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**ABSTRACT:**

Gypsum board is the most common wall and soffit finish in the US. One finish does not fit all applications. Specifying appropriate gypsum board finish levels helps control project costs while producing the desired aesthetic results.

**FILING:**

UniFormat™  
C1010 - Interior Partitions  
C2060 - Ceiling Finishes

MasterFormat®  
09 29 00 - Gypsum Board

**KEYWORDS:**

Gypsum board, finish levels, spackling, plastering.

**REFERENCES:**

ASTM C 840 Standard Specification for Application and Finish of Gypsum Board.  
ASTM C1396/C1396M Standard Specification for Gypsum Board

**Gypsum Association:**

GA-216 Application and Finishing of Gypsum Panel Products 2004.  
GA-214-17 Recommended Levels of Gypsum Board Finish.

**USG Corporation**

The Gypsum Construction Handbook

## Gypsum Board Finish Levels

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Gypsum products are versatile, fire resistant, sound resistant, durable, and have a low installed cost. For these and other reasons, gypsum is one of the most-used materials in modern construction. Depending on the application, gypsum products require finishing by applying plaster or other compounds to create a smooth veneer, either on the joints and intersections of the gypsum materials or over the entire surface. The application of the different levels of finish vary greatly in cost. Specifying the most appropriate level of finish will save time and money on any project.

The Gypsum Association, in concert with the Association of the Wall and Ceiling Industries International, Ceilings and Interior Systems Construction Association, and the Painting and Decorating Contractors of America, has developed standards for gypsum board finish. These standards were eventually incorporated into ASTM C 840, and are the industry-wide standards.

When designing the use of gypsum materials, the level of finish should be specified. Including a specified level of finish will result in more accurate bids for the work, will provide clear and concise direction on expectations for the finished product, and will contribute to quality and cost controls on a project.

The five basic levels of Gypsum finish with examples of applications follow.

### Finish Levels

**Level 0**

No taping of joints and no finish is required.

Level 0 is useful in temporary construction, where there will be no finish, or where final finish is undetermined.

**Level 1**

All joints and interior angles have tape embedded in joint compound. Tape and fasteners need not be covered with compound. The surface must be free of excess compound. Tool marks



and ridges are acceptable.

Level 1 is often used in building service areas or concealed areas such as attics, plenums, etc. Sometimes called "Fire Taping" this method provides some smoke control. Fire rated assemblies must be constructed in accordance with reports of tested assemblies.

#### Level 2

All joints and interior angles have tape embedded in joint compound and are wiped with a joint knife leaving a thin coating of joint compound over all joints and interior angles. Fastener heads and accessories are covered with a coat of joint compound. The surface must be free of excess joint compound, and tool marks and ridges are acceptable.

Level 2 finish is appropriate for garages, warehouses, and other similar areas where appearance is not paramount. This finish is also useful where the material will serve as a substrate for tile, per ASTM C 1396.

#### Level 3

All joints and interior angles have tape embedded in joint compound and one additional coat of joint compound applied over all joints and interior angles. Fastener heads and accessories are covered with two separate coats of joint compound. All joint compound must be smooth and free of tool marks and ridges. Level 3 finish is most appropriate for areas that are to receive commercial grade wall coverings or a hand applied or sprayed, textured finish.

#### Level 4

All joints and interior angles have tape embedded in joint compound and two additional coats of joint compound applied over all flat joints and one additional coat applied over interior angles. Fastener heads and

accessories are covered with three separate coats of joint compound. All joint compound must be smooth and free of tool marks and ridges. Level 4 finish should be used where residential grade wall coverings, flat paints, or light textures are indicated. Joints and fasteners must be sufficiently concealed so as not to telegraph through these light finish materials. This level of finish is not recommended for locations where gloss, semi-gloss, and enamel paints will be applied.

#### Level 5

All joints, interior angles, and fasteners are finished as for Level 4. Then a thin skim coat of joint compound specific to the purpose is to be applied over the entire surface. The skim coat is not intended to level the surface or correct defects. This may be accomplished by veneer plaster instead.

Level 5 is the highest quality finish and is an effective way to provide a uniform surface and minimize the possibility of joints or fasteners showing through finishes. Use Level 5 where gloss, semi gloss, and enamels are specified, and where critical lighting conditions occur.

#### Accessories:

For Finish Levels 0 and 1 accessories such as outside corners are optional. For the other finish levels, accessories should be coated to the same standard as required for flat joints and inside corners of the respective finish level.

#### Primer:

It is recommended that finish Levels 3, 4, and 5 receive a coat of a high quality drywall primer before application of a final finish. Primer will improve adhesion for wall coverings

and minimize show through for joints and fasteners.

## Conclusion

By creating a wall finish schedule and specifying the finish levels for each area a project can be completed to the exact desired standards. Using these finish levels will result in more accurate bidding and cost control, less confusion in projects where various quality finishes are required, and a happy client, the ultimate goal.

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