

# TEN TOP TIPS FOR COMPLETING YOUR FLATPACK ITEM SAFELY AND SUCCESSFULLY

from Flatpack Jersey & Flatpack Assembly Suffolk's

**ROY EVERITT**

## Ten Top Tips for Completing Your Flatpack Item Safely and Successfully

**from Roy Everitt, owner at Flatpack Jersey and Flatpack Assembly Suffolk**

Flat pack furniture can be a great way to furnish your home, update a single room or replace an old and worn out item of furniture. Sometimes, it's the only way – you simply can't get a double wardrobe or bed up the stairs in most homes, especially if you're trying to do it yourself, while you might be able to manage individual boxes to be assembled in situ. If not, you can move it piece by piece to the room where it will be built and used.

Flatpack furniture is often cheaper, too, and it can be perfectly satisfactory and last for many years, as long as you do a good job putting it together in the first place.

But there are some things you need to take into account to do a good job, do it safely and end up with a piece of furniture that looks as good you hoped and that will serve you for years to come.

Here, then, are the ten top tips, a distillation of professional knowledge and real-world experience from my years working as Flatpack Assembly Suffolk and Flatpack Jersey.

## ***Tip One: Measure very carefully!***

Before you order your new furniture make very sure that it will fit in the space you have planned for it. This can include height, as well as width and depth, and when it comes to height, remember that very tall items (like IKEA's tallest wardrobes) will need enough clearance to rotate them into a vertical position.

(Wardrobes are usually built face down initially and then lifted into their final vertical position.)

Otherwise, you'll need to build them in an upright position, which is very tricky, to say the least – 2.4 metre tall boards don't just stand there while you join them together, and if they fall you can be sure that something will break. Believe me when I say you don't want them collapsing on top of you, either.

So, if building your 2.4m wardrobe on its face (and then lifting it into position) isn't feasible, consider buying a smaller one or getting professional help.

People are often surprised by the size of a finished item, and while a chest of drawers might be smaller than they thought, a bed can easily look a lot bigger in an average size bedroom than it did in the showroom or catalogue. So, do make sure your room is big enough to accommodate it and allow you to open doors and drawers.

One thing to note is that beds are generally sized according to mattress dimensions, so one with a wooden surround, for instance, might be 25cm (10 inches) or more longer and wider than you expect.

## ***Tip Two: Build them in the room where they'll stay***

One thing you won't want to do (and it might not even be possible) is move your newly-assembled furniture from one room to another. As we've seen, one of the benefits of flatpack furniture is that you don't have to worry about access.

Also, flatpack furniture is surprisingly heavy, so moving it further than absolutely necessary is to be avoided. Finally, an item like a wardrobe can seem quite flimsy if you don't move it carefully. At the very least, you shouldn't fit a wardrobe's doors until it's in its final position.

This means you should ideally have the boxes delivered to the room where the item will stand, or in an adjacent room so you can carry individual parts into the right room and build it there. As long as you have enough space to work, life will then be much easier when you do this. The boxes themselves can take up valuable floor space, so unpacking them in an adjacent room is often a good idea.

If you do have to build the item elsewhere, make sure you have someone strong to help you move it to the right place and don't add heavy parts like doors, drawers and shelves until it's in place.

And if you're really not sure about where to build it or how to move it, maybe you should call for professional help.

### ***Tip Three: Give yourself enough room to work***

Speaking about the right room, you'll find it much easier (usually) to make space in the 'correct' room than you will to move a big or heavy item after you've built it.

This might mean, for example, moving a bed to one side or even tipping it on its side to make enough floor space to work safely, or you might need to take some items out of the room while you work, but how much space will you need?

As an example, a 'standard' wardrobe is about 2m high by 1m wide, and it will be built on its side and then turned onto its face (to fit the back). You'll ideally have about one metre all round for safe working, so for a perfectly normal wardrobe, you need a floor area roughly 3m by 4m (almost 10ft by 13ft).

You'll see that that's bigger than some bedrooms, so I often have to work with less space than I'd like, but a floor area smaller than the wardrobe itself is impossible to work in and I have to be creative in how I tackle the job.

A bed should fit in the room, unless you've measured it wrong, but again enough room to work around it is essential. Chests of drawers are often built on their sides, then turned face down, so they will also need more space than their upright 'footprint' would suggest. Chests are usually sturdy enough (and not too heavy until the drawers are fitted) to build nearby and then move to the right place, if necessary.

All this is preparation, and you haven't started building anything yet, or unpacked a single box, and there are still a couple more things to do before you pick up your screwdriver.

### ***Tip Four: Keep children and pets away***

For safety reasons, it's important to keep children and pets away from the area you'll be working in, and you should keep them well away from the unopened boxes, too.

You don't want stacks of flatpack boxes, heavy shelves, etc, falling onto children or pets, and you don't particularly want them to help you unpack the boxes, either. It's important that you keep track of all the parts as you unpack them.

But safety is the main concern, and children or pets under your feet when you're concentrating on building a complicated piece of furniture, using potentially dangerous tools and possibly lifting heavy items into place could be dangerous for you as well as them.

Distractions can lead to mistakes, too.

Although children are often fascinated by the goings-on, especially if they're the ones getting a new bed or wardrobe, etc, it's important they stay at a safe distance and know that you can't play with them just now.

### ***Tip Five: Remember how heavy flatpack items are***

If you've moved or carried any of the boxes already, you'll know that your new flatpack furniture is quite heavy. Individual boxes are just about manageable – although you might need two people to move them far – but when the contents of two or three boxes are combined into one item of furniture they are sometimes very heavy indeed.

There's no point hurting yourself or damaging the furniture or décor because you didn't want to ask for help. If you're struggling with the boxes you'll struggle with the furniture, too, and remember you'll often have to turn the item as you build it and then maybe lift it into position.

So, unless you're really confident about doing the job alone or you already have someone to help you with the lifting and turning, ask someone else to give you a hand.

A while ago, one lady in the midlands managed to trap herself under a wardrobe she was building when she found she wasn't quite as strong as she thought and it came down on top of her. Luckily, she wasn't hurt and had her mobile phone with her so she was able to call the fire brigade to come and rescue her. Everything ended happily but she could easily have been badly injured.

### ***Tip Six: Get help!***

As well as asking a neighbour, relative or friend to help you with the lifting and shifting, help is also available (at least from IKEA) at the end of a telephone. You'll find the number in the instructions you'll soon be reading. I haven't used this service, so can't comment on how useful it is, but it is there should you need it.

You will also find videos online, showing how to build certain items, as well as diagrams and tips from people who have been there before and want to share their knowledge.

Finally, of course you can get help from a professional flatpack assembler to do all this for you.



## ***Tip Seven: Read the instructions***

Finally, you can open the box or boxes and find the instructions and list of components. Sometimes these are stuck to the outside of the box but they're usually inside.

You should read these instructions through at least twice before you start – once to get a general idea of what you need to do and a second time to identify parts (especially very similar parts) and get an idea of how they will fit together.

But unless you're extraordinarily gifted you won't be able to memorise the instructions by reading them once or twice, so you should keep them with you and keep referring to them as you assemble your flatpack item.

Needless to say, you should follow the sequence as shown in in the instructions and not try to second guess or anticipate them. There's usually a good reason for the sequence of steps and ignoring the order or thinking you know better nearly always leads to mistakes and wasted time, if not actual damage, as you have to undo work you've already done.

Pay particular attention to which holes are used for which fittings – it's easy to miscount or confuse the left side with the right or the top with the bottom. Really.

But first, read the instructions to get a good overall idea of how things fit together.

### ***Tip Eight: Identify all the parts***

In my experience it's very rare for any parts to be missing, despite the stories you may have heard elsewhere. What's more common is people mis-identifying parts so they get used in the wrong place and so aren't there when they're really needed.

You might have several sizes of screws, for example, some of which are almost interchangeable, but not quite – a shorter screw might do here but a longer screw might be too long there, or one type has a countersunk head while another has a dome. You could also have two or more sizes of cam bolts, different sized dowels, and so on. There may be some wooden pieces that are finished on one side only, or not at all, while others will be finished on all sides and edges. And so it goes on.

The more different parts you see on the list the easier it will be to confuse one with another, so make sure you're aware of the (sometimes subtle) differences, and keep checking the parts list as you go to make sure you're using the right pieces at every stage.

You're now just about ready to start.

## **Tip Nine: Take your time**

The more you rush the more likely you are to make a mistake and have to backtrack. You're also more likely to damage something or hurt yourself, so remember: it's not a race.

There are no prizes for finishing quickly and you'll only feel pleased with your work if the end result is as good as you hoped, so take your time.

Some pieces – like the side of a wardrobe or bed, for example, will be long, awkward and quite heavy, and it's easy to bash walls, doors and other furniture if you don't take care and move slowly. There are no shortcuts, really, that beat working steadily and carefully, paying attention to the instructions and making sure you only have to do each step once.

It's important to be careful when you're turning, lifting or moving items, too, so make sure you're well set, the space you're moving it to is clear and nothing will be scraped, crushed or bashed when you move anything. Some things to watch for that are sometimes less than obvious, are ceiling and wall light fittings, which you can easily damage when you stand up or move a wardrobe or tall bookcase.

And of course, your own safety depends on you being careful and attentive to what you're doing. Take care with screwdrivers and hammers. You won't often need to use a sharp blade but you might need to drill through a door, for example, and it's quite likely you'll need to drill into a wall to secure a tall piece of furniture. You also won't want to drill in the wrong place, either, especially anything that will show, so always measure at least twice. If you're drilling two holes at a set distance apart, measure again after you've drilled the first one.

Think before you press the trigger and make sure your fingers are well clear.

Doors are usually easier to fit than they used to be but they're quite heavy and tricky to hold in place while you attach the hinges (either pushing them together or screwing them in place). Be patient, take your time. In my experience, rushing this part usually leads to it taking much longer.

Another source of time-consuming mistakes is repetition. For example, you might have to assemble six, eight or more drawers, and it's very easy to make a mistake when you think you know what you're doing. If you're getting much faster you're quite likely to be forgetting something or getting careless about quality. Pieces left over at the end are a good clue!

In short, take your time to save time, damage and possible injury.

## ***Tip Ten: Use the right tools but avoid power tools***

You don't need to spend much on tools but you should have the right ones to hand if you want to do a good job. You will need a couple of sizes of philips screwdriver, maybe a flat-bladed screwdriver and a small to medium-sized hammer for most jobs. Any specialised tools, like allen keys or spanners will usually be included with the flatpack item, but a small adjustable spanner might be useful.

Old and worn screwdrivers are more likely to slip and damage screw heads (and maybe hurt you, too), so it's worth spending a pound or two on a new one, even if you only use it once! A smallish hammer will be easier to use when you're hammering in the little pins or nails that are used to fix the backs of wardrobes and chests. You can find perfectly adequate tools in pound shops, although naturally you'll get more durable ones when you pay more.

Apart from a low-powered screwdriver I rarely use power tools and some manufacturers' guarantees are invalidated if you do use them.

You need to be able to 'feel' when a screw or bolt is tight enough, and a powered screwdriver can easily go too fast, leading to over-tightening and stripping of the thread or damage to the screw head.

This really comes back to taking your time, but you might also be tempted to cut corners in this way if you're not used to this kind of work and your hands start to get sore and blistered. Allen keys (hexagon keys) are particularly hard on your fingers. Usually, they can take a bit more torque than an ordinary woodscrew but it's still possible to overdo it.

You can wrap something around an allen key (plastic or tape) so it's a bit kinder on the fingers but you might have quite a few of them to tighten. Even so, don't be tempted to cheat unless you really, really know what you're doing and/or you're prepared to take responsibility for any damage.

## ***Recap: Ten top tips from your flatpack professional***

Here they are then, but please read the whole PDF again and keep it for future reference!

1. Measure carefully, including height
2. Build them in the room where they'll stay
3. Give yourself enough room to work
4. Keep children and pets away
5. Remember how heavy flatpack items are
6. Get help!
7. Read the instructions – and keep referring to them
8. Check all the parts and make sure you can identify them
9. Take your time
10. Use the right tools but avoid power tools

Good luck with your flatpack assembly and all your home improvements. You can almost certainly manage this but you know where to come if you can't.

*With best wishes,*

*ROY*