

HOW TO PAINT PANELING

With the right prep work, you can transform your old paneling and achieve a beautiful new look.



Whether you have high-quality varnished hardwood, simple veneer, or faux paneling, painting over paneling can give you a fresh, new look. It also avoids the hassle of having to deal with issues with the wall surface beneath the paneling. The key to success is putting in a little extra time on the front end and prepping the old surface properly.



Learn how to transform a paneled wall into a smooth, flat wall in this step-by-step video.

Supplies Checklist

- ✓ Caulk
- ✓ Caulk gun
- ✓ Goggles
- ✓ Mask
- ✓ Paint brushes
- ✓ Premium Benjamin Moore Paint like [Aura® Interior](#) or [Regal® Select Interior](#)
- ✓ Primer: Choose the right one based on your specific project, outlined in our step-by-step guidance.
- ✓ Rollers
- ✓ Sandpaper and sanding block
- ✓ Spackle or joint compound
- ✓ Spackling knife



Step #1: Assess

Before you start, take the time to determine what type of paneling you have. Polyurethane finish, layers of paint, and even a decades-long coating of cleaning products can mask the material underneath. Find a spot where a panel's edge is exposed, which may require removing an HVAC grate or baseboard molding, to properly examine the end of a piece of paneling to see what you're working with. If your paneling is veneer (which only has a thin surface layer of wood grain), fiberboard, or composite instead of solid wood, you want to be very careful not to damage it.



Key Watchout

Veneer is a paper-thin layer of wood grain over a stronger—though unsightly—material like particle board or fiberboard. Be careful not to sand through it.



Step #2: Clean

Grease, grime, and even cleaning-product residue can really build up on veneer or hardwood paneling over the years, which can then prevent your paint from properly adhering to the surface. Be sure to remove all contaminants and residue with a grease-removing cleaner before beginning work. If the paneling is still too glossy after cleaning, you may need to dull the surface a bit with a light sanding to make sure the paint has texture it can adhere to. Just be very careful if you're dealing with veneer, as sanding can ruin the thin outer layer, exposing the fiberboard underneath.



Important Safety Note

Whenever you're removing an old surface through sanding, it's important to protect yourself from potentially dangerous dust with a mask and goggles.



Step #3: Spot Prime

Do you want the finished look to be that of a smooth wall? Or will you retain the look of the paneled grooves? If you want to keep the grooves, skip to Step 4.

To get the best-looking smooth surface on your painted paneling, check out the video on this page. You'll need to prime the paneling first—at least the areas you plan to fill with spackle or caulk—to ensure you get the best possible adhesion. Primer choices include:

- For laminate or veneer paneling, [INSL-X® Stix® primer](#), specifically engineered to bond with challenging glossy surfaces, will give you the best results.
- For hardwood paneling, [INSL-X® Aqua Lock®](#) or [Fresh Start® High-Hiding Primer, 046](#) will both provide better stain blocking for real wood, with very good adhesion.
- For tannin-rich woods like cedar or redwood, your best option is to use an oil-based primer such as [INSL-X® Prime Lock](#) or [Fresh Start® Multi-Purpose Oil-Based Primer, 024](#).



Step #4: Spackle and Caulk

If you are creating a smooth surface, wait until after the first coat of primer has dried before you spackle to get proper adhesion. You will need to use joint compound (also called drywall mud) or spackle to fill in all the grooves in the paneling to meet the rest of the surface. Using a quick-drying "hot mud" or patch, which has a high pH level, creates unique challenges and is not recommended. If you do use it, be sure to use a 100% acrylic primer for best results.

Whether you're going for a smooth or grooved look, any seams between panels also need to be filled in. For this, you should use caulk instead of spackle. Caulk will expand as the panels shift slightly over time, as opposed to spackle, which can crack.



Helpful Tip

Spackle or joint compound dries hard, whereas caulk can expand and contract slightly over time. This makes spackle better for filling grooves and caulk the better option for seams.



Step #5: Sand, Vacuum, and Tack

A light sanding at this stage will create a smooth, dull surface free of imperfections, and also one that is just rough enough to give the paint proper adhesion. Using a fine sandpaper (220 grit is a good level here), focus on any areas that are uneven or that have dried drips, such as corners and edges. After you sand, be sure to vacuum the paneling thoroughly and tack or wipe everything down with a damp cloth to remove any remaining dust. Then let it dry.



Step #6: Prime Again

Re-priming after spackling and caulking is one of the most important things you can do to ensure an even, professional finish. A second coat of primer will help conceal differences between the spackle and panel surfaces, cover any stains and knots in the paneling, and provide proper adhesion for your paint top coat. Be sure to give the primer enough time to fully dry as recommended on the label.



Step #7: Paint

Use a paintbrush to cut in to corners and edges first, then blend any seams as you complete the rest of the wall with a roller. Note that a lighter paint color on dark wood may require an extra coat, depending on how well the primer masked the grain below.

Different Paints Offer a Range of Finish Options

Waterborne alkyds like Benjamin Moore [ADVANCE®](#) offer an easy-application top coat for painting paneling and cure to a durable, furniture-quality finish. Latex paints will give you more of a glossy or shiny look: Benjamin Moore's [AURA® Interior](#) and [Regal® Select Interior](#) paints both offer rich, durable look with a mildew-resistant finish.

Benjamin Moore offers [3,500+ different colors](#) from which to choose, and pint-sized [paint color samples](#) are available for shipping right to your door to make decision-making easier.

Step #8: Paint a Second Coat

After the first coat of paint is fully dry, apply a second coat for an even, spot-free finish. Be sure to allow a full 24 hours of drying time for the new finish to fully cure before replacing any wall decor, fixtures or furniture.

Enjoy the Look of Your Freshly Painted Wood Paneling

Few projects will have such a profound impact on the look of a room as painting old paneling. By taking the time to do the proper prep work first, you can take a dated appearance and transform it into a space that is fresh and beautiful.