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## How to apply letter stickers straight

I made it at the TechShop! Problem: On the first church sign I made, the vinyl letters went uphill. Not good! Here's how I succeeded on the second try. Start with a well-prepared board or other surface. The vinyl letters have been cut at the TechShop, weeded, and the transfer paper has been applied to the face of the letters. I'll call this sandwich the letter layer. The other equipment you'll need: straight edge, cutter, masking tape, pen, burnisher. Trim the letter layer close to the lettering at the top and along each side. Position the letter layer on the board. Cut paper strips the width of the side margins and apply them to the board with glue stick. Mark the position of the top margin on the paper strips. Make sure the letters are exactly where you want them. Then with a long piece of masking tape, tape the letter layer to the board, creating a hinge. Flip the letter layer up so the backing paper is exposed, then carefully peel off the backing paper. Slowly roll the letter layer onto the board. If you have only two hands, slide a yard stick along the top of the letter layer, to help smooth the letters onto the board without gaps or wrinkles. Burnish the letters though the transfer paper to be sure they're firmly stuck to the board. Then slowly remove the transfer paper. Voila! A sign with the letters exactly where I wanted them. Color was added by hand with artist's acrylic paint. Then the whole sign was sealed with several coats of clear finish. Picture this: You've got your business all set up, the interior looks great, the sign on the building is perfect, and all you've got left to do are a few little things like putting the vinyl letters on the front door. Just wipe that door and slap on the letters, right? Not so fast. If you fail to apply your vinyl lettering correctly, you'll be replacing it sooner than you'd like. Follow these simple steps to ensure quick and easy application and vinyl lettering that lasts. Check out our other blog post on how to remove vinyl lettering. Supplies Needed Before you apply your vinyl lettering, you'll want to gather your supplies so you've got everything close at hand. Here are a few items that will make the job a lot easier: Cleaning Supplies Squeegee Masking Tape Level Tape measure Consider Your Surface Vinyl sticks best to surfaces that are relatively flat, such as glass, plastic, painted interior walls, vehicles, and metal. Although vinyl lettering can adhere to slightly textured surfaces, such as an orange-peel textured wall, highly textured surfaces like brick or stucco won't lend to good adhesion. When it comes to applying your vinyl lettering, the smoother the surface, the better the seal. 1. Clean the Surface Now that you know where you'd like to put your vinyl lettering, make sure it's clean and dry. This doesn't mean wipe the glass door with your sweatshirt sleeve. Take the time to clean your surface properly, and use the appropriate cleaner for the job. For plastic or glass, a surface cleaner like Windex is fine. For metal or other exterior surfaces, use a solvent cleaner. Painted surfaces like interior walls, require a mild generic household cleaner. Don't go overboard though, and rinse the surface if you feel like there is a residue leftover after cleaning. Be sure and dry your surface or let it air dry for a good amount of time. 2. Place your Vinyl Lettering Your vinyl lettering comes sandwiched between two other sheets. If you're looking at your graphic as it should be read, the first layer is the mask layer, then your vinyl lettering, then the backing. Measure your graphic and hold it up to your surface. Decide where you want it to go, and use your tape measure to make sure things are lined up correctly. For example, if you want your lettering to be in the middle of the wall, measure the entire wall both ways and find the center. Then, measure your lettering and decide where it needs to be so it's perfectly centered. Eyeballing is great, but you'll be wasting time and money if you don't take a few extra minutes to measure and make sure your lettering is in the correct spot. Measure, center, and mark your spot with masking tape. 3. Create a Hinge A hinge is made when you apply tape horizontally to the top of your graphic, with the mask side toward you. You should be able to read the letters normally, and the letters will still be sandwiched between the masking and backing. Remove any tape you used to mark where you want the lettering to go. At this point, nothing should be in the way of your vinyl besides the backing layer. With the masking tape hinge, you should be able to lift the whole graphic up. 4. Remove the Backing Now you will remove the backing layer and expose the adhesive on the back of your vinyl letters. Carefully peel the backing from one corner, keeping your hinge in place. Go slowly. If your vinyl lettering lifts, press it firmly to the masking layer. Completely remove the backing while holding the corner of the masking layer to keep the letters off your surface until you're ready. 5. Apply Vinyl Lettering to Your Surface Lower the mask layer and using your squeegee, press firmly at a 45 degree angle, starting from the middle and going out. The adhesive on the back of the vinyl lettering should stick well to your surface if it has been properly cleaned and prepped. Once you've got everything in place, use your squeegee and go over the letters a few times to really seal them. 6. Remove Masking Layer Slowly peel the masking layer as well as your hinge tape away from the lettering. The letters should stay put and the masking peel away cleanly. Again, go slow, and if a letter starts to lift, lower the masking back down and press firmly on the letter. \*Remember to always use the masking layer between the squeegee and the vinyl. Using a squeegee directly on top of your vinyl lettering without anything in between it can leave scratches on the vinyl lettering. 7. Cure and Complete It's tempting to want to wash and wipe your surface right away, especially if it's glass. Washing and wiping too soon can move your letters, so let them sit and cure for 12-24 hours before you clean. You're done! Applying your vinyl lettering is quick and painless with these steps. You'll be finished and on your way with less stress and more time for other things. Applying vinyl decals can be done by anyone. Make sure your it is above 70 degrees and your surfaces are clean enough to eat off. I use the following tools when applying vinyl decals or lettering. Masking tape Tape Measure Squeegee Application spray Pin or exacto knife (optional) Cleaning Procedures: All surfaces are contaminated to some degree. To ensure good adhesion to any vehicle surface it is critical that you follow these recommended procedures in decontaminating and preparing the surface prior to any vinyl product installation. Wash the area with warm water, dry the surface with a clean lint-free towel or cloth. Finish up the cleaning process by wiping down the entire area with Isopropyl Alcohol (rubbing alcohol). To avoid recontamination during the final cleaning step, wipe the surface in just one direction, using a clean, lint-free towel or cloth. Any dust or debris will result in the bubbling of vinyl decals. Temperature Recommendations: Surface temperatures should be between 70 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit before attempting the installation. Vinyl can be applied in cooler temperatures but adhesion is more difficult. We are in San Diego so decals go on like butter. As a general rule, if the surface is hot to the touch it's over 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Adhesive becomes brittle when it gets too cold and gummy when it gets too hot. Applications outside the recommended range of 50 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit reduce the adhesives' ability to perform. Making application fluid I like to use real applicator fluid. Ask us to include a bottle in your order if you plan on a DIY installation. If none is available mix 1 drop of dish washing soap in a cup of warm water and mix. Poor the soapy mixture into a spray bottle, clean out a windex bottle if nothing else is around. Application Procedures: You can choose to apply vinyl in one of two ways; dry or wet. Applying vinyl dry does not allow for any mistakes, if this is your first time applying decals don't do it this way. Once the vinyl touches the surface, there is no removal without damage. However, applying vinyl with application spray allows you the opportunity to remove and reposition vinyl as needed for up to several minutes. For obvious reasons, this method is recommended for both beginners. The biggest advantage to dry application is time. To apply using the application spray, spray the surface thoroughly. Then lay the vinyl on a flat surface and spray the adhesive side as you remove the backing. An extra set of hands is a good idea. Then simply apply the vinyl to the surface. Do not excessively stretch vinyl during the application. This is the main cause of end lift. Pull the vinyl only as taut as necessary to keep a straight line. Because vinyl is a pressure-sensitive product, a squeegee should be used for all installations. The purpose of using a squeegee is to remove the excess fluid and or air from behind the vinyl. You should always start the squeegee from the middle and either use a straight up or down motion. Don't be afraid to use some pressure you need to get all the water out. Any water left under the surface will expand and contract with temperature changes and create bubbles. Allow the vinyl to set for 5 to 15 minutes. (Pinstriping can be laid down initially using your thumb. However, after the application tape is removed, a squeegee must be used on all cut ends including door breaks as well as the ends of the stripe.) When removing the application tape, always pull it slowly, back onto itself, at a 180-degree angle. Bubbles should be punctured using a pin. Do not slit the vinyl to release the air. If the vinyl is slit it will spread or gap. The cutting or trimming of any stripe or graphic should be done using a very sharp knife and very little pressure.



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