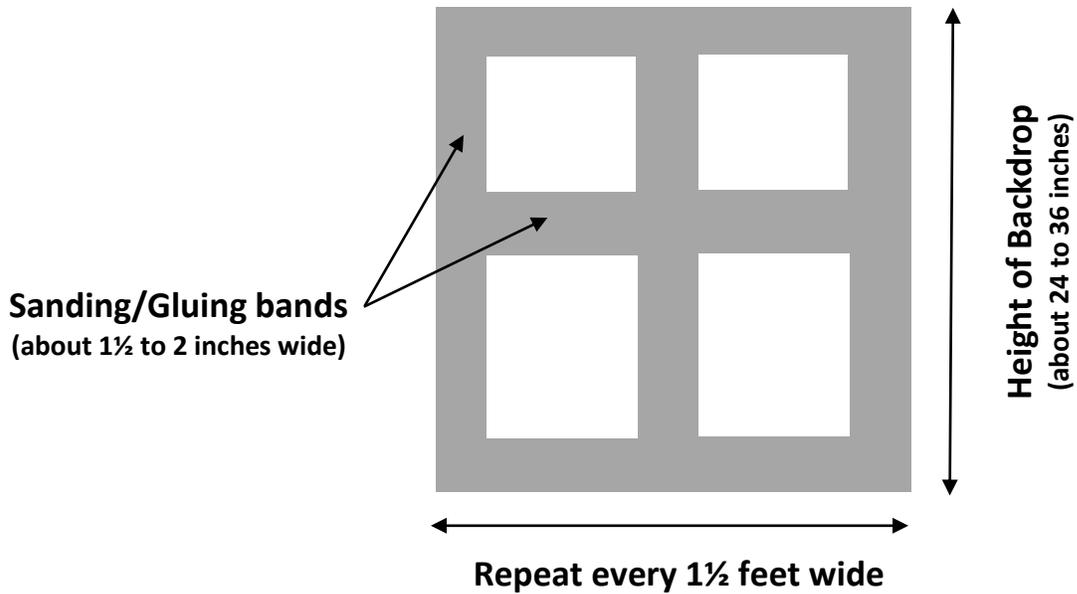# Applying Photo Backdrops
By Brad Jonas

1. Stock or custom photo backdrops are available from a number of companies, but generally have insufficient instructions on how to install them. This is the method I developed.
2. Since I had 2 different types of surfaces to put the backdrops on, I first painted the entire area where the backdrops would be applied a uniform color (in my case white). The reason was to eliminate a possible difference in show-through if the backdrops had a tendency to react to the rubber cement. The paint also sealed the surfaces in preparation for gluing.
3. Any visible surface areas extending above where the backdrops will be applied could be painted a black or dark charcoal color. This will enhance the visual effect of the backdrops.
4. Start by sanding the entire backdrop application area in a pattern as shown on the Sanding and Rubber Cement Application Pattern, repeating every 1-1/2 feet in width across the entire area. I used 80 grit sandpaper. The main purpose of the sanding is to not remove the paint but just to rough it up so the rubber cement has the ability to bite into the paint.
5. The next step is to determine if you want to apply your backdrops right to left or left to right. This will be determined by the most prevalent viewing angle to cut down on the visibility of seeing the overlaps from one section to another.
6. Wipe the area clean to remove any loose dust that could hinder the ability of the rubber cement to adhere to the sanded areas.
7. Select the first backdrop sheet that you want to apply – **make sure it is the correct sheet**. Do any necessary trimming of the bottom or top of this first piece so that it will align properly with subsequent sections. For the following sheets this step will then take place after you have completed the application of the first sheet.
8. After sanding and trimming you are ready to begin the application process. Pour rubber cement into a jar about half way. The mouth of the jar should be large enough to accept at least a 2" brush. Start by applying a moderate coat of rubber cement **only to the pattern sanded areas for your first backdrop sheet**. I used a 1 ½" brush.
9. Allow this coat to dry for about 2 hrs. You will apply a 2nd coat of glue later in step #14.
10. Roll up your backdrop so that the outside end will be the edge where you intend to start the application process.
11. Now your process will require a second set of hands. One person will apply the rubber cement and help hold the roll. The other person primarily aligns and smooths the sheet.
12. One person holds the roll while the other makes sure the beginning edge of the sheet is properly aligned vertically and horizontally. Use a level to make sure the edge is true. If

there is any mistake at this point you may have an undesirable tilt up or down as you apply the entire length of the backdrop. A minor amount of run (up to 1/8 of an inch per 12 feet) may not be a problem.

13. When you are satisfied with the alignment, place strips of green Frog removable painters tape along the vertical starting edge of the backdrop to hold it in the proper position. Use 3 to 4 inch long strips of tape about every 6 inches. **Use only the Frog brand tape**, as other masking or painters tapes (blue ...) have been shown to peel off the printed image.

14. Now one person holds the backdrop roll while the other person applies the second coat of rubber cement to the first 1 ½ foot wide area following the same pattern used in the sanding in step #4 and the gluing in step #8. Apply less glue than applied in step #8.

15. Now the backdrop roll is given to the gluing person. The roll is slowly unrolled as the application person presses the backdrop into the rubber cement by using smooth gentle hand strokes in a circular motion.

16. When you reach the end of the area where the 2nd coat of rubber cement was applied the application person will apply strips of Frog tape along the top of the glued down portion of the backdrop. This helps prevent sagging while the rubber cement dries. Apply strips about every 4 inches.

17. At this point you should reroll the backdrop enough to expose about 1" of the backdrop that already had rubber cement showing on the backing. This will allow you to apply the 2nd coat of cement across the next section, without glue gaps next to the prior section.

18. Now return to step #14 and repeat the process. This will be repeated until the roll has been completely installed.

19. After this roll of backdrop has been completely installed, let the backdrop stand for 24 hours to completely dry before starting installation of the next roll.

20. Before you begin the installation of the next sheet remove the tape from the first sheet. Then do any necessary trimming of the top or bottom edges of this next sheet.

21. Now trim the end of this next sheet, if needed, based on where you want the overlap to take place. The backdrops may be printed with additional image at the ends to allow for this process.

22. Repeat the process as followed for the first backdrop, starting at step #8. When beginning the application of any subsequent pieces you may get squeeze out of rubber cement along the overlap of the two sheets. **Do not try to remove this when it is wet**. Allow any squeeze out to dry for 24 hours before removing. Then, upon rubbing it with your fingers, it should just ball up and not be a problem. However if it does leave any marking they can be removed by using a good quality white polymer eraser. You can lightly rub for quite a while without affecting the printing on the backdrop.

Sanding and Rubber Application Pattern

Sanding/Gluing bands
(about 1½ to 2 inches wide)

Height of Backdrop (about 24 to 36 inches)

Repeat every 1½ feet wide

Tools for Applying Photo Backdrops

Level	**Sanding Block** and **80 Grit Sandpaper**
Scissors	**Disposable Brushes** (1 ½" and 2")
Wide Mouth Jar	**Painter's Tape**: use only green Frog tape
Utility Knife	**White Soft Eraser**: Pentel Hi-Polymer, etc.

Rubber Cement: Elmer's – No Wrinkle (in 1 Qt. can at Office Depot)

Tools for Applying
Photo Backdrops