



HOW TO GUIDE

Identifying what you need.

The first step in identifying the products you will need, depends on what you are applying the finish to. A majority of guitars are built using a combination of Maple, Mahogany, Alder or Ash. The most important part to any finish is prep work. Having a strong understanding of what wood you are working with is very important. The wood grain will be a very important factor in the steps you take to finish your project and the amount of materials you will need to purchase.

Gracey's polishing and sanding kit.

We designed this kit for your convenience. The kit comes with everything needed; including, sand paper(s), fresh tips, and a specially designed rubbing compound with polish and cloths. It is ideal to do the job and is designed around saving your time and money. If the finishing process is new to you, we highly recommend purchasing this kit.

Step 1.

After you have identified what wood you're working with, you will need to fill the grain. This is very important and a highly debatable subject. Our sealer is designed to take all of the hard work out of the project. (See our pre-finished and refinishing section below if not working with a raw wood)

How much to purchase depends on the wood grain. Ash, for example has a very deep grain and will need on average 2 cans to completely seal the grain properly. Some woods, like maple need very little, if no sealer, depending on the application.

To apply you will want to first clean your project. Use nothing finer than 400 grit sand paper before applying your first coat. A finer sand paper will not give an adequate surface for the finish to adhere to. At Gracey's Finishes, we personally use mineral spirits to remove any dust or left over sanding residue. After you have a clean surface you can begin your first coat.

Hold the can approximately 12 inches away when beginning your spray pattern. When applying the sealer you do not need to soak the wood, light passes offering just enough coverage is best. You will want to put on as many coats as you can, creating a layered effect. You will want to apply at least 4-6 coats before the first sanding. We find, for best results, 400 grit paper works best. For the best end results, we suggest block sanding. Block sanding assures a perfectly flat finish.

Our sealer will be powdery, if applied correctly the sealer should sand very easily. You will want to continue this process until you have a completely flat surface. It is extremely important you have no exposed or unsealed wood. Check edges and corners very well and apply another coat if needed. You will want to clean between sanding and sealing. At Gracey's Vintage Finishes, we use a micro fiber cloth and naphtha.

Step 2.

Once the body is completely sealed and the surface is smooth, you are ready for color. If working on just a body, one color should be enough. Transparent colors differ. Our transparent colors are very light in transparency which allows you to control the transparency over multiple coats. It gives you shading options and less possibilities for error. We designed this option after having complications with one coat splotchy transparent finishes.

Undercoats and primers: Primer colors are very important with vintage guitar finishes. Our sealer is a "clear" primer base coat. If a color base coat is desired, any of the colors we offer will work. Our most popular sealers to date include desert sand, Olympic white, and Sunburst. Follow the directions below for applying the under coats.

Only enough material to cover is needed. One to two light mist coats is usually all it takes. You can use this opportunity to make sure your colored primer coats are flawless and ready for your master color. Any minor mistakes or imperfections can be easily fixed at this time. If you have any exposed grain or unlevelled spots re-apply the sealer and sand as if you were following step 1.

Your color coats should be a light, mist. This is especially important in metallic finishes, so the flake will not run. You do not want to see the finish as if it is wet. The more thin coats over time you apply, the better it will look. This is the biggest difference between aerosol and a spray gun setup. The finish can be much more concentrated if sprayed through a gun. We do not suggest sanding any of the colors before clear or between coats. We suggest approximately 4-8 coats depending on color and desired shade. Color coats should be applied simultaneously.

Step 3.

Once you have the color coats completed you can apply the clear coat. One tip we suggest with our experience is to slightly dust a couple ultra-light coats over the top of the entire project. We find this helps lock the metallic flake in place and helps prevent the stripe effect. This is extremely important over water slide decals! I suggest a minimum of one can of clear for a standard body. Many times 2-3 cans is not uncommon to get the thickness and depth you may be after. The coats should be applied simultaneously and only sanded between cans and not coats. We suggest a nothing finer than 400 grit sand paper. You can apply as little or as much as wanted/needed for the application.

Step 4.

Optional polish. We say optional because it's only if needed or wanted. Our clear is a high gloss and usually does a good job lying flat and smooth. For professional results, wet sand and polish will be mandatory. It should take NO less than 6 hours to do it correctly and by hand. If you're going this route, at least three cans is needed to create a thick enough finish to sand on. We use a 2000 grit sandpaper to start and sometimes use 1000 grit sandpaper in spots, if needed. Using a block in this stage will produce the best results. Never sand side to side, circular motion is best. We use rag baby diapers and a 3000 grit sandpaper extra cut compound. Hand rubbed finishes are the way to go! It's a more personal experience that will add that personal touch.

Maple, Maple/Rosewood Neck finishes.

Most necks are constructed of Maple. Maple is a dense material with very little grain exposure. When working with any of our neck tints you have many options. Our shades are much different than what most people are used to working with. We designed the color around multiple coat applications. This is a flawless way to get the color and shading exactly how you would like it in multiple coats. You do not need to worry about a single coat being perfect. To apply the sealer, you will follow step 1, with the maple finish, little sealer is needed. Two to three coats is usually enough. It is very important to have no maple (wood) exposed. After the sealer is applied, you will want to sand using nothing finer than 400 grit paper. You can then apply the amber finish, if desired. Never sand a transparent finish directly. Once the amber finish is applied and the shade of color desired is where you want it, you can then apply the sealer. Follow the steps step 4 for wet sanding and polishing. We find that one can of amber finish is enough to do about 5-8 necks. We suggest at least one full can of clear to do a single neck.

Tools needed.

A painter's mask is always important. Identify a low humidity, clean and safe space to work. You will also want a dust free, well ventilated space. Most individuals use their garage or simply spray outdoors. The easiest and safest method for securing your project while spraying is through the lower strap button hole. We find a standard eye hook really does the trick. This allows the project to be hung, free of obstructions and fully adjustable as far as height and position. There are many ways to do this, none being wrong, it is more of a personal preference. We use a rotisserie style setup in our shop using 1" dowel and PVC.

Pre finished and refinishing.

When working on guitars that have a factory finish, you have options. We find that most factory finishes are compatible with Gracey's. Although you will not gain the tonal benefits of nitro which is ideal for color changes. This allows you to bypass the sealer and go straight to color. Keep in mind the base coat may affect the end shade.

Refinishing a completed guitar can be a fun project. There are many things to consider when thinking about starting a complete refinish. Many new finishes are designed not to be removed and most bleed into the wood at least 1/16". These style finishes are ideal for the above color change. Mainly foreign companies use this technique, it saves lots of time and money. Most vintage guitars can be stripped using common strippers. We use a product called BIX. We find a Lacquer thinner clean up works best when working with strippers. Often a heat gun is need. There are many ways to strip a finish, we suggest researching one that works best for you.

This tutorial is designed as a guide to help you through the process. Strictly our methods and not a golden rule. There are many methods and techniques, none of them wrong, if they work. Our methods may be completely different than others but it is solid and worked for us for over 10 years now at Madison's Music. If you have any questions or comments you can reach us here on our [Facebook](#). We invite you to post pictures of your work and communicate with other dedicated guitar builders. Due to high call volumes we ask that you direct your questions through [email](#) or [Facebook](#).

Trouble Shooting and Frequently ask questions.

Why did it take so long to get to me?

All aerosol products are in a class of Hazardous Materials. In order to ship hazardous materials, you must be licensed. All paint must go ground. We are currently looking for overseas distributors to provide for our customer base! Shipping ORM-D may take up to 10 days, please keep in mind this is out of our control.

How long in between coats?

We suggest approximately 30 minutes between coats. If the finish has been applied to thick we suggest a 24 hour time lapse between coats. This is to ensure equal and dry base coats.

Why is my finish cracking?

99% of finish cracking is due to a wet undercoat. Different products dry and cure at different rates. If shellac or a lacquer based sealer or primer is used, it will not dry at the same rate as the nitro. It is very important when using other products, especially that the undercoats are dry. Humidity and temperature changes may also have an effect.

Why is my finish splotchy or have light and dark spots around the edges?

This is very easily explained by exposed wood. A sealed surface is going to react different than a porous surface. The color change or difference is caused by exposed grain.