

The Best Way to Hang Full-Length Curtains

by Vicki Blazejowski

You've filled and arranged your room perfectly with furniture pieces you love, found the perfect area rug, and purchased the curtains that will perfectly complement your design style. Be care though. How you hang those curtains could make or break the overall room design you've worked so hard to establish.

Positioning curtains correctly is like putting on the right jacket to perfect balance your outfit. That jacket shouldn't be too loose or too tight, should be the right shape, and the right length. Otherwise it will look out-of-sorts with the rest of your outfit. That jacket is the first piece of clothing others will see as they approach you so want to be sure it fits just right.

The same holds true for window panels in a room. The light of a window draws naturally draws your eye to the area when you enter a room. How you frame that area can dramatically impact the design of the room.

We're assuming you've already worked with your favorite curtain shop and found the perfect fabric and the perfect color full-length curtains for your room. It's now time to hang these beautiful works of art and it's important it's done just right.

In addition, be sure your rod extends beyond the window frame so the panels are not covering the window. They should cover the frame and just slightly cover the window by an in or so, but the rest of the fabric should be along the wall itself.

Position the curtain rod high above the window frame

Before you even decide which length curtain to purchase, decide where your rod will be positioned above the window. Lifting the rod, lifts the eye toward the ceiling, and gives the appearance of a higher ceiling and a bigger space.

As a general rule position your rod at least half way between the top of the window frame and the ceiling. Half to two-thirds of the way is best, but you can choose to go as high as just below the ceiling itself. The higher your curtain rod hangs, the more dramatic your room will feel.

Hang Curtains at Just the Right Height

So often people will be tempted to purchase store-bought curtains at length "close to" the window height. Full-length pre-made curtains come packaged in 84-, 96, and 108-inch lengths. In many cases

that 84-inch length is too short. The general length of the curtain will actually be determined on where you place your curtain rod and how you'd like the panel to sit.

In this post, we're not even talking about a curtain panel that falls just below the window frame. This design mistake is just painful to see and never recommended. If you'd like a shorter curtain panel, be sure the hem falls evenly at exactly the window sill. Period.

The three standard options for determining the length of a full-length curtain panel are:

1. Less than one inch above the floor. An inch above floor is acceptable and many people choose this option so they don't feel like they're sweeping their floors with the curtain every time they open and close it. This option sits just above the floor and doesn't touch it.
2. Barely touching the floor. This option requires a very exact measurement on one that has to be done once your curtain rod is in place. If you're planning to hang the curtain panel with drapery rings, be sure to measure with these also attached to the curtain.
3. The puddle. In this case the curtains actually lay (puddle) on the floor. This is good option for a more dramatic space in which you're using a high quality fabric. A thinner fabric or a cotton canvas will just appear as though you didn't bother to hem the panel. How much they puddle on the floor depends on how dramatic you want the space to feel. If you love the old-world, European design, panels that puddle on the floor may be a good option for you.

Once you know the height of the rod, choose a pre-made curtain length based on this. Always choose the length that's longer than the measurement and then hem the panels according to how you'd like them to hang.

Use enough fabric to frame the windows

You've now hung rod at the right height, and chosen the length that sits best in your room. In order to complete the look, be sure you have enough fabric to adequately frame the windows. A large, expansive window will typically require more fabric on either side of it than a typical 36-inch, double-hung window. If you have larger window you may need to hang more than one curtain panel on each side for two reasons. First, to ensure you have enough fabric to cover the window when the panels are pulled closed; and second to ensure that that the amount of fabric is equally balanced by the amount of window.

Imagine a thin metal frame placed around a very expensive, hand-painted portrait hanging in a 18th-century European castle. It's just wrong. That type of frame wouldn't balance the painting itself or the room in which it hangs. The same holds true with the fabric you choose to frame your windows.

When the panels are open and sitting on either side of the window, they should adequately frame the window. The type of fabric (sheers, cotton, linen, velvet, etc.) should reflect its surroundings and the amount of fabric (the width of the panels when pushed together) should be balanced with the size of the window. In many cases, you may need to hang two curtain panels on either side of a large bank of windows.