

Backdrop Mounting Details

No detailed instructions exist on the railroadbackdrops.com website for hanging the non-adhesive panels so I used the info on the website's YouTube video on the adhesive panels, plus some tribal knowledge and common sense to come up with our plan, which is detailed below.

Prepare the Backer Board

We used 1/8" Masonite in all places except on an extreme curve we used some 1/16" thick plastic sheeting from Lowe's that normally is hung in shower stalls. The sheets were cut to fit and screwed in to 1X4's that had been secured to the wall. In this way, the sheeting actually is set away from the wall by at least 3/4". This allows for the use of C-clamps to secure things when needed.

We used #6 all-purpose screws that have a Torx or 6-starred head. These are easier to work with. When screwing into Masonite, the Masonite has a tendency to "bunch up" around the head of the screw. So, make sure you gently screw the screw down until it's just a bit below the "normal" level of the Masonite. On the plastic sheeting, we found that the screws had a harder time "holding" so we used a bit longer screws and that fixed that issue.

The "bunched up" Masonite was sanded down and all screws were re-examined to make sure they were properly countersunk. All screws were finished with at least 2 coats of mud. We used mesh drywall tape over the seams initially and then finished it with 3 coats of thin drywall mud. Sand with 220 grit sandpaper. Feel with your hands to find any spots that need rework. Be patient. Wait 24 hours between drywall mud coats.

The backdrop printer says to use acrylic primer, not latex paint. We used Zinsser's ACRYLIC primer; it's called Bull's Eye 1-2-3 water-based primer. We used a foam roller to put a single coat over the entire backer board setup. This way, everything is the same color and you don't risk something showing through with goofy colors, even though that should not occur. Also, by painting it white, you now have a perfect surface on which to write your marking lines in pencil.

Once the backer board has dried (at least 3 days), use a straight edge, tape measure, squares, etc. to mark the full length near the top of the backer board where you will be placing the top edge of the backdrops. We used those cheap mechanical pens because if you lose them you don't care, you can lay them down around the layout for easy reach and they produce a very thin line that can be erased later if needed.

Dry-Fitting the Panels

On each panel, lay it out flat and trim the LEFT side (the one with your name and panel number) down to about 1/8 of an inch of white border. Do not trim the RIGHT side, top or bottom.

We use blue painter's tape to hold things in place. It seemed strong enough and comes off the vinyl panels easier than the standard masking tape. In our case we had about 3 inches of backerboard being exposed above the backdrop so there was plenty of material to tape to.

Working from left to right, position each panel on the backer board with the top edge of the backdrop mating up with the penciled in top edge on the backer board.

Either use the digital level on your smartphone or get a digital angle finder. Using the angle finder, make sure the right edge of the first panel is very close to 90 degrees. If you can get within 0.5 degrees that's great.

Tape the first panel in place in as many places as you need across the top to lock it in. On the bottom, just a few pieces are needed.

On the right side, mark on the backer board where the right edge of the actual printed image ends. Place a mark just above the backdrop and another just below. This will be used later to determine where you make the dreaded “double-cut”.

Take the next panel and place it on the backer board in a similar way. The key thing is to position the LEFT edge of this panel just a bit to the left of the 2 marks you just made on the backer board. You don’t need more than 1/8 of an inch. Line up the top and bottom of the second panel with those of the first panel.

Again, lay out the panel to the right and try to keep it very close to the top penciled line on the backer board. We found it was impossible to keep everything perfectly in line over very long runs. It’s okay to readjust the panels up or down by a bit to get them back in line. You want to avoid at all costs having a long run of panels going constantly uphill or downhill. We found that a bit of mismatch on the seams was acceptable and weren’t noticed until you looked very hard.

Repeat the process for all panels. We had 4 7-foot panels that made up our longest run. We got all 4 taped and locked down before we did any gluing.

Gluing the Panels

The glue we used was Roman’s Pro-555 Extreme Tack wallpaper adhesive. When you open the container, it looks like diluted dry wall mud. You don’t mix it. You just use it as is. Don’t be deceived. It works great and I believe it’s perfect for this application. We used a bit less than 1 gallon to hang 44 feet of backdrop, 36” to 42” wide.

To use the glue, we apply it to the backer board, not the panels. Once the panel is folded/rolled back, we used 2 people to apply the glue. Each person had an aluminum pie pan with some glue in it and a 2” paint brush (non-foam). One person would apply glue from the top to the middle and the other would apply from the bottom to the middle. Load up the brush with a moderate amount of glue, not too much. Then just brush it on and smooth it out. One brush load only covers a half a square foot if that. Keep the brush wet and be liberal with the glue but you are looking for a smooth shiny look on the wall. It won’t take long to put glue down for a section of the panel. Use a strong side light and then look from the side and make sure that you can see your glue shining nicely with no dry spots.

Fastening the First Panel

The first panel we glued was the leftmost panel. On the backer board, use a pencil to mark the bottom of the panel and where you wish to end the glue on the right. Remove the blue tape from the panel, up to about halfway across. You can start with a smaller area if you wish. Use blue tape to hold the panel folded back to the right. Apply glue to the backer board just past where you’ve marked the boundaries.

One person then holds the loose panel away from the backerboard and another person, working from the right, uses a wide, stiff wallpaper brush to initially press the paneling onto the wet glue. Working about a foot at a time, press the panel onto the backer board from the center towards the outer edge along the horizontal center of the panel. Then, use the brush to press on the panel from the horizontal center up to the top and down to the bottom. Use angled strokes to keep moving the new edges away and up/down from the already pressed portions.

Use a wallpaper smoother to work out any large bubbles on the first area but don't try to get it perfect. Once the initial area has been pressed on, move on to the other areas to the left. Use the same techniques to press them onto the backer board.

Once all of this first section has been pressed on, use your hands and eyes (of both workers) to see and feel where any bubbles are. Use the wallpaper smoother to work the bubbles to the edges. A bubble will contain either air or excess glue. Most often it is excess glue. When the excess glue oozes out at the edges of panel, use a wet sponge to wipe it off and keep the sponge rinsed off.

To do the right side of the panel, repeat the same technique as described above. Start from where you just glued, fold back the dry panel, apply the glue in sections and brush/smooth it out. Continue this process until the entire panel is glued down. Make sure the right side has a healthy amount of glue on it when you are done. You don't want that edge drying out before you do the double-cut.

Fastening the Next Panel

Fastening each succeeding panel follows the same technique as the first one with one additional step: the dreaded double cut. To start, use the same technique to glue down the leftmost 2-3 feet of the panel. Do all the steps to get it laid down as perfectly as possible.

The Double Cut

You should now see that the rightmost edge of the already completely glued down panel is under the panel you are currently working on. Further, it extends only a very short ways under the new panel and, most importantly, there is a mark above and below the panels that shows you exactly where the image on the already glued down panel ends.

Also, you should see where the image ends on the left side of the panel you are working on. There should be a gap of 1/8 to 1/4 of an inch, depending on how much space you provided for during your dry fit.

Take a single straight edge and secure it tightly so that one edge of the straight edge lies within that gap. Securely fasten the straight edge to the backer board. We used C-clamps. It is imperative that the straight edge not move during the cut.

Use a stiff bladed snap knife. Do not use a thin variety. You want a super sharp blade each time and you want the blade to remain very stiff as you make the cut. Get a full-throated knife.

Starting at the top, position the knife next to the straight edge. Pushing as hard as necessary and holding it at an angle so that it "drags" along the edge, drag the knife down the entire length of the straight edge, making sure to cut through both layers of vinyl. Because you are cutting 2 fairly thick layers of vinyl, you need to apply steady firm pressure for the entire length. Take your time. Try to keep steady pressure against the straight edge to avoid letting the knife waver. Take your time. Work your way slowly down the edge, concentrating on staying straight and keeping the pressure on.

Once the cut is done, remove the excess from the 2 layers of vinyl. Lay the other portions down and you should have an almost invisible seam.

Continue Laying the Panel

Once the seam is complete, continue laying the rest of the panel towards the right.