

Chapter 16. Underlayment and Finish Stairs

16.1 INSTALLING UNDERLAYMENT & DRICORE

16.2 FINISHING STAIRS

Tools needed by volunteers:

Hammer
Nail apron
Tape measure

Materials needed:

¼” Underlayment
DRICore
Staples
80 Grit sanding belts
2” Screws
3” Screws
[¼” Underlayment spacers](#)
Weatherstripping
Weathermate™ Construction Tape
Scrap foamboard
Construction Adhesive
[Pneumatic tool oil](#)

Tools and equipment needed:

Extension cord
Belt sander
Drill driver
Table saw
Air compressor
Pneumatic stapler
Shop vac
Skirtboard Template
Sheetrock square
[DRICore seating tool](#)
Putty knife
Utility knife
Broom
Adjustable bevel
[Floor scraper](#)

Personal Protection Equipment:

Safety glasses (required)
Dust masks (recommended)
Ear plugs (recommended)

Safety First! Review the Safety Checklist before performing tasks in this chapter.

16.1. INSTALLING UNDERLAYMENT

16.1.1. Multi-ply Underlayment Prep

1. Check for floor squeaks. Where found, drive a 2” deck screw through the sub floor into the floor joists to eliminate the squeak.
2. Scrape the entire floor to remove any plaster, debris, or protruding nails or staples.
3. Using a belt sander, sand the OSB sub floor seams to ensure the seams are flush so the underlayment will lay flat.
4. Vacuum the floor.
5. Verify that all floor vents in the vinyl flooring areas (at a minimum) are nailed in place and air sealed per instructions in Section 12.3.3.
6. Wherever the underlayment will cover existing stud location marks on the floor, transfer the marks to the wall with a red crayon (no higher than 2” off the floor).
7. Snap a chalk line 47³/₄” out from the wall surface (plaster). Lay underlayment sheets tight to the chalk line, butted tightly against each other, and located slightly under the plaster wall. Adjust as required and tack first row in place.
8. Plug the compressor into an outside outlet WITHOUT using an extension cord (the compressor can draw high current). Tilt the compressor and close the pressure relief valve (horizontal position). Connect one or two compressor lines. Turn the compressor on and set the pressure to about 80 psi.

NOTE: At the end of the day, tilt the compressor and slowly open the pressure relief valve (vertical position) to release the air and drain any moisture from the tank. Set the compressor back down to ensure all moisture drains out.

9. Place a few drops of pneumatic oil into the air inlet of the pneumatic power stapler.

NOTE: This may have to be done a few times throughout the day or after encountering stapling issues like multiple staples being fired or staples suddenly not countersinking properly (and the air compressor pressure is fine).

10. Connect the power stapler to a compressor line.

16.1.2. Installing Multi-ply Underlayment

1. Alternate rows of underlayment should be staggered 12”–24” in order to avoid a point with four corners. Multi-ply seams must be at least 6” from any parallel sub

floor decking. When installing underlayment over DRICore in basement bathrooms, offset the underlayment seams and parallel DRICore seams by 6" minimum.

2. Plan the layout so a full sheet is placed in front of all doors.
3. Begin the second row with a half-sheet and tack pieces in place as they are laid. Gaps between sheets must be less than $\frac{1}{8}$ ".
4. Where an exterior door enters a carpeted area, the underlayment should extend 8" outside the arc of the door in both the open and closed positions, and the inside corner should be trimmed to a 24" radius. Install the sheet per the following instructions:
 - a. Place a sheet of underlayment on the floor in front of the front door, tight to the left and right door jambs. Position the sheet so it's 8" beyond the edge of the door. Mark the 8" position on the floor.
 - b. Make a mark on the sheet along the outside edge of each door jamb. (These marks will be used to realign the sheet after trimming.) Trim $\frac{1}{4}$ " off the sheet edge between these marks to allow the sheet to slide $\frac{1}{4}$ " under the adjacent sheetrock.
 - c. Open the door 90° and make a mark on the underlayment 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ " beyond the edge of the door. Use a T-square to extend this mark across the sheet and trim along this line.
 - d. Locate the center point for scribing a 24" arc on the transition corner of the underlayment. Make a mark 24" in from the corner on both sides. Use a T-square to extend these marks and tack in a nail at the intersection of the lines. Place the loop of a string on a pencil, place the pencil tip at the edge of the sheet, and wrap the string around the nail. Hold the pencil tight and draw the arc between the sheet edges. Trim the radius with a jig saw.
 - e. Re-install the sheet against the door jambs with the sheet edge under the sheetrock and the corner 8" beyond the edge of the closed door. Secure the sheet to the floor.
 - f. Fill in the space behind the door with a single piece of scrap underlayment.
5. Seams between vinyl flooring and carpeting should be midway under the bottom of a door when closed. Doors when closed are not located in the middle of the doorjamb. Use the edges of the jack stud as reference. For doors swinging inward, use the inside edge of the jack stud for the location of the end of the underlayment. For doors swinging outward, use the outside edge of the jack stud. (See Figure 16-1.)
6. Underlayment should extend under doorjambs to avoid open gaps.

7. Ensure all holes for registers are cut open.

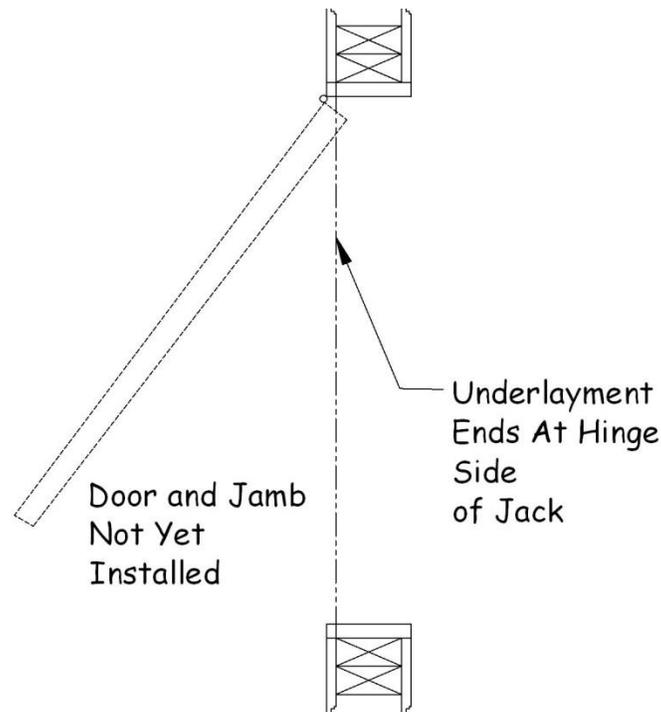


Figure 16-1. Underlayment in Interior Door Opening.

8. When stapling, constantly check to make sure the gun is loaded with staples and that the compressor air pressure is high enough to ensure staples are countersunk below the **surface of the sheet (otherwise each staple will have to be countersunk by hand)**.

NOTE: Some of the power staplers have a depth adjustment feature that can be used to adjust the stapling depth.

9. Adjust the exhaust outlet of the power stapler to vent away from the finished wall surface.
10. Start the stapling process at one end of the floor by first “tacking” several sheets before completing the stapling process. Start at the center of each sheet and then staple vertically, horizontally, and then diagonally every three or four X’s.
11. When several sheets have been “tacked”, completely staple each sheet by again moving from the center toward the edges. Do not staple edges of the floor before stapling the interior. In the field of each sheet, place one staple at each “X” mark and one in the middle of every four “X” marks (this will make the average spacing of each staple about 3”).
12. At all seams, staple the edges at 1” intervals about $\frac{3}{8}$ ” from the edge of the sheet. At all other edges (against a wall, next to carpeting, in the doors, or along the tub or

shower), staple only at the X's. Drive all staples parallel with the grain of the sheet.

13. Quality check each underlayment sheet by verifying that all staples have been installed at the appropriate spacing and that they are set below the surface. Check with a putty knife or ice scraper. Set offending staples with a hammer.

NOTE: Shining a flashlight straight down on the surface helps to identify missing staples (indicated by no reflection).

16.1.3. DRICore Installation

1. Layout is required to not only determine the optimum starting point, but also to ensure that the last row is at least 6" wide. Generally, the starting point should be one of the walls in the basement hallway or the wall at the base of the stairway. Start at that point and work outward in both directions. Once the first row is installed, two crews can work at opposite edges of the first row and work in opposite directions

NOTE: Before starting in houses with two bedrooms in the basement, carefully measure into each room, in all directions, to ensure that all rows along walls are at least 6" wide and that all overlaps are at least 6".

2. Once the starting point has been established, snap a chalk line as a reference for the first row. DRICore should not be tight to the wall; a gap of ¼" is preferred. Use a ¼" spacer between the DRICore and the wall to maintain the ¼" gap
3. Alternate rows of DRICore should be staggered at least 6", avoiding a point with four corners.
4. To seat the tongue and groove, lay the seating tool along the grooved or cut edge so that pounding will not damage the edge of the DRICore piece.
5. After completion, walk slowly over the traffic areas of the floor to check for DRICore that moves when walked on. If found:
 - a. Drill a ⅜"-½" hole through each piece that moves.
 - b. Force several squeezes of construction adhesive through the hole so that it spreads out like a leveler. When dry, the glue will fill the low spot and help to adhere the DriCore to the floor.

NOTE: Do this AT THE END OF THE WORK DAY to allow the adhesive to dry without foot traffic

16.2. FINISHING STAIRS

16.2.1. Installing the Handrail

1. All stairways with more than three risers require handrails.

NOTE: For safety reasons, it is recommended that the permanent handrail be installed before installing the skirtboard and permanent treads.

2. Handrails should have a maximum cross-sectional dimension of $2\frac{7}{8}$ ". The tops of the handrails should be located at least 34" but no more than 36" above the nose of the stair treads.

NOTE: Blocking has been installed for the handrail from the top of the stairs to the bottom. (See Section 10.5.7).

3. A handrail should be continuous for the entire length of the stairs except:
 - At an intermediate landing, or
 - At an intermediate wall where the horizontal offset between the two rails is less than 12".
4. At the top and bottom stair treads, measure vertically 31" above the nose of the treads and mark the wall. Pull a string line very tight between these marks. This line represents the location of the bottom holes in the three handrail mounting brackets and will place the top of the handrail about 35" above the stairs. (Adjust this level slightly up or down for special circumstances.)
5. Along this line, first mark the wall for locations of the top and bottom handrail brackets. The top bracket should be 10-12" from the top end of the stairway wall and the bottom end should be 10-12" from the bottom end of the stairway wall, or from door trim if present. Make a third mark halfway between. See Figure 16-2.
6. Cut the handrail to a length such that each end will be 2"-3" from the end of the wall or door trim. Once the returns are installed (Steps 7 & 8 below) this will provide adequate room for hand grip without so much room that the railing flexes or moves.
7. The ends of the handrail must have a return back to the wall. With the flat side of the handrail firmly on the bed of the saw, cut opposite 45° miters on each end of the handrail (the miters will be perpendicular, not parallel, to each other).
8. Cut opposite 45° miters on a piece of handrail approximately 15-18" long (this length will allow safely cutting short pieces off each end). Install the handrail and move the mounting brackets under the handrail to their farthest positions from the wall. Measure from the long end of the miter to the wall at each end (the distances

may not be the same). Carefully cut (square cut) two pieces these lengths from the short mitered piece.

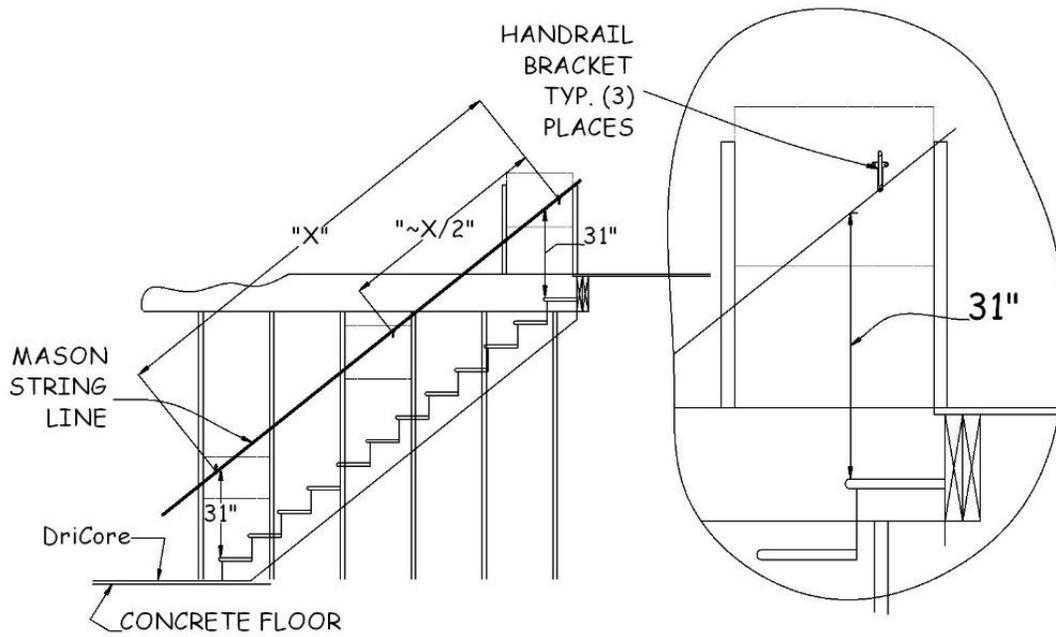


Figure 16-2. Handrail Bracket Installation.

9. At each end of the rail, check the fit of the miters and if acceptable, apply wood glue to the miter cuts of both the handrail and the return piece. Set the return piece in place, and hold in place with a clamp. If necessary, wedge a tapered shim between the wall and the end of the return to ensure good contact at the glue joint.
10. Using a 2½” hardened trim nail, predrill the miter joint and nail the return to the rail using one of the same trim nails. Do NOT use a Paslode nailer. Use one nail in each direction, with a slight vertical offset to avoid the second nail hitting the first. Wipe off any excess glue. Set the nails if required, and putty the holes. If the return is not tight to the wall, loosen the screws holding the bracket to the rail, push the return tight to the wall, and retighten the screws. If necessary, insert a small shim between the bracket and the underside of the rail to ensure a tight fit.

WARNING: Do not use your hands to hold the pieces while nailing.

11. Once the return is set, use the Paslode nailer to drive a 2½” finishing nail at an angle through the flat underside of the return into the wall blocking.

16.2.2. Installing the Skirtboards

1. Scrape wall surfaces behind the stair stringers to ensure skirting will lay flat on the wall surface.
2. Clean off any dirt or plaster on the 2x4 on either side of the outside stringers. This will allow the skirtboard to sit firmly down on the 2x4.
3. On each side of the top of the stairway, cut a 1" wide notch in the subfloor overhang, flush with the header, so the skirtboard can rest tightly against the header. Using a square, draw a 4" long plumb line on the wall aligned with the face of the header. This represents the top end of the skirtboard.
4. At the bottom of the stairs, use a level to draw about an 8" plumb line 4" from the end of the stringer. Sometimes the wall ends there, or there is a door opening that will not allow you to go 4" past because of the trim that goes on the door; draw the line as far as possible up to 4".
5. Lay the 24" side of a framing square on the 2x4. Make two marks 11½" up from the 2x4 (the width of the skirtboard) about 3' apart at each end of the stairway. Repeat on the other side of the stairway. (See Figure 16-3.)
6. Place a 6' level on the two marks at the top of the stairway (from Step 5) and scribe a line across the two marks to a point that intersects the plumb lines from Step 3. This creates Point 1, which must be at least 3" above the floor to be higher than the floor trim (see Figure 16-3). Then, using the two marks at the bottom of the stairway (from Step 5), draw a line to a point that intersects the plumb line. This intersection is Point 2 (see Figure 16-3). Repeat on the opposite side of the stairway.

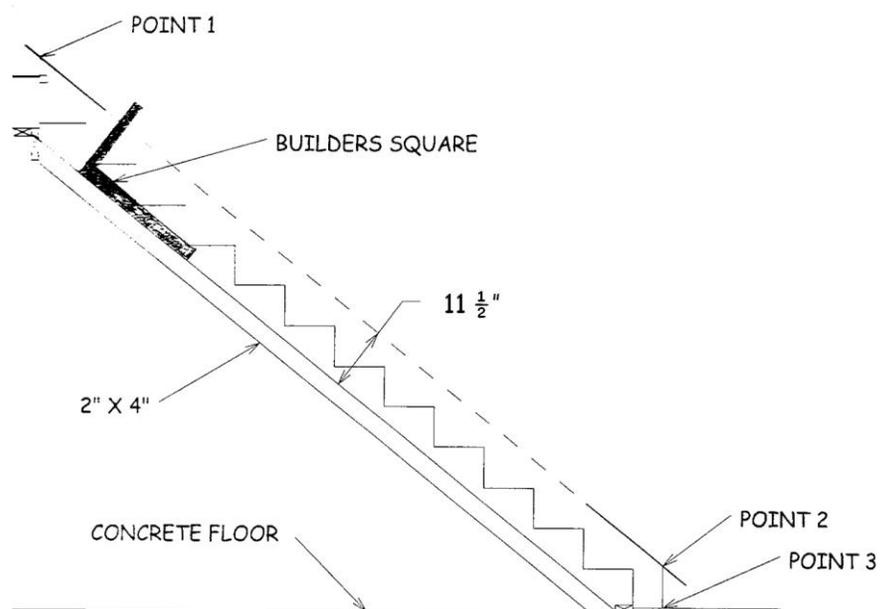


Figure 16-3. Skirtboard Installation.

7. Measure from Point 1 to Point 2; this is the total length of the top edge of the skirtboard. Then, measure from Point 2 (on the wall) straight down to the floor. This measurement minus $\frac{1}{4}$ " is the dimension to Point 3. Subtract another $\frac{1}{4}$ " if there will be vinyl flooring at the bottom. If the DRICore is not yet installed, subtract another $\frac{7}{8}$ " from the measurement to account for that thickness.
8. Compare measurements from both sides of the stairway. If the 2x4s have not been installed exactly the same on each side, there may be small differences between the measurements of the two sides. If they are different, make the following adjustments until the measurements are the same (to allow cutting both skirtboards at the same time):
 - a. Measure up to Point 1 on both sides. Adjust the point as required so that both sides are at the highest measurement of the two sides, and a minimum of 3" above the subfloor.
 - b. At the bottom, measure up to Point 2 on both sides, and adjust as required so that both are at the highest measurement of the two sides.
 - c. Finally, measure the distance from the adjusted Point 1 to the adjusted Point 2 on both sides to get the length of the top of the two skirtboards. These measurements should be equal within $\frac{1}{4}$ ". If not, recheck measurements above.
9. If the bottom of the skirtboard ends close to an outside corner, adjust the length so that the skirtboard ends flush with the corner (base trim will end flush with the face of the skirt), or it ends at least 1" back from the corner to allow for base trim to wrap around the corner.
10. If the bottom of the skirtboard ends close to a door opening, the length may need to be adjusted so there is adequate room (1-2") to install base trim between the door casing and the end of the skirtboard. However, the end of the skirtboard (Point 2-to-Point 3 line) must be at least 4" past the end of the stringer. If there is insufficient space for both base trim and door trim, first eliminate base trim and second rip or notch the door trim to fit.
11. The "Skirtboard Template" is provided only as a guide in cutting the two ends of the skirtboard. The angles are approximate only. To establish the correct angles, place the template at the top of the stairs, tight against the edge of the flooring, and exactly aligned with the line drawn on the wall in Step 5. If necessary, tack it to the wall with two Paslode nails or finishing nails to keep it in place.
 - a. If the vertical edge of the template is perfectly parallel with the plumb line on the wall, that angle should be used in laying out and cutting both ends of the skirtboard.

- b. If the vertical edge of the template is not parallel with the plumb line, set an adjustable bevel on the top of the template and align it with the plumb line and lock it. This will be the angle to be cut at both ends - at the top, with the adjustable bevel set on the top edge of the skirtboard and at the bottom with the bevel square set on the bottom of the skirtboard. These cut edges will then be parallel.
12. Set the skirtboard on saw horses with the unfinished side up (any tear out from the circular saw will then be on the unfinished side). Lay the template on the board and orient it to establish the proper cut orientation at the top of the skirtboard. If the top angle of the template is correct, use it to mark for cutting. If not, use the adjustable bevel angle established above. This will establish Point 1 (see Figure 16-2).
13. Measure along the top of the skirtboard to locate Point 2 at the distance measured in Step 6. With either the template or the adjustable bevel, as appropriate, mark the correct angle for the bottom end vertical cut. Check to be sure the top and bottom cuts will be parallel.
14. Transfer the Point 2-to-Point 3 measurement from Step 8 to the skirtboard (keep in mind that the skirtboard is held $\frac{1}{4}$ " off the floor) to locate Point 3. From Point 3 (on the skirtboard), create a 90° corner with a pencil line; this edge will run along the floor.
15. Before cutting the skirtboard, recheck all measurements for angles and lengths and adjust until correct. Cut the first skirtboard and test fit on both sides of the stairway. Use it as a template to cut the second piece by placing the unfinished sides together.
16. Before installing the skirtboards, stain both ends.
17. Prior to placing the skirtboard in position, measure from the final Point 1 to the floor and mark the upper edge of the skirtboard at this dimension down from the peak. Drive a finishing nail into the end, leaving about $\frac{1}{2}$ " exposed. This will provide a "handle" to help lift the board into position.
18. Place the skirtboard in position, apply pressure from the bottom to seat it firmly in the notch in the floor, and lift it up at both ends to match with Points 1 and 2. Lift it enough to cover any layout pencil lines on the wall. If the basement is not to be finished, hold the skirtboard off the floor with a temporary $\frac{1}{4}$ " spacer. If it is to be finished (with DRICore), use a piece of DRICore along with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " spacer to set the height of the skirting off the floor. Nail the skirtboard to the wall, nailing into studs or blocking with $2\frac{1}{2}$ " Paslode finishing nails. Putty the nail holes.
19. Repeat Steps 17 and 18 for the opposite skirtboard.

16.2.3. Installing Treads and Risers

1. For safety reasons, only remove the temporary treads from two sets of steps at a time and MAKE CERTAIN that the gap is guarded AT ALL TIMES.
2. Install risers first. The riser may need to be cut to the proper width. It should be flush or slightly under the top of the stringer.
3. Measure between the skirtboards to get the length. If the stairs are going to be carpeted, cut the riser $\frac{1}{2}$ " short so there is a $\frac{1}{4}$ " gap on either side. If the stairs are not going to be carpeted, cut to a tighter fit for appearance.
4. Secure the riser to the stringer with $1\frac{5}{8}$ "–2" screws. Two in each stringer (six total). Predrilling for these screws is not normally necessary.
5. Install treads so there is a $1\frac{1}{4}$ " overhang from the face of the riser. If the treads are wider than 11", rip them to 11" wide on the table saw.
6. Establish the length of the tread using the same process as the riser (Step 3 above).
7. Apply a bead of construction adhesive on the three stringer sections. Place the tread on the stringers and drill three $\frac{5}{32}$ " pilot holes per stringer. Secure the tread using 3" screws.