



Each grit step exists to erase the scratch pattern left by the one before it. Skipping a step doesn't save time, it just moves the problem downstream to where it's expensive to fix.

Grit (P-Grade)	Production Stage	Purpose
60–80P	Stripping / heavy removal	Leveling old finish, deep scratches, mill damage, and rework panels.
100–120P	First smoothing pass	Initial smoothing after strip, or on raw stock straight off the molder/CNC.
150–180P	Recommended pre-stain / pre-sealer range	Creates a smooth, uniform surface that promotes even stain penetration and proper adhesion.
220P	Maximum recommended grit for raw wood	Provides additional refinement when needed without over-polishing the surface. Sanding beyond 220P may burnish the wood and reduce even stain absorption.
320P+	Between-coat scuff	Lightly scuffs the film to remove dust nibs and promote adhesion without visible sanding marks.

Rule of thumb: don't jump more than one grit step at a time through the low-to-mid range.

Species Notes

Species Type	Guidance
Tight-grain (maple, birch, cherry)	Stop at 220P. Sanding past this risks burnishing the surface, which closes the grain enough to cause blotchy, uneven stain absorption.
Open-grain (oak, ash, mahogany)	More forgiving of the final grit step, but still follow full sequence — open grain shows skipped steps as texture, not just shadowing.

When to Swap the Sheet >>>

Judge by cutting speed, not appearance. If a sheet is cutting slower than it was ten minutes ago, it has stopped abrading and started burnishing — replace it before continuing, especially ahead of a pre-stain pass.