GUIDELINES FOR FRAMING CANVAS PAINTINGS
IN TRADITIONAL FRAMES WITHOUT GLAZING, PART I

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Introduction
Canvas paintings are usually mounted with tacks or staples to auxiliary supports called stretchers or strainers. "Stretcher" supports are adjustable and allow vertical and horizontal movement of the stretcher bar members. "Strainers" are fixed supports that are not adjustable and are held in place with nails, screws, or corner braces.

Glazing is a protective covering sometimes placed over a painting's surface for ultraviolet filtering capabilities, as a vandalism deterrent or for microclimate control. Glazing can consist of glass or various brands of acrylic sheets.

Traditional frames are frames with the flat back of the frame rebated. The lip left by rebating is the rabbet. The stretcher or strainer rests against the rabbet.

Frame Requirements
Check the frame to ensure that it can support the painting and repair loose fitting joints by reinforcing with steel corner angles on the frame's reverse. Use a miter vise and Titebond adhesive to repair frame corners which are misaligned or broken.

Rabbets which are too shallow for the painting's stretcher or strainer can be modified by adhering "finished" molding strips to the frame rabbet.

Frame Preparation
Coat or cover unsealed wood of the rabbit and stretcher to deter offgassing of dangerous chemicals. Use either Marvelseal 360 vapor barrier strips adhered with heat from a tacking iron or water-based polyurethane.

If the painting is not square and does not fit the frame, chisel out the frame's rebate with a flat gouge or bull nose rabbit plane. Smooth the area with sandpaper and seal with Marvelseal 360 strips or water-based polyurethane.

Preparing the Painting for Framing
Dust the painting's surface using a soft sable brush to dislodge surface dirt or dust particles. Begin at the painting's top and let gravity work for you. With light, gentle strokes, move the brush down the surface. Continue the motion moving from left to right until the entire surface has been covered. Use only a soft sable brush on a painting's surface. Only the ends of the brush hairs should come into contact with the painting. Dust the painting's reverse using a 3M Newsstrokes disposable paint brush. Discard the brush when it becomes soiled.

Protect the painting's edges from abrasion and paint loss by using either black painted metal stripping mounted to the edges with screws (cut strips with miter cutter) or twill tape stapled over the painting's edges (use bronze or stainless steel staples). Edge protection is not necessary if paint loss is not extreme.

If the painting's stretcher or strainer are rusty, replace with copper plated steel canvas tacks. If blued upholsterer's tacks are used, isolate the tacks from the canvas by cutting acid free blotting paper on a hole puncher and mounting the tacks through the blotter circles before placing tacks in the canvas edges.

Fitting the Painting into the Frame
If the frame has ornamentation, place on padded blocks to cushion areas that might be damaged by pressure applied during frame installation.

Fit the painting into the frame and check the image or sight area. Check for any shifting of the stretcher in the frame. If shifting is possible, fit lateral or vertical shims or spacers on the sides. Shifting causes rabbit abrasion and results in paint loss and unsightly edges. Reinforce with acid free mat board strips, balsa strips, or Coroplast strips. Strips can be glued to the frame, reinforced with brass escutcheon pins, or held in place with brass mending plates. If strips are adhered with glue, use conservator's approved Titebond glue adhesive.

Secure the painting in the frame using four hole brass mending plates (do not use two hole plates) and brass screws. Bend the plates on a vise to conform to the contours of the frame and stretcher or strainer. The plates should extend over the frame and onto the stretcher or strainer by approximately 1 1/2." Do not use nails to secure a painting in a frame. Nails can puncture the painting and tear the canvas edges. More importantly, frame vibrations are directly transferred to the painting when nails are used to hold it in place.

If the painting's frame is small or too thin for longer length screws, mount single hole nickel plated offset clips into the frame instead of mending plates. Four hole brass mending plates are preferred if the frame's width and depth will accommodate longer length screws.

Mount mending plates or offset clips into the frame only. Do not place screws into the stretcher. Screws placed in the stretcher restrict movement of the stretcher bar members. Position the mending plates according to the painting's "wallhanging" position. Place more plates on the bottom and sides with fewer plates across the top. Paintings usually shift from side to side and downwards, so
additional support is needed in those areas.

**Protective Backing**

Attach a protective backing to the painting's reverse. The backing should cover the painting's stretcher bars and canvas. Backings provide "impact resistance" and serve as a buffer against the environment, dust and dirt. Materials of choice are 4mm thick Coroplast or single wall construction acid free corrugated board. Standard brown corrugated cardboard should not be used because its acidic properties and lignin content could damage the painting. To avoid snagging, trim the corners to the inner edge of the stretcher bar members without exposing the painting's canvas.

Mount the backing to the stretcher with steel screws and nickel plated cup washers. Place the screws and washers through the backing using an awl to make the holes. Additional screws and washers are sometimes necessary to make a tight fit between the stretcher and the backing.

**Hanging Hardware**

Mount hanging hardware to the vertical frame members (not the stretcher or strainer) using nickel plated cup washers. Place the screws and washers through the backing using an awl to make the holes. Additional screws and washers are sometimes necessary to make a tight fit between the stretcher and the backing.

Match screw coloration with the hanging hardware. For example, use steel screws with nickel plated washers. Be consistent and neat even though the painting's reverse is not highly visible.

Refrain from attaching braided wire through the hangers. More support is possible if the painting is hung on two wall-mounted picture hooks that latch onto the two or three hole frame mounted hangers. This two hook hanging method is "museum standard practice" and provides more support since stress is distributed over the two hooks. Braided wire can break at the apex where it rides over a single picture hook.

**Supplies and Product Sources**

**United Manufacturers Supply, Inc.**
80 Gordon Dr.
Syosset, NY 11791
800/645-7260
FAX 516/496-7968

- Steel corner angles
- 1/2" x 3" brass mending plates and screws
- Nickel plated offset clips
- Brass plated picture hooks
- Double or triple hole nickel plated hangers
- Brass escutcheon pins
- Balsa wood strips
- Bull nose rabbit plane
- Blued upholsterer's tacks
- Steel staples
- Coroplast
- 4mm Coroplast protective backing

**Products and Sources**

- Testfabrics Inc.
- 200 Blackford Ave.
- Middlesex, NJ 08846
- 201/469-6446
- FAX 718/788-7481
- Marvelseal 360 for sealing rebate of frames

- Conservation Materials Ltd.
- PO Box 2884
- Sparks, NV 89431
- 702/331-0582
- FAX 702/331-0588
- Titebond Glue
- Edco Supply Corp.
- Brooklyn, NY 11232
- 800/221-0918
- FAX 718/788-7481
- Coroplast
- 4501 Spring Valley Rd.
- Dallas, TX 75244
- 214/392-2241
- Twin tape (acid free)
- Decco felt rabbit liner with acrylic adhesive

- Decco-Felt Corp.
- PO Box 156
- Glendora, CA 91740
- 800/543-3226
- FAX 818/914-2734
- Decco felt rabbit liner with acrylic adhesive

- Archivart
- PO Box 428
- Moonachie, NJ 07074
- 201/804-8986
- Acid free corrugated board

- Rawl Plug Company, Inc.
- PO Box 428
- Two F.B. Powers Square
- New Rochelle, NY 10802
- 914/235-6300
- Framing hardware

- Dow Chemical Co.
- Midland, MI 48647
- 800/258-2436
- Water-based polyurethane

- S & W Framing Supplies, Inc.
- PO Box 340
- New York, NY 11040
- 516/746-1000
- FAX 516/746-6877
- Nickel plated cup washers for steel screws

- Brainerd Manufacturing Co.
- East Rochester, NY 14445
- 716/586-0028
- 1/2" x 4" brass mending plates
- Solid brass corner plates

- Archivart
- PO Box 428
- Moonachie, NJ 07074
- 201/804-8986
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