

# Duct Tape vs Gaffer's Tape

Gaffer's tape or Duct tape? Both are multi-purpose, pressure-sensitive tapes with a strong hold due to fabric reinforcement. But do you know which one is best for construction? Which one is more heat tolerant? Water-resistant? Tearable? Knowing the specific characteristics between duct tape and gaffer's tape will ensure you choose the right tape for your job. Let's break it down.

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## What Is Gaffer's Tape?



*ECHOtape's CL-W6033 is a matte black gaffer's tape.*

Gaffer's tape (also known as gaff tape) is a heavy cotton cloth pressure-sensitive tape with strong adhesive qualities. It is most commonly used in theatre, photography, movie and

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television production, as well as industrial staging work. In fact, when cables are taped down onto a stage or other surface, either to prevent tripping hazards or hide them from the view of the audience or camera, they are said to be “gaffed” or “gaffered,” which is how the tape got its name.

While similar to duct tape, and frequently confused with it, [gaffer's tape](#) is made from a fabric material rather than vinyl or other plastics; it is more resistant to heat; it doesn't harm the surface to which it adhered. Meaning, gaffer's tape can be removed without leaving behind an adhesive residue, and it doesn't reflect light.

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## What Is Duct Tape?



ECHOtape's [CL-  
W6064](#)

*Industrial  
Strength  
Utility Grade*

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## *Duct Tape*

Well known for its versatility and strength, [duct tape](#) is a cloth tape coated with a polyethylene resin on one side and an aggressive, rubber-based adhesive on the other. Unlike other tapes, the fabric backing gives duct tape strength, yet allows it to be easily torn and adhered to a variety of surfaces.

Its initial design was simple but effective: a strong fabric bonded to polyethylene film for sealing/waterproofing, silver-gray coloring to match metal ductwork, and a thick coating of adhesive to seal the joints and make them airtight. But people quickly determined that duct tape could be used for a variety of other purposes, and the boom was on. There are no less than [eight different types of duct tape](#) – each with different qualities of fabric, polyethylene, and adhesive – for many different uses. It will hold together almost everything, making it a very reliable tape to use when you want to be sure that your project doesn't fall apart. Duct tape's high adhesion properties mean it typically will leave behind residue, so it's not the best choice when you need to remove the tape once your job, event or project is over.

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## **Gaffer's Tape or Duct Tape—Which Is**

## Best?

Gaffer's tape is the best choice for the arts and entertainment industry, as it removes from carpets, cables, stages, and other surfaces easily without causing damage or leaving adhesive residue. Duct tape is great for making permanent repairs and waterproofing. But it's not always that simple. Understanding the difference between these two types of tape will prevent frustration and ensure positive results for your application. We've compiled the best questions for contractors and building professionals to ask when choosing between duct tape and gaffers tape on the job site.

## Do You Need Permanent or Temporary Adhesive?

**Duct Tape:** permanent and/or semi-permanent

*Ideal for:* Making long-lasting general repairs on the spot. Fun fact: Our [CL-W6064 Industrial Strength Duct Tape](#) can provide a permanent adhesive alternative on some applications, but it is removable if need be. For example, in the abatement/remediation industry, after the job is complete, the duct tape holding up the poly film for the containment room must be removed.

**Gaffer's Tape:** removable, temporary adhesive

*Ideal for:* Temporary uses especially when you can't damage the surface beneath the tape. [CL-W6033 Matt Black Gaffer's Tape](#) is perfect for things like trade shows when you need to remove tape from the convention center floor or in the entertainment

industry for marking positions on a stage. It conforms well to irregular surfaces without twisting or curling.

## Does It Need to be Hand Tearable?

**Duct Tape:** scissors or can be torn by hand

*Ideal for:* Situations where you have some basic tools on-hand to complete the job. Some duct tape can be torn by hand, making it convenient for working on the fly. However, some duct tape products have extra reinforcement, which will require scissors or hand-tools to cut. ECHOtape's new professional [duct tape](#), [CL-W6064](#), has a fine mesh easy-tear backing which gives you a crisp clean edge when torn by hand.

**Gaffer's Tape:** easily torn by hand

*Ideal for:* Working on the fly.

## Is Duct Tape Resistant to Heat and Water?

**Duct Tape:** Waterproof and weather-resistant

*Ideal for:* Patching and seaming. It's important to note that duct tape is not very heat resistant. Under extreme heat conditions, duct tape adhesive typically becomes extremely gummy and may slide and or dry up really fast, taking the integrity out of the tape and possibly making it fail.

**Gaffer's Tape:** Water resistant; able to resist high heat temperatures

*Ideal for:* Securing cables and props that are exposed to the bright, hot lights of camera work. Please note: Because it does not have a polyethylene backing, gaffer's tapes are not

waterproof, but the barrier properties in the coated cloth backing does make gaffer's tape moisture resistant in most cases. For example, [CL-W6033](#) has excellent water, vapor and abrasion resistance, which makes it suitable in humidity and moist environments.

## Which is more flexible: Duct Tape or Gaffer's Tape?

**Duct Tape:** very flexible and easy to stretch

*Ideal for:* Situations in which the tape must fit into tight areas or hug irregular surfaces and contours.

**Gaffer's Tape:** less flexible than duct tape

*Ideal for:* Situations in which you need the tape to hold its shape (it won't stretch like duct tape) or when a tight fit is less critical.

## What kind of finish do you need... Matte or Reflective Finish?

**Duct Tape:** CL-W6064 comes in 7 colors with a reflective finish

*Ideal for:* Color coding and labeling things.

**Gaffer's Tape:** CL-W6033 comes in matte black. The matte finish stops the tapes from reflecting light making it blend in with a normal stage background or floor. It is sold in a range of widths from 1/4" to 4", with the 1" and 2" the most common.

*Ideal for:* Securing cables or props that need to remain invisible under the lights of a photography or film set.

## How Much Does Duct Tape Cost?

**Duct Tape:** less expensive; \$7.99 for 60 yards

*Ideal for:* Go-to everyday general repair tape.

**Gaffer's Tape:** more expensive; \$19.99 for 60 yards

*Ideal for:* Circumstances where the unique properties of gaffer's tape (especially the removability) warrant the higher cost of the tape. However, because gaffer's tape is more easily removable, with less residue, there will be minor savings on labor cost for cleanup.

Choosing the right tape for your job is extremely important.

At ECHOtape, we've made it [our passion](#) for more than [40 years](#) to help professionals with their [sticky issues](#). For more in-depth information on duct tape, check out our [Complete Technical Guide to Duct Tape](#) to learn the top 6 conditions where duct tape can fall short and what adhesive tape you should be using instead. If you still aren't sure, feel free to [contact us](#) with your challenge. We would love to help!