

The 7 (previously) Unwritten Rules Of Installation



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In every industry there is a school of thought that simply exists even without the concepts being spelled out and written down.

The same is true when it comes to window treatments. You can scour the internet, search the local library, or survey the craftsmen in your area but you will be hard pressed to find a document that contains this information.

If these "rules" were to be numbered, ***Rule Zero*** would be: hire a professional installer; he knows the rules already so you don't have to. But if you want to be one of those D-I-Y types then here's the rest of the story.

Rule #1 Don't bleed on the draperies.

It is very easy to cut your finger with a box cutter or tip of a screw driver. And most fabrics don't react too well to blood.

Blood is probably one of the most difficult substances to extract from a set of draperies.

According to some people, you can remove blood from fabric by "wetting a long piece of white cotton thread with your saliva and place it across the spot of blood. The thread will absorb the blood." Like many homegrown tips and tricks, there are no guarantees. It may or may not work so attempt this at your own discretion. If the blood has already dried, the likelihood of this working diminishes significantly.

Rule #2: Never Use The Screws They Send

In most cases, the screws and anchors that are sent with your drapery rods are the least expensive, lowest quality parts the manufacturer can find.

Look at it from a mathematical stand point. The drywall is at least 1/2-inch thick. The screw they send is 3/4-inch long. *Assuming* you can line up the screw with a stud behind the drywall the tip of the screw will only penetrate the stud by 1/4-inch.

If you don't line up with the stud then you have to use some sort of wall anchor to secure your hardware. Again, in most cases companies do not send the best stuff on the market.

The only hardware company that comes to mind that supplies an appropriate quality screw is *Antique Drapery Rod Co.* Of course the screws they supply are pretty much mandatory because the brackets typically will not accept any other type of screw. The anchors they send could be better though.

So if you're going to Do-it *yourself* then *do* yourself a favor. Go down to the hardware store and buy a box of 1-5/8" black, Phillips head, drywall screws with a #8 coarse thread and a box of 1-3/4" zinc-plated, 1/4" hex head, wood screws. That should cover 90% of all your hardware needs.

As for the anchors, try using the nylon #10/#12 screw-in style "Zip-It." If you can't find them at your local hardware store, look for a company that sells fasteners to industry. (One such company with locations all over the country is [Fastenal](#). They also sell to the public).

Rule #3: Don't Cut The Window Treatments

Be very careful when opening the packaging and removing the treatments. It's not uncommon for a box cutter to slip and slice into the draperies, or when removing a cellular shade from the box for the fabric to catch on a staple that wasn't totally extracted. It can be very costly to have to replace a window treatment because of a tear in the fabric. Most treatments can't be repaired if they are damaged; only replaced.

Rule #4: Some fabrics don't respond well to steam.

If your goal is to have your drapes to look crisp and neat, but you pick the wrong fabric you will not reach your goal - even if you steam your draperies (sometimes *especially* if you steam your draperies).

You can sit and steam linen panels for a day and a half and still not remove all the wrinkles. And it's almost as if linen drapes have their own personality and if you look at them the wrong way they will intentionally get new wrinkles.

Silks can also be somewhat difficult to work with. Certain silks even become "puckered looking" if too much steam is applied.

And let's not forget about water spots. Too much steam in any one place on any fabric can cause the fabric to retain the moisture and show a water spot.

Rule #5: There's no such thing as a "standard" window.

If you take a drive out to your local home improvement warehouse or specialty supply store that sells door and windows, you will likely see a large selection of various styles of windows that are all identical in size and basic design. This is usually true regardless of the manufacturer or style of window you select.

However, once the window is installed in your home, that's when it ceases to be a "standard" window. Any number of factors can adjust and change the "finished dimension" of your window opening - the type and amount of trim around the window, the quality of the installation itself, the amount of variance in the "squareness" of the opening, and so on.

A more appropriate terminology to use when describing your windows would be "single window" where there is basically one section of window, "double window" where there is some sort of divider creating two sections of window, "triple window"... well you get the idea.

A word of warning: a "double window" should not be confused with a "double hung" window. (In case you don't know)... *"The double-hung window is perhaps the most familiar window type. It consists of an upper and lower sash that slide vertically in separate grooves in the side jambs or in full-width metal weather-stripping..."* (description taken from [Old House Web](#)).

So if you are planning on installing blinds or shades inside the window opening consider hiring a professional installer to measure and install the treatments for you. Most installers will guarantee their measurements to be accurate and their workmanship to be error free. Don't use them if they don't. If you plan on doing the work yourself remember the following:

- * Accurate measurements are crucial to a proper fit. Measure to the nearest 1/8th of an inch across at the top of the window opening, at the bottom of the window opening and in the middle of the window opening. You may find that you get 3 different measurements and that your measurements may vary as much as 1/2 inch. You may also find that two windows side by side may have different measurements as well. Go with the smallest dimension on each window.

- * Make sure the window opening is deep enough to accept the brackets for an inside mount application. If you are not sure, contact the company you purchased from (or are going to purchase from) and find out what the minimum depth requirement is for the window treatment you are interested in.

- * Once you have your window treatments and are ready to install, open the packaging to make sure the product is not damaged. Then locate the box or bag with the brackets and screws. You should have at least 2 brackets for any blind or shade up to 36 inches, 3 brackets for shades of 60 to 72 inches or so and probably 4 or more brackets for shades over 72 inches wide. You can throw away the screws they sent ([see Rule #2](#)) and use the screws you bought for the project.

Rule #6: Never hang a mirror on a wire.

Realistically *even if you can* there are very few things *that you should* hang using a wire on the back.

Most of the really nice mirrors on the market are rather heavy - even some of the smaller ones have some significant weight. With that weight comes gravity. When it comes to any sort of wall hanging (mirrors, pictures, draperies, blinds, etc.) gravity is not your friend.

So you've got a choice: hire a professional to come out to hang your new display piece or do it yourself. A professional installer will probably charge anywhere from \$50 to \$70 to \$90 as their minimum trip fee. Some people feel that's a bargain compared to the risk and hassle of the mirror not being hung properly. Some people feel that's too expensive to pay to have one item hung.

Keep in mind, most installers want you to get the best value for the services they provide, and they know that coming out to hang one item is not the best value to you. But they have to cover their costs and overhead just like any other business. So unless you've got 8 or 10 items to hang, it's hard for some homeowners to justify hiring a professional.

So if you're going to hang it yourself, why shouldn't you hang the mirror on a wire?

A mirror (or oil painting, or whatever) that is mounted using a wire is unstable. Over time the wire can stretch, thereby lowering the height of the mirror. Over the course of several years, some wires even become brittle and break apart.

If the mirror is mounted on a wire using one hook (or nail or screw) the slightest vibration (like from a slammed door) can cause the mirror to shift thereby leaving one side slightly higher than the other. Also if the wire is not wound tightly enough the mirror will want to tip forward at the top. But if it's wound too tightly it makes it difficult to catch the wire with the hook.

Even using two hooks (nails/screws) in conjunction with a wire is not ideal. There is usually a lot more effort involved to catch both hooks, often resulting in scratches and scuff marks on the wall until the mirror is finally in the correct spot.

The best installation technique is a **direct mount**. If the mirror has D-rings that have been used to attach the wire to the mirror, cut the wire off and use these rings in conjunction with the hooks in the wall. It takes a bit more precision measuring but if done correctly the mirror is more secure, it rest flush with the wall better (less tilting), and will likely never shift out of level. If the mirror does not have D-rings, they can be added very easily in most cases. If you are not sure if D-rings can be attached to the frame, take the mirror to a local frame shop and get their opinion.

Rule #7: Understand the 3 to 1 rule before you buy roller shades.

Okay so this is less about installing it yourself and more of a buyer beware warning.

Over the years, roller shades have evolved and come a long way from what they used to be.

Remember the old roller shades that had those tiny little brackets and were spring loaded and so tightly wound that if you let go of the shade it would shoot all the way up and flap around the top of the window half a dozen times before it stopped? Unfortunately, some companies still make those.

However, a large number of roller shades on the market are so far removed from that style that it is almost unfair to group them in the same category. If you've been to a fast food restaurant or a coffee shop recently you've seen this new style of roller shade. It has a chain clutch to raise and lower the shade - or better yet, it has been motorized and hardwired into a switch in the manager's office. They cut down on the glare and heat from the sun but still allow you to see out through the fabric.

Or maybe you've been in the conference room of an office building for a presentation and they lower these shades that totally darken the room before the video presentation starts.

Or you've been to someone's lake home and they have roller shades on their windows, but the material looks like some sort of woven fibers or natural grass fabric.

So there are lots of options out there for roller shades, solar shades, screen shades, blackout rollers, whatever you want to call them.

But what is the 3 to 1 rule?

Because roller shades are not really confined into a headrail like a wood blind or a cellular shade, the fabric can sometimes shift or crawl from one side to the other. This is called telescoping. Telescoping is actually pretty common in roller shades.

A few reasons that roller shades telescope: 1) The shade has not been installed properly. 2) The fabric was not cut straight prior to being attached to the roller tube. 3) The window itself may not be square thereby giving the illusion that the shade fabric is further over to one side than the other. 4) The dimensions of the window may be breaking the 3 to 1 rule.

The 3 to 1 rule is a "rule of thumb" that basically says for every inch of width in the shade there should not be more than 3 inches of length. Meaning if your window is 36 inches wide, hopefully it is less than 108 inches long... if your window is 50 inches wide, hopefully it is less than 150 long... and so on.

You usually run into problems with the 3 to 1 rule when putting roller shades on French doors. Typically the glass you are trying to cover on the door is 22 to 24 inches wide and 66 to 72 inches long. So you are already "on the bubble" of the 3 to 1 rule. Now, add to that, you need to go up 2 to 4 inches above the top of the glass to mount the shade and you will want the shade to drop down at least 2 inches below the bottom of the glass. As a result in most cases you have exceeded that 3 to 1 recommendation.

But that's not to say that you shouldn't put roller shades on French doors (or any window that is over that 3 to 1 ratio). Just be aware of the potential for telescoping - and it's just that potential, not a definite problem. And if you are able to hire a professional installer to put them up for you, they should know a few tricks to reduce or eliminate the telescoping problem.

Good luck. Let us know if we can help.

About The Author

James Holloway is a ten-year veteran of the window treatment and home decor installation industry. He is founder and CEO of South East Installation Solutions, a full service installation service provider that works alongside homeowners and several interior design companies across Upstate SC, Western NC, and Northeast GA.

The company's website is www.SouthEastInstalls.com