

Full-Frame Window Replacement Step-by-Step Installation Guide

You've measured your opening, ordered your window, and it's arrived at your door. This guide walks you through a complete full-frame (tear-out) brick-to-brick installation—every step, in order, so you can do it with confidence.

Before You Start

This guide covers a full-frame (tear-out) brick-to-brick installation. Before you begin, confirm the following:

- **Install type:** Full frame (tear-out). The existing window and frame are fully removed.
- **Opening check:** The rough opening must be plumb, level, and square
- **Window fit:** Your window should be 1" overall smaller than the rough opening ($\frac{1}{2}$ " per side) to allow for shimming and insulation
- **Code compliance:** Check local building codes, especially for egress requirements in bedrooms and basements

What You'll Need

Gather these tools and materials before you start so the install goes smoothly without interruption:

- Peel-and-stick flashing tape (blue skin or equivalent)
- Low-expansion spray foam
- Window-specific installation screws
- Shims
- Level
- Hammer and utility knife
- Vacuum or brush
- Measuring tape
- Safety glasses and gloves

IMPORTANT

Before removing the old window, compare its dimensions to the new window. Discovering a sizing issue after removal is a situation you want to avoid entirely. Take 60 seconds to do this check first.

Installation Steps

1

Clean and prep the rough opening

A clean opening is the foundation of a good install. Remove all old debris, shims, nails, and screws from the previous installation.

Vacuum or sweep the sill and corners thoroughly. Hammer in any protruding fasteners and remove loose wood or insulation. Clean the sill and frame contact areas to ensure a completely flat surface. High spots will throw off your level later.

CLEAN AND PREP ROUGH OPENING

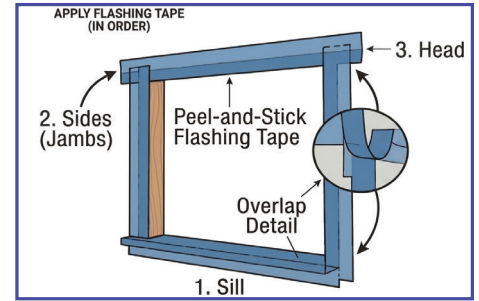


2

Apply Flashing Tape

Flashing tape creates a weathertight seal around the rough opening before the window goes in. Use blue skin or equivalent peel-and-stick flashing tape and follow this sequence:

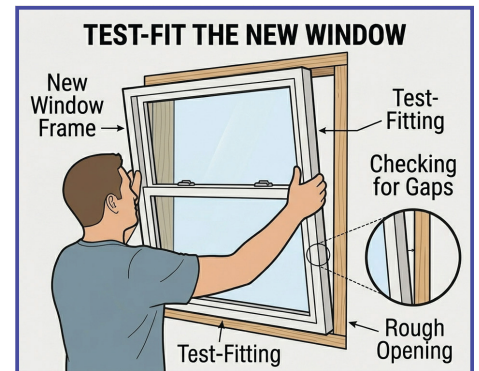
1. **Sill first:** Apply end to end, extending slightly past the opening on both sides.
2. **Side jambs next:** Apply to both sides, overlapping onto the sill tape below.
3. **Head last:** Apply across the top, overlapping onto both pieces of side jamb tape



3

Test Fit the Window

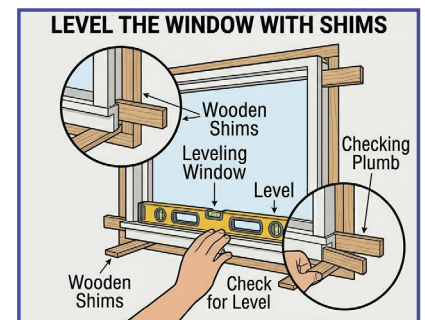
Before committing, place the window into the cleaned opening to check for a proper fit. Confirm the brickmould clears the opening with room for shimming on all sides. Check that all four corners sit flush with the interior drywall using a level. Do not fasten anything yet.



4

Level the Sill

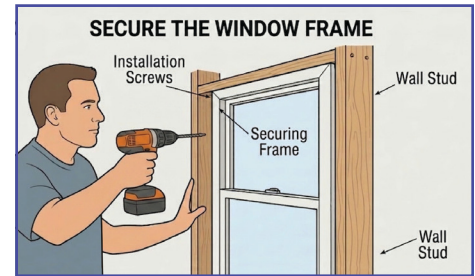
Place a level across the bottom sill of the opening. If it's not level, add shims until it reads perfectly level. This is the most important step. Everything else is built on top of it. A sill even slightly off will cause the frame to fall out of plumb, making the sash difficult to operate.



5

Shim and Fasten the Window

Shim locations should match your fastening locations: 6–8 inches from sill and header, then every 24 inches in between. Use window-specific installation screws—not drywall or wood screws. Start at sill corners, drive first screws partially (don't fully tighten yet). Check each jamb with a level; adjust shims until plumb, then lock in. Open and close the sash after each set of shims to confirm smooth operation before tightening further.



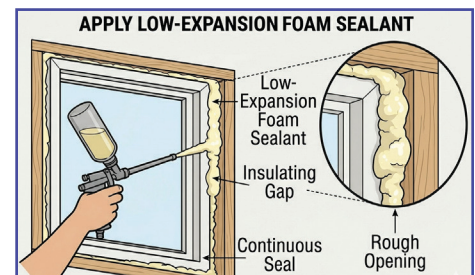
6

Insulate With Low-Expansion Foam

Apply foam in two passes: Exterior bead first: Apply a thin bead at the exterior side of the frame to stop outside air and moisture. Interior bead second: Apply near the interior side, leaving a small gap between the two beads.

FOAM TIP

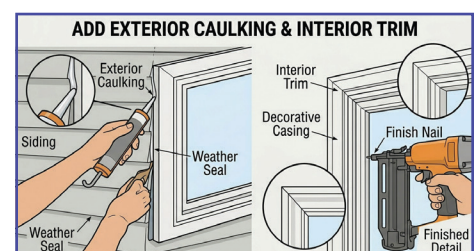
Always use low expansion window and door foam. High expansion foam generate too much pressure and will bow the frame, causing the sash to bind. Look for foam labelled for windows and doors.



7

Finish and Trim

Once foam has fully cured, cut off excess shim and foam material flush with the window frame. Apply interior trim (casing) to cover the gap between frame and drywall. On the exterior, caulk the brickmould along all edges where it meets brick or siding. Do a final check: open and close every sash, test locks and hardware, and inspect the exterior seal.



Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Skipping the flashing tape:** It takes 10 minutes and prevents years of moisture damage. Never skip it.
- **Using high-expansion foam:** This will bow your frame and bind the sash. Always use low-expansion foam.
- **Not testing the sash as you go:** Check operation after every set of shims. Catching a problem early saves you from backing everything out!
- **Forgetting Code compliance:** Bedroom and basement windows often have egress requirements. Check local codes before starting.
- **Overtightening screws before leveling:** Get the window plumb, level, and square before fully tightening any fastener.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a full-frame (tear-out) installation?

A full-frame installation involves removing the existing window and its entire frame down to the rough opening, then installing a new window from scratch. This is the right approach when the existing frame is damaged, rotted, or when you're changing the window size.

What type of foam should I use?

Always use low-expansion window and door foam. Standard expanding foam generates too much pressure and can bow the window frame, causing the sash to bind. Hilti foam is a professional-grade low-expansion option widely available at most building supply stores.

How do I know if my window is plumb and level?

Use a 12–24" level on the sill (for level) and along each jamb (for plumb). The bubble should sit centred between the lines. Check all four sides — a window can be level on the sill but still have a jamb out of plumb if the rough opening isn't square.

Haven't measured yet?

Before you install, make sure your measurements are right.

Visit iriswindows.com/blogs/learning-centre/how-to-measure-windows



Need more guidance?

Scan here to watch our full step-by-step guide on how to install a window.

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