch Up

Ready to finish painting the room and get on with your life? Yeah! Don't stumble just short of the finish line. Follow these instructions to give everything a nice, finished, snappy look.

Time required:

1 to 2 hours for an average size bedroom

Equipment list:

- Three [1-gallon buckets](#) to hold the ceiling paint, the wall paint, and the trim paint (or work out of the paint cans)
- Three brushes, one for each paint (or wash the brush between colors). Use the [3-inch angled tip brush](#) you've been using to paint the room; then maybe a [2-inch brush](#) or [2.5-inch brush](#) for straightening lines. Throwaway [foam brushes](#) work okay for wall touch up.
- Possibly a [mini roller](#) for large areas of wall touch up
- [Rags](#)
- [Multipurpose painters tool](#)
- [1-inch putty knife](#)
- [Razor scraper](#)

Materials:

- The remaining ceiling paint, wall paint, and trim paint
- [Blue painter's tape](#)

Instructions

Congratulations, you're done painting the room! Well, not *quite* done. 😊 Now it's time to do some touch up and clean up.

First, check the ceiling. Did you bump it with the roller when painting the walls? Now is the time to touch it up. Dab at it with a brush to mimic roller stipple so the touch up will blend in more. (Throwaway [foam brushes](#) can work well for this too and then you don't have to wash your real brushes.)

Also take a look at the line between the ceiling paint and the wall paint, assuming they are different colors. As mentioned in [Step 3: Painting the Walls](#), it's best if the wall paint runs just slightly (1/32-inch) up *onto* the ceiling rather than having ceiling paint wavering down onto the wall. However, if you accidentally ran it more than that and you see some noticeable wavering, use the ceiling paint to cut it back a little and straighten it out. Just don't run the ceiling paint back down onto the wall even one little bit!

Next, inspect all the lines where the trim paint meets the wall paint and fix any obvious messes. If the trim paint wavers out onto the wall anywhere, you can fix it by taping off the trim with [blue painter's tape](#) and brushing the wall lightly with a "dry brush," which just means the brush isn't dripping with paint. Make sure you press the tape down VERY hard with your finger immediately before brushing, then remove it immediately after. By using a "dry brush" and removing the tape quickly you minimize the chances of 1) paint leaking under the tape; and 2) the tape damaging the fresh paint on the trim.

NOTE: In [Step 4: Painting the Trim](#), I warned against applying tape to recently painted walls because it tends not to stick well. However, for some reason putting a little blue tape on recently painted wood trim sticks better, at least temporarily, and this can really help straighten out any wavering. See the video for tips on how to do this.

Next, touch up any wall spots that need it. Be surgical with a [small brush](#) (or [foam brush](#)) when touching up walls, using a dabbing motion to mimic roller stipple rather than brush strokes. You can also try a [mini roller](#) for larger areas of touch up. However, be aware that, especially with dark colors, touching up a big spot in the middle of a wall can "flash" with a slightly different sheen, and that spot will remain visible. If there is a lot of touch up needed, consider re-rolling the entire wall (no need to cut in again). But for little spots on the wall, just dab with a brush to mimic roller stipple.

When you're satisfied the touch up is done, it's time to remove any remaining tape and paper still adorning the room. You can use the corner tip of your [1-inch putty knife](#) to gently score the paint bridge before removing the tape, but be careful you don't go off track and mar the trim or wall. Once you pull tape off something, use a wet rag wrapped around the tip of your putty knife to clean any errant paint that leaked underneath (onto door hinges, natural wood trim, etc.). If you get it right away it's easy to clean.

Now you are ready to put the [switch plates](#) and [outlet covers](#) back on (consider buying nice new ones). Put the door back up if you took it down to paint it. Then roll up the drop cloths up, take them outside, shake them out, fold them and store them.

Vacuum the floor of the room thoroughly. If any paint leaked through the drop cloths and stained the carpet, see my video [Cleaning Latex Paint Off Carpet](#) as soon as possible because you don't want that paint to harden. If you're really concerned, call a professional carpet cleaner as soon as possible. If the paint DOES harden, try rubbing it off with 80-grit sandpaper. It actually works well to remove dried paint from carpet threads!

Once the room is clean, you can start putting it back together—move in the furniture, put up the pictures, hang up the curtains, etc.

Of course, the final step is to clean and store all your equipment. I usually throw out the roller covers after letting them dry thoroughly on a piece of cardboard (I like to buy new ones for each job). The brushes, on the other hand, can last for many years if they are cleaned properly, so see the video [Cleaning a Paint Brush in the Kitchen Sink](#).

Okay, now you're really done. Congratulations on your beautiful room!

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