



GUIDE 5 • THE FOUNDATION

Surface Prep & Cleaning

Most wraps that fail early fail because of preparation, not film. Get this right and everything else becomes easier.

Why prep is everything

Vinyl adhesive bonds to the surface it touches. If that surface carries wax, polish, grease, or bonded contaminants, the film bonds to the contaminant — not the paint — and lifts within weeks. Thorough prep is non-negotiable.

The prep sequence

- 1 Wash** the panel with car shampoo to remove loose dirt and grime, then rinse thoroughly.
- 2 Decontaminate** bonded contaminants — tar spots, industrial fallout, tree sap — until the surface feels perfectly smooth to the touch.
- 3 Dry completely**, including seams, shut lines and the areas around trim where water hides.
- 4 Final wipe** with isopropyl alcohol on a lint-free cloth to strip every last trace of wax, polish and grease. Work in sections.
- 5 Let it flash off** fully, and from this point do not touch the surface with bare hands.

The detail areas

Pay special attention to edges and the zones around handles, badges, lights and trim — these are where lifting begins if any grease is left behind. Where practical, **remove badges, trim and even handles** so you can wrap film slightly around edges and tuck it cleanly. It takes longer but transforms the durability and the finished look.

DO NOT SKIP THE IPA

A car can look spotless after washing and still be coated in invisible polish and wax. The isopropyl wipe is the step beginners most often rush — and the one that most often causes edges to lift later.

A quick prep checklist

- Washed, rinsed and fully dry
- Decontaminated until smooth to the touch
- Trim, badges and handles removed where possible
- Final IPA wipe done, section by section
- Surface flashed off and untouched by bare hands