



## Utrecht Art Supplies Staples or Tacks? Sides or Back?



**Ask the Expert: "When I stretch canvas, I've always used staples on the back, not on the sides. Why would someone use tacks and put them on the sides? Is there an advantage I don't know about?"**

**A:** We've seen artists get great results with staples and tacks, side-stapled or on the back. There are advantages to each method, however, which might lead you to select one way over another.

Staples are quick to insert and, if you've got a good staple gun, can be inserted without a lot of manual strength. One disadvantage to using staples, however, is that they tend to countersink, making removal difficult and risky for the canvas. Inserted improperly (in a single horizontal row), staples can also cause a long crease to form which can distort the canvas weave. These issues can be easily managed: If the staple gun has a depth setting, adjust until staples can be inserted flush, but not below the depth of

the canvas. Also, instead of inserting staples parallel with the direction of the stretcher, insert them diagonally so tension at the tack point is spread out. This reduces the chance of tearing and minimizes puckering around the edges.



While it's true that staples are quick and easy to use, tacks can be inserted pretty quickly once you acquire the skill. Tacks used for stretching canvas are very sharp, so they can be set quickly by pressing with the thumb, then sunk with a hammer when a hand is free. It's easy to leave tack heads slightly above the canvas so they can be removed later without gouging the fabric. Tacks can also be pulled out and reused.

When stretching with tacks over heavy-duty bars with a deep profile, insert two parallel rows offset diagonally to spread tension on the bias.

Regarding whether to insert staples/tacks on the sides or back, we think that tacking on the sides technically yields a better, tighter stretch, but a skilled artist should be able to a good job either way. Obviously, gallery-wrapped presentation requires back-stapling/tacking. It might also be necessary to use staples/tacks on the back when using a tight-fitting frame or architectural niche.

Questions? [Ask the Expert](#)

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