

Level 5 Drywall Finish

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A Level 5 gypsum board finish is not a cosmetic upgrade. It is a performance driven system intended to minimize joint telegraphing, surface irregularities, and visible defects under critical lighting conditions, high-end decorative finishes, and tall or curved walls. During value engineering, eliminating a specified Level 5 finish without a thorough evaluation of lighting conditions, wall exposure, paint sheen, and owner expectations often transfers risk rather than reducing it. In many cases, the short term savings achieved by downgrading the finish are outweighed by increased punch list items, owner dissatisfaction, corrective work, and disputes over final appearance. Understanding when a Level 5 finish is necessary, and when it can appropriately be modified, is essential to delivering the level of quality intended by the design team and expected by the owner.

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Installation guides that are a good reference for gypsum board Level 5 drywall finish:

1. GA-214-2021 – “Levels of finish for Gypsum panel products
2. Drywall Manufacturer installation Guides”
3. ASTM C840-2025 – “Standard Specification for Application and Finishing of Gypsum Board”
4. Many drywall finish articles written by AWCI and others
5. Your Specifications
6. AECOM Hunt Quality Website www.aecom.com/hunt-quality, Quality Bulletins, and Preinstallation Meeting Minutes

When to install level 5 drywall finish and not value engineer the finish away

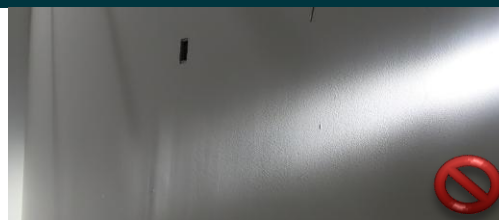
- ☐ Long Hallways
- ☐ Curved Walls
- ☐ Hallways and rooms with harsh lighting from windows, skylights, or wall washing lights
- ☐ Tall walls
- ☐ Walls that will be painted with semi-gloss or gloss paint
- ☐ Walls that will be painted with dark, deep tones
- ☐ Walls that will be covered with vinyl or similar wall covering
- ☐ Walls that will be covered with murals

Definition of Level 5 finish per ASTM C840-2025 & GA-215-2025

- ☐ All joints and interior angles shall have tape embedded in joint compound and shall be immediately wiped with a joint knife or trowel leaving a thin coating of joint compound over all joints and interior angles as described for Level 2.
- ☐ Two separate coats of joint compound shall be applied over all flat joints. (*feathered*) One separate coat of joint compound shall be applied over interior angles. (*6"-8", 10", and 12" width feathered recommended*)
- ☐ Fastener heads and accessories shall be covered with three 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. (*no patching after skim coat applied*)
- ☐ The surface shall be smooth and free of tool marks and ridges.

General Installation

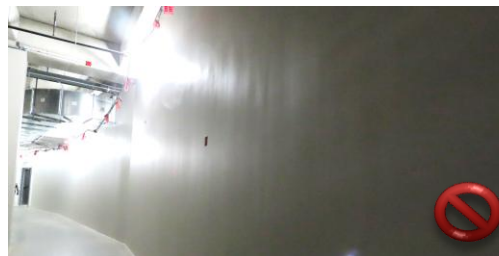
- ☐ The objective of skim coating is to achieve total coverage of the entire surface, which can be accomplished by
- ☐ using a drywall broad knife to force the material into the
- ☐ surface pores and imperfections, then shearing the excess joint compound from the surface.
- ☐ Skim coating is a process intended to conceal minor surface differences and create a more uniform surface.
- ☐ A skim coat is essentially a “film” of joint compound and is not a readily measurable thickness.
- ☐ A “skim coat” will not approximate a plastered surface.
- ☐ Once the skim coat dries, the gypsum board paper
- ☐ may show through the coating and the treated joints, filed voids, and spotted fastener.



Level 5 drywall finish is a flat skim coat that gives the surface the best flatness for **tall, curved, harsh lighting, gloss & dark painted and wall covering.**



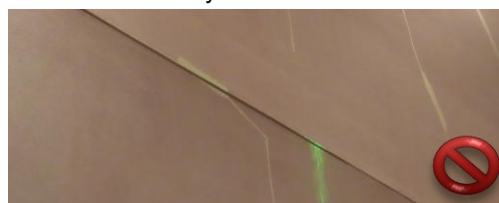
Recommended to install a level 5 drywall finish at tall walls & where harsh light occurs, such as a skylight or down lights. Potentially incorrect mud width.



Recommend to install a level 5 drywall finish at curved walls, when paint used is either a semi-gloss, high gloss, or dark deep tones.



Recommended to install a level 5 drywall finish under most wall coverings, such as vinyl or a mural.



This is a horizontal control joint that is not properly feather in and produces an abrupt edge (*the laser disappears*)