

Drywall Repair & Finishing — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into practice. Each section maps to a course module and gives you exercises to plan a repair, worksheets to spec materials, and checklists to run each job in order. Keep it next to your mud pan and knives as you work a real patch from cut-out to topcoat. The goal is to make the three-coat rhythm and the raking-light inspection a habit before you ever call a repair finished.

Drywall, Damage, and the Materials That Fix It

Diagnose the damage in front of you and choose the exact compound, tape, and tools the job needs.

Exercise: Diagnose the Damage and Its Cause

Stand at the wall you plan to repair and answer these in writing before buying anything. The cause changes the fix.

- Describe the damage: nail pop, dent, hole, or seam crack, and measure its width in inches.

- Is the paper torn or the gypsum crushed (a hole), or is the paper intact (a fill)?

- What caused it: impact, a backed-out fastener, settling at a corner, or water? Name the evidence.

- Does the repair need backing (over open framing) or can a mesh patch or fill handle it?

Worksheet: Compound and Tape Selection Sheet

Decide which product goes in each coat. Use setting compound (Easy Sand) for first coats and patches; lightweight (Plus 3) for top coats.

Repair type and hole size

First-coat compound (e.g. Easy Sand 45 / All-Purpose / Durabond)

Top-coat compound (e.g. Plus 3 lightweight / Topping)

Tape choice (paper / fiberglass mesh / none)

Patch hardware (mesh patch / clip kit / wood backer / California patch)

Reason for each choice (strength vs speed vs sandability)

Working time needed if hot mud (20 / 45 / 90 minutes)

Checklist: Tools and Materials Ready-to-Start

- Taping knives in 6, 10, and 12 inch widths plus a 4 or 5 inch putty knife
- Mud pan or hawk, clean and dry
- Chosen compound and tape on hand in the right quantities
- Pole sander, hand block, and a sanding sponge for corners
- 120 and 150 grit screens or paper
- Utility knife with fresh blades, drywall saw, drill, and drywall screws
- Stud finder, N95 mask, and a work light for raking the surface

Patching Holes from Pinholes to Blowouts

Match the right patch method to the hole size and rehearse the steps before you cut.

Worksheet: Hole-by-Hole Repair Plan

List every defect you intend to fix and assign the correct method using the size ladder from the course.

Location / room

Damage type (nail pop / dent / hole / crack)

Size across in inches

Method (re-fasten+fill / mesh patch / clip kit / wood-backed / California)

Backing available behind the wall? (Y/N)

Compound for first coat

Number of coats planned

Checklist: Nail Pop and Small Dent Steps

- Drove a new screw an inch from the pop into the stud, dimpling not tearing the paper
- Reset or removed the original fastener below flush
- Scraped away lifted paper and loose compound
- Applied a thin first coat over the fastener heads or dent
- Let it dry or set, then second-coated and feathered
- Sanded flush with 150 grit and spot-primed

Checklist: Large Hole (Backed or California) Steps

- Squared up the hole with a drywall saw to clean, firm edges
- Installed wood backer strips and screwed the wall into them, or cut a California paper flange
- Cut a drywall plug of matching thickness to fit with a small gap
- Fastened or embedded the plug flush, dimpling screws below the surface
- Taped all seams with paper tape and embedded in compound
- Built three coats with progressively wider knives and feathered the edges

Exercise: Rehearse the Coat-Building Logic

On scrap drywall or cardboard, plan and then practice building a patch flat. Write what you observe.

- How far did you feather each coat past the previous one, in inches?

- What happened when you applied too much compound in one pass?

-
- How did you confirm a coat was fully dry or set before recoating?
-
- Where did raking light reveal a ridge or low spot you could not see head-on?
-

Taping, Mudding, and Sanding to a Flat Finish

Run the three-coat seam and sand it to a paint-ready Level 4 or 5 finish.

Checklist: Three-Coat Seam Checklist

- Coat one: bedded paper tape in 1/8 inch of all-purpose compound and seated it with the 6-inch knife
- Checked for and sliced out any tape bubbles after the bed set
- Coat two: covered the tape with a 10-inch knife and widened the mud 2 to 3 inches per side
- Coat three: skimmed a thin top coat with a 12-inch knife and feathered the edges to nothing
- Let every coat dry or set fully before the next
- Used lightweight compound for the top coats for easy sanding

Worksheet: Seam and Coat Tracking Log

Track each seam or patch through its coats and dry times so you never recoat over soft mud.
Seam / patch ID and location

Joint type (tapered / butt / inside corner / outside corner)

Coat 1 compound and time applied

Coat 2 knife width and time applied

Coat 3 knife width and time applied

Total feather width achieved (inches)

Sanded? grit used and date

Exercise: Read the Wall with Raking Light

After your final coat is dry, set a work light low and to one side and inspect. Record what you find before sanding and after.

- List the high spots (ridges casting shadows) you can see under the raking light.
-
- List the low spots (dark dimples) that may need a touch-up skim.
-
- What did your fingertips feel that your eyes missed?
-
- Is this a Level 4 (smooth sanded) or does the lighting demand a Level 5 skim coat? Justify it.
-

Matching Texture and Priming for Paint

Forge the surrounding texture, seal the compound, and topcoat so the repair disappears.

Exercise: Identify and Rehearse Your Texture

Examine and photograph the existing texture, then test your match on scrap before touching the wall.

- Name the texture: smooth, orange peel, knockdown, popcorn, or hand-troweled.

- Describe the droplet size and density you must match.

- For knockdown, how long did you wait before flattening the peaks, and what knife did you use?

- If a pre-1985 popcorn ceiling, did you confirm asbestos testing before any scraping? (Y/N)

Checklist: Prime and Paint Checklist

- Surface fully sanded, dust-free, and dry before priming
- Chose the right primer (PVA drywall sealer, or shellac stain blocker over stains)
- Spot-primed and feathered the primer past the compound onto the surrounding paint
- Matched roller nap to the wall texture so the patch is not glassy
- Let primer dry the full label recoat time before painting
- Matched the existing sheen and painted to a natural break

Worksheet: Texture, Primer, and Paint Spec

Lock in the products and settings that reproduce your wall so the repair blends.

Texture type and matching method (aerosol can / thinned mud / trowel)

Test-on-scrap result and adjustments made

Primer product and type

Roller nap used for primer and topcoat

Existing paint sheen (flat / matte / eggshell / satin / semi-gloss)

Topcoat product and color match source

Spot, full-wall, or corner-to-corner repaint decision

Exercise: Final Inspection Against the Tells

Once the topcoat dries and the sheen sets, inspect under raking light and grade yourself against the common amateur tells.

- Is there a visible hump from too much compound? Where?

- Any flashing halo from skipped or smooth-rolled primer?

- Does the texture droplet size and density match the surrounding wall?

- Walk a stranger past it: can they point to where the damage was? What still needs touch-up?

Your Action Plan

1. Diagnose the damage and its cause, then confirm whether each defect is a fill or a hole.
2. Select the first-coat and top-coat compounds, tape, and patch method on the selection sheet.
3. Gather and stage tools by coat, keeping separate clean sets for premixed and hot mud.
4. Cut out and back larger holes, or apply a mesh patch, so the surface is rigid before mudding.
5. Bed paper tape on seams, slicing out any bubbles after the first coat sets.
6. Build three coats with 6, 10, and 12 inch knives, feathering each wider and letting each dry.
7. Sand to Level 4 with 150 grit, inspecting under raking light and feeling with your hand.
8. Add a Level 5 skim coat only where glossy paint or harsh side lighting demands it.
9. Test the texture match on scrap, then reproduce orange peel or knockdown and blend the edges.
10. Prime the bare compound, matching roller nap, then topcoat to the existing sheen and re-inspect.

