

Subfloor Preparation Guide

Essential Requirements for Successful Installation

Proper subfloor preparation is crucial for flooring performance. This guide covers testing, requirements, and common solutions.

Moisture Testing

Concrete

Acceptable: Below 2.5% MC or 75% RH

Testing: CM test (most accurate), digital meter (quick), plastic sheet test (48hr check)

Solutions if failed: Apply DPM, install moisture barrier, allow drying time, consider engineered flooring

Wood

Acceptable: 6-12% MC, within 2% of flooring

Testing: Pin-type meter at multiple points

Solutions if failed: Fix moisture source, increase ventilation, run dehumidifiers

Levelness Requirements

Tolerances:

- Standard: 3mm over 2m
- Wide plank: 2mm over 2m
- Parquet: 1mm over 1m

Testing: Straight edge + feeler gauge

Solutions:

- **Minor (up to 5mm):** Self-levelling compound
- **Major (5mm+):** Full screed, plywood overlay, grind high spots

Structural Requirements

Concrete

- 28+ days old
- No cracks over 1mm
- Sound and clean surface

Problems: Fill cracks, strengthen weak surface, grind contamination

Wood

- Minimum 18mm thick
- 300mm max joist centres
- No movement/squeaks

Problems: Screw loose boards, add noggins, overlay if too thin

Common Problems & Solutions

Uneven Surface: Use self-levelling compound or grinding

Springy Floor: Add noggins or strengthen with plywood

Contamination: Grind surface or apply isolation membrane

Mixed Subfloors: Create transitions, level to highest point

Underfloor Heating: Run 2 weeks minimum, use engineered flooring

Preparation Timeline

2 Weeks Before: Moisture test, order materials, arrange repairs

1 Week Before: Apply compounds, complete wet trades

48 Hours Before: Final checks, acclimatise flooring, set room to 18-22°C

Day Before: Final level check, clean thoroughly

Quick Standards

Type	Moisture	Level	Thickness
Concrete	2.5% MC	3mm/2m	50mm
Plywood	12% MC	3mm/2m	18mm
OSB	12% MC	3mm/2m	18mm

The Bottom Line

Never skip subfloor preparation—it's the foundation of successful installation. Moisture and levelness issues cause most flooring failures. Test properly, fix problems before installation, and consult professionals when needed.