



FASTER Drywall Finishing with No-Coat

The rigid plastic backing in UltraFlex prefinished drywall corner tape provides crisp corners, especially for off-angle applications.

This prefinished corner
taping system reduces
sanding, and can cut
drying time in half

One of the saving graces of drywall is that given enough tries (and enough dust masks), most carpenters can produce an acceptable finish. But taping drywall is something of an art, and those of us who tape only a few seams once in a while have to do a lot more sanding than the pros. On

by Carl Hagstrom

a remodeling project, the dust created during the final

sanding is often what sends edgy clients over the edge.

To help reduce the amount of sanding required, No-Coat (Grabber Construction Products, Concord, Calif.; 800/477-8876; www.grabberman.com) has developed an innovative line of prefinished drywall tapes that streamline the process of finishing inside, outside, and off-angle corners. The No-Coat tapes — UltraFlex, UltraFlex Lite, UltraCorner, and UltraBull — also reduce the “wait to paint” time, often making it possible to paint the drywall the same day it’s taped. In this article, I’ll explain how these new drywall tapes are used, and the benefits they offer to contractors.

Corners Just Got Easier

Conventional inside corners typically require at least three finishing steps. First, a bed of drywall compound is troweled on both sides of the corner; paper tape is cut to length, creased in the center, bedded in the compound, and troweled in tightly.

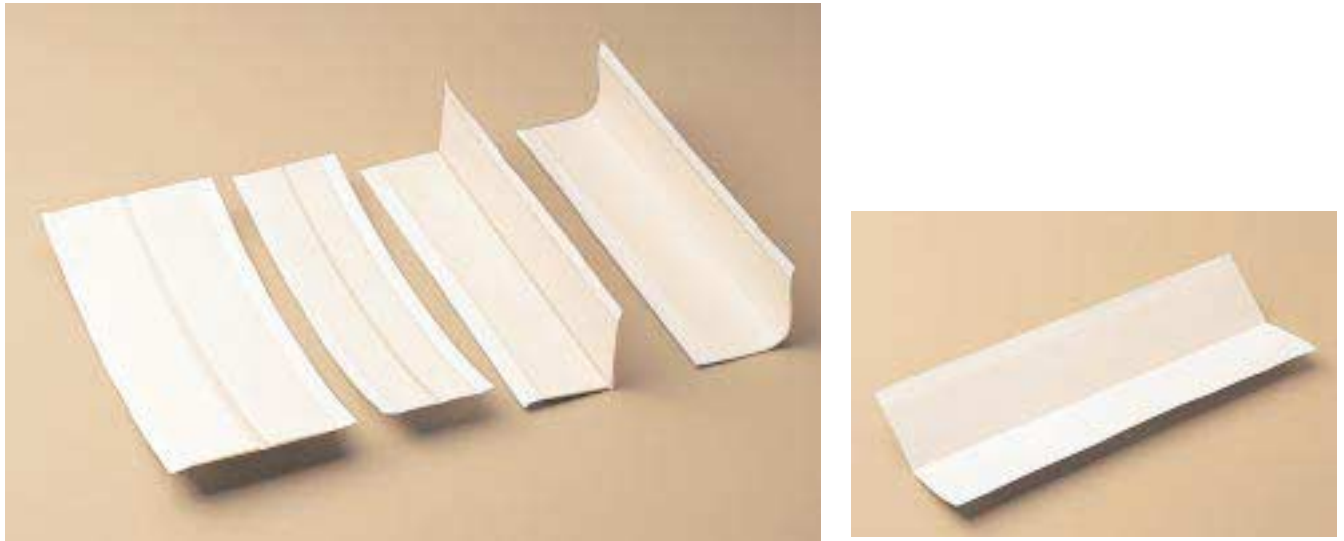


Figure 1. No-Coat corner tape is made by sandwiching strips of rigid plastic between regular paper tape on the back side and a layer of heavy finish paper on the front that can accept paint. Shown here, backside-up, are (from left): UltraFlex, for inside and outside corners of any angle, and the narrower UltraFlex Lite, for inside corners up to 9 feet long, both of which come in 100-foot rolls; and UltraCorner and UltraBull, two preformed outside corner tapes that come in 8-, 9-, and 10-foot lengths. At right, a piece of UltraFlex is shown finished-side out and creased to fit an off-angle inside corner.

Second, after the first coat has dried, compound is applied to both sides of the corner, covering the paper tape. Finally, additional coats of compound are applied and sanded until an acceptable surface is achieved and ready to paint. The number of “feathering” coats required depends on the skill of the finisher.

Finishing inside corners has always been frustrating work for me. When it comes to bedding the tape, any large gaps where the sheets of drywall meet will often cause the tape to wrinkle. If I fill the gaps with compound to build a solid backing for the tape, it adds an extra step and drags out the job, because the filler has to dry before I apply the tape. Applying the second coat is also problematic. No matter how hard I try, making a pass on one side of the corner always seems to ruin the nice pass I just made on the other side of the corner. The more I fuss with the corner, the worse it gets. Corner trowels help, but tend to leave a hefty ridge of compound at the outside edges.

Outside corners are no picnic, either. The corner bead has to be nailed or crimped in place just so, which can be difficult if the drywall doesn’t make a tight joint at the corner. If the corner bead is skewed slightly to one side, or if a nail head stands proud of the bead or goes in at a slight angle, it wreaks havoc with the finish coat. And when it comes time to run the baseboard, the metal bead can get in the way of a tight miter.

Drying time is also an issue with both types of cor-

ner joints. The thick layers of joint compound applied to corners dry slowly — in low temperatures and high humidity, it can take 48 hours or more for the compound to dry completely. I’ve used quick-setting compounds like Durabond, but I don’t like having to mix the mud on site, and it’s nearly impossible to clean off my tools and buckets after it’s set. Durabond is also harder to sand.

Finish Tape

The No-Coat tapes address all of these issues. Unlike conventional paper tape or corner bead, which get completely covered with compound, No-Coat tapes are made with a heavy, smooth paper that accepts paint as well as the drywall surface itself. The finish paper is reinforced with two thin strips of flexible plastic, one on either side of the centerline, backed with two strips of regular paper tape. Because the paper surface will accept paint, only the edges of the finish paper, which overhang the plastic reinforcing by about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, need to be blended or feathered into the surface of the drywall.

The basic No-Coat tape is called UltraFlex (see Figure 1). It’s $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide — nearly twice as wide as regular tape, comes in 100-foot rolls, and can be used for inside and outside corners of any length. A narrower $2\frac{5}{8}$ -inch-wide version called UltraFlex Lite is suitable only for inside corners up to 9 feet long. A preformed

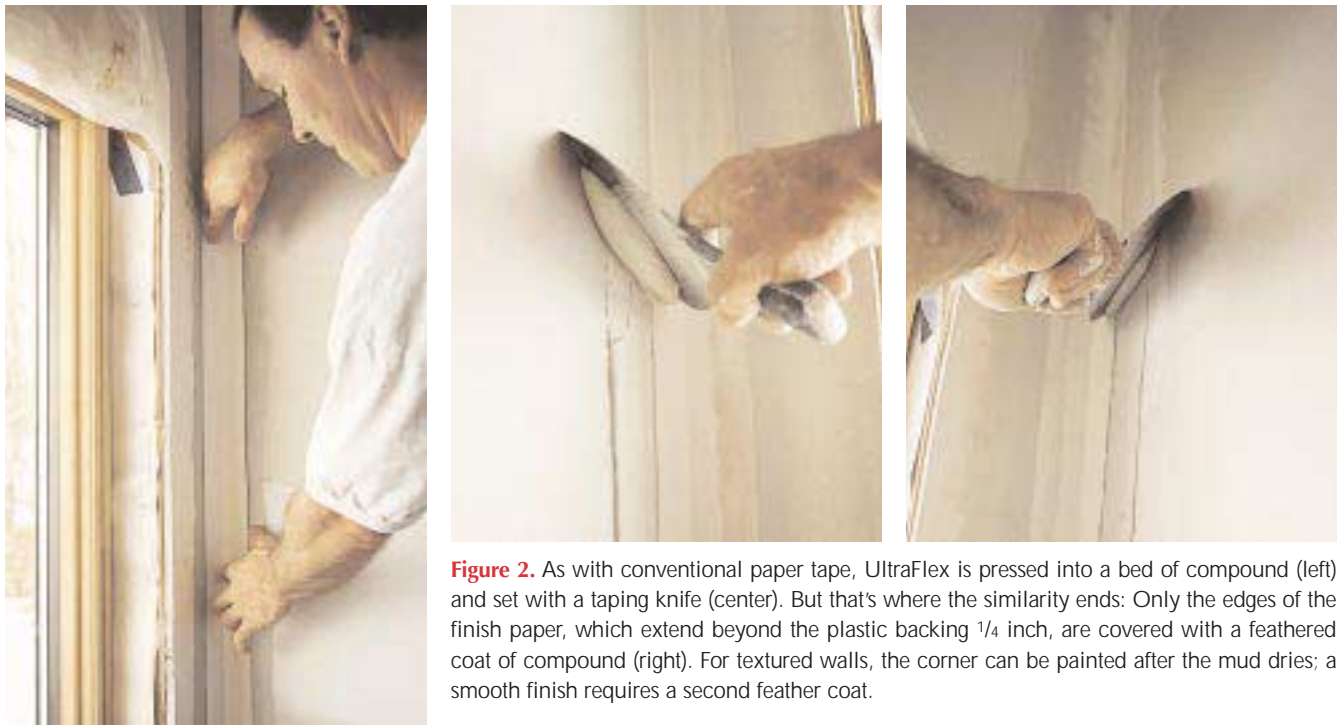


Figure 2. As with conventional paper tape, UltraFlex is pressed into a bed of compound (left) and set with a taping knife (center). But that's where the similarity ends: Only the edges of the finish paper, which extend beyond the plastic backing $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, are covered with a feathered coat of compound (right). For textured walls, the corner can be painted after the mud dries; a smooth finish requires a second feather coat.

90-degree outside corner called UltraCorner is also available in 8-, 9-, and 10-foot lengths, and costs about 25% less than UltraFlex. (A bullnose corner tape called UltraBull is also available in the same precut lengths.) The plastic backing on all of these tapes is rigid enough to bridge any voids or gaps in the corners that often cause regular paper tape to wrinkle or pucker. The result is a crisp-looking corner that is easier to achieve — particularly in remodeling situations where corners are often wavy.

Fast drying time. For a textured wall, corners can be taped in one pass. To use UltraFlex, for example, you fold the tape at the center and trowel it into a bed of compound that has been thinned with water; then wipe down the narrow flange with a finishing knife, leaving most of the tape exposed (Figure 2). Immediately apply a feather coat, again covering only the $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch paper flanges, and when the compound is dry the corner is ready for paint. A smooth wall finish requires a second feather coat at the paper flanges.

Both UltraFlex and UltraCorner are easy to align over the corner, and because both the bed coat and edge coats are comparatively thin, outside corners require much less time to dry than corners trimmed with metal bead. Both of these tapes also have a much flatter installed profile than conventional metal corner bead. This reduces the amount of standoff created at the baseboard — a distinct advantage when dealing with stain grade trim.

Off-angles. The rigidity of the plastic backing in the wider UltraFlex makes the tape ideal for use with off-

angle inside or outside corners, particularly in cathedral ceilings where the least bit of waviness is quickly picked up by even an untrained eye. I've watched seasoned drywall finishers struggle with the joints formed at intersecting roof planes, and they generally devote a lot of time and energy to achieving a straight, crisp line. With UltraFlex tape, the plastic backing forces a straight and true joint, and reduces finishing time (Figure 3, next page).

Splicing, Cutting & Sanding

UltraFlex comes in 100-foot rolls, theoretically eliminating any field overlaps, but long lengths can be difficult to handle, particularly when working solo. It's much like trying to extend a one-inch tape measure, unsupported, beyond 9 feet or so. To create a field splice, the plastic backing is scored and peeled off about one inch from the end. This creates a flap of finish paper that is bedded in compound and feathered over the previously installed piece, much the same way conventional paper tape is spliced.

Three-way corners in flat-ceilinged rooms are treated conventionally, with the UltraFlex bedded in the ceiling corners first, followed by the vertical run. But the splicing technique is useful at cathedral ceiling intersections. Where the wall tape overlaps the ceiling tape, the plastic backing can be scored and peeled off, and the paper flap bedded and feathered out with compound.

Wrapped posts. With standard corner bead, a 6x6 post wrapped in drywall would be finished by filling



Figure 3. Gaps in drywall joints, like these at the peak of a cathedral ceiling (left), can cause bubbles or wrinkles in ordinary paper tape. UltraFlex's plastic backing not only bridges these kinds of gaps, but makes it easy to get a clean crisp line at the joint (right).

the entire space between each pair of beads with compound. While you could use the same technique with No-Coat, all you really need to do is fill the area between the parallel plastic strips of reinforcing. This might require a 4-inch or smaller taping knife, but it eats up a lot less compound.

Cutting. Unlike regular paper tape, No-Coat tapes can't be torn — you have to cut them to length. With a razor knife, it takes about three passes to score the plastic strips on UltraFlex, which then break easily by bending the tape back and forth a few times. UltraFlex can also be cut easily with scissors or shears, but the preformed corners are best cut using shears, just like standard corner bead.

Sanding. Although No-Coat tape is designed so that just the 1/4-inch-wide flanges need to be covered with compound, it's a cinch that some mud will end up on the finish tape. One advantage of these tapes is that you can use a damp sponge to spot-clean the surface before the compound dries. If you wait to sand until the mud dries, the rules are the same as for regular tape. If you never use sandpaper coarser than 180-grit, you won't rough up the No-Coat paper any more than the drywall paper itself.

What's It Cost?

UltraCorner costs about 34¢ a foot, UltraFlex runs about 50¢ a foot, and UltraFlex Lite, 28¢ a foot. That's pretty steep when compared with 11¢ a foot for metal corner bead, but the reduced finishing time more than makes up for the higher cost of the mate-

rial. For example, using UltraCorner for 100 linear feet of outside corners would add \$24 to the price of the job, but the corners will be crisp and straight, and will probably be ready for paint by the end of the day. Plus, because very little if any sanding is needed, there's virtually no dust — I won't even try to put a price tag on that.

Word on the Street

It can be difficult (and costly) to schedule drywall subs for smaller jobs, so to keep the job moving, remodelers often become reluctant tapers. The remodeling contractors I talked to who take on "part-time" taping chores spoke highly of UltraFlex. The reduced sanding combined with the ability to tape and paint in 24 hours provides these semi-skilled drywall finishers with a real advantage.

One seasoned taper I talked with has used UltraFlex for tricky off-angles and liked the results, but when working with standard inside and outside corners, he wasn't convinced that he'd save any appreciable time over conventional finishing methods. As in most trades, old habits die hard, and I wouldn't be surprised if it takes a little longer for veteran tapers to form an objective opinion of the UltraFlex.

As for me, I plan on keeping a roll of UltraFlex handy. When it comes to finishing drywall, I need all the help I can get.



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