

Laser Tape Measure Tips

Tips for accurate measuring:

If you're like me, you will be skeptical of laser measures for a while and will double-check everything with your tape. In fact, I suggest you do this just to make sure the tool is functioning properly. It won't be long before you trust the results. Here are a few things I've learned that help to achieve more accurate measurements.

Calibrate your tape. Lasers don't replace tape measures altogether. You still need to transfer a measurement to a piece of wood before making a cut. So take the time to make sure that your tape measure is consistent with your laser measure, and adjust the hook on the tape as needed.

Aim for solid targets. Measuring to porous, highly reflective, translucent, or water-covered surfaces can be difficult. This issue isn't a function of quality; it's just the nature of the laser. If you're measuring distances greater than 100 ft., most manufacturers suggest using a target to reflect the beam. Targets can be purchased, or you can use a light-colored, flat surface such as a piece of white paper.

Know the environment. These tools work by bouncing a beam of light off a fixed object to determine the distance between the target and the base unit. But light conditions and dust in the air can affect the range and accuracy of the measurements. Ideally, the target should be shaded from bright light.

Hold it steady. These tools excel at taking measurements in positions that would be awkward to negotiate with a tape measure, but if the tool doesn't remain steady against a flat surface, the results can be inaccurate. When I had a hard time holding the laser measure steady and pressing the button at the same time, the tools with a timer really helped.

Supplement outside corners. Although some tools feature a hook for this application, the hook is relatively small and really good only for latching onto surfaces that are smooth, flat, and square, such as the edge of a counter top. If you need accurate measurements from a drywall or plaster corner, hold something flat (such as a scrap of wood or a piece of drywall) against the wall to butt the tool against.