

Top 5 Things Every Model Train Beginner Must Know Before Spending a Dime!

by James Reynolds

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MODELTRAINBOOKS.ORG

Dear Model Train Beginner,

In this crafted note, I am going to show you the TOP 5 things that you must know before spending any money starting your model first model railroad.

By the end of this note, you will completely understand the most important concepts to model railroading but what is truly unique is the real takeaway action plan that you can implement immediately for each of the things that matter. It's not worth your time scouring the internet for the best way to start your model

As a model train beginner, the top 5 fundamental concepts are a MUST KNOW to ensure a flawless model railroad that can be shared with family and friends. Most model train enthusiast make critical mistakes when first starting out and it costs them dearly... some to the point that they actually quit and never build their “dream model train layout.”

Let's jump into the Top 5 Things that you must know before building your model railroad:

1. Understanding the basic building blocks for any model railroad and how not paying attention the basics can cost you time and money for no reason.
2. Trackwork and how to build a perfect model railroad every-time
3. Track work - how to lay track perfectly every time
4. Benchwork - how to avoid costly mistakes when building model railroad
5. Electrical wiring to make sure your model trains don't fry
6. Scenery - how to build model train hills & trees perfectly every time

After spending the last 25 years building model train layouts for some of the biggest model train expo's in the United States, I wanted to give away my successful formula that has earned me reputation that proceeded me in the model train world. In this crafted note I distilled it down to help model train beginners not make costly, time wasting, expensive mistakes and build their model railroads correctly during their very first construction.

I am also sharing this knowledge with you to make sure the “World's Greatest Hobby” lives on for generations and you can share wonderful experiences with your friends and family building model railroads.



[Here's How to Get Started Quickly and Easily with Your Dream Model Railroad](#)

Lets get started

The Top 5 Things that matter are basics, benchwork, track work, electrical and scenery.

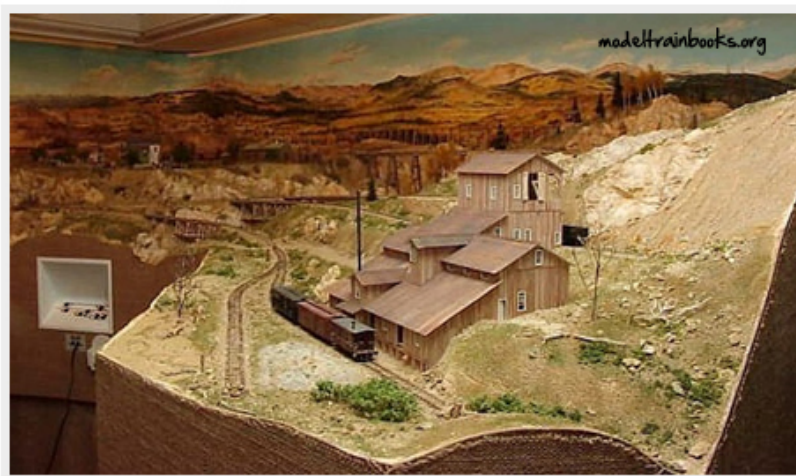
#1 Basics

I know you are excited to get started on the "world's greatest hobby!" and this beginners guide is made to help you not waste your *precious time, money and limited space*. Constructing your first model railroad is an adventure, so get ready for the ride.

In this guide you will learn the **THREE** major **CONCEPTS** that beginners must know to help get their goals accomplished on their very first attempt at building a **model train layout**.

This three part "**Model Trains for Beginners Starter Guide**" was created to be followed in order. Do each part of the series and remember to answer the important questions before spending a dime on layout benches, supplies and scenery. At the end of the three part series, you can download a more detailed version of the report simply by clicking the PDF download button.

What is Your Model Railroad Theme?



What is the Setting? Location? and Era?



Once you have decided on a **theme** for your model railroad, including the era and time period, for example the Chicago Union Station theme based in the era of the 1930's, your next **CONCEPT** to figure out is the type of **scale** to use.

Scales refer to the ratio between the measurement of a model compared to that of the prototype. In other words, what **size** trains do you want to run? For example, a Lionel locomotive that is 1/48th the size of the real thing is called 1/48th or 1:48 scale. (As it happens, O gauge trains are 1/48th scale.) Sometimes the terms "gauge" and "scale" are used interchangeably even though, technically, they're different. **Gauge** is the term used to describe the distance between the 2 rails of track. Usually 2 inches is ("standard gauge"). "Narrow gauge" is a term used for rails that are closer together than standard gauge - usually around 0.75 inches.

You Need to Decide on What Scale to Use

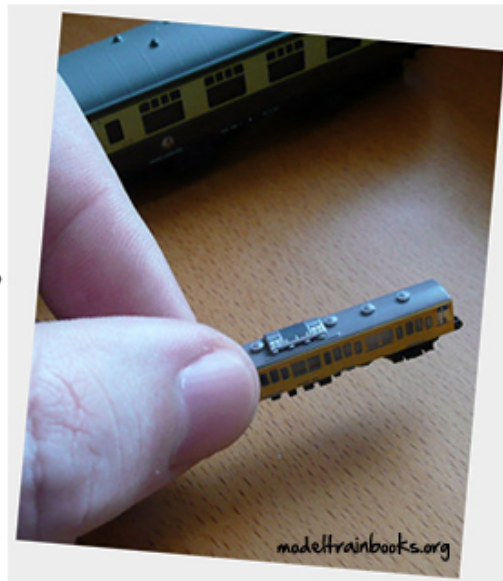


You Need to Decide on the Gauge to Use

Base this decision on your finger dexterity to deal with very tiny engines on tiny tracks.

Keep in mind your visual acuity, are your eyes fading?

Also, consider if your layout consist more of scenery or trains.



After deciding on what **scale** and **gauge** to use for your model railroad. The next **CONCEPT** to figure out is the **display** of your model railroad layout.

The third **CONCEPT** to figure out for your model railroading layout adventure is the **display**. In other words, how will you show off your work? where will you show off your layout? And more importantly to who?

Want a Huge Wall-to-Wall Empire?



How About a Small Switching Layout?



Every model train enthusiast has personal inspirations for creating their very own model railroad. For some, it is to remind them of their childhood, such as myself included. For others it is simply to enjoy this magical world of miniature worlds and spend time with their children and grandchildren.



Next, learn detailed step by step directions on the following:

- How to pick and build the perfect layout to suit your budget and the space you have available? One that will provide loads of fun for years to come
- A full glossary to explain the model train language
- All the track cleaning methods explained and what not to do. Easy ways to maintain and keep your layout clean... easily keep your trees and scenery free from dust and cobwebs
- The 4 different track options explained and compared to allow you to make an informed decision on what you should be using

- The best way to create grassed meadows and fields and fire scenes!
- What repairs you should do yourself and when you should use an experienced repairer
- The secrets to creating realism and an aged look... how to create rust, mud and tire marks on your rolling stock
- Handling common track features – turnouts, reversing loops
- How do you convert your analog layout to a DCC system and should you even consider DCC?
- How to avoid those frustrating electrical shorts on your turnouts?
- The most important part to building a model railroad is **knowing** exact step-by-step directions for planning, designing and building ahead of time. To avoid endless frustration due to **limited space, derailment/wiring issues and wasted time trying to figure out**, understanding the fundamental steps is crucial. The best feeling in the world as a model railroader is enjoying a fully operational layout with all the bells and whistles.

To master model railroad building will take countless hours trying to figure out the exact process for each part.

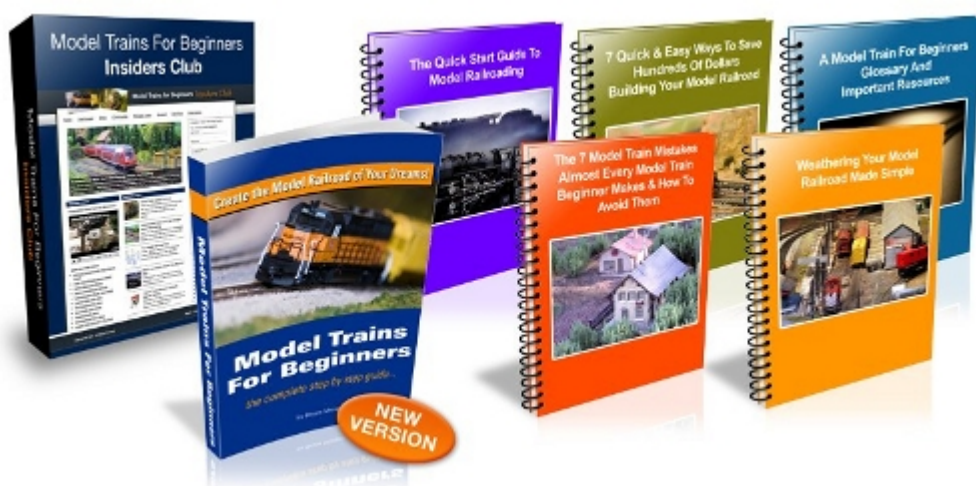
You must know each of the bullet points above to ensure your locomotives do not have **erratic stops, derailments or lack of speed on gradients**. and is a fully functional realistic model train layout.

Fortunately, you don't have to **spend hours and money with trial and error**, here's everything you need to know packaged into one resource.

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#2 Trackwork

You are about to learn **how to lay down model railroad track**.

One of the most common mistakes is **laying track too late** in the building process, only to be disappointed when your model trains **derail, stop moving and cannot turn curves**

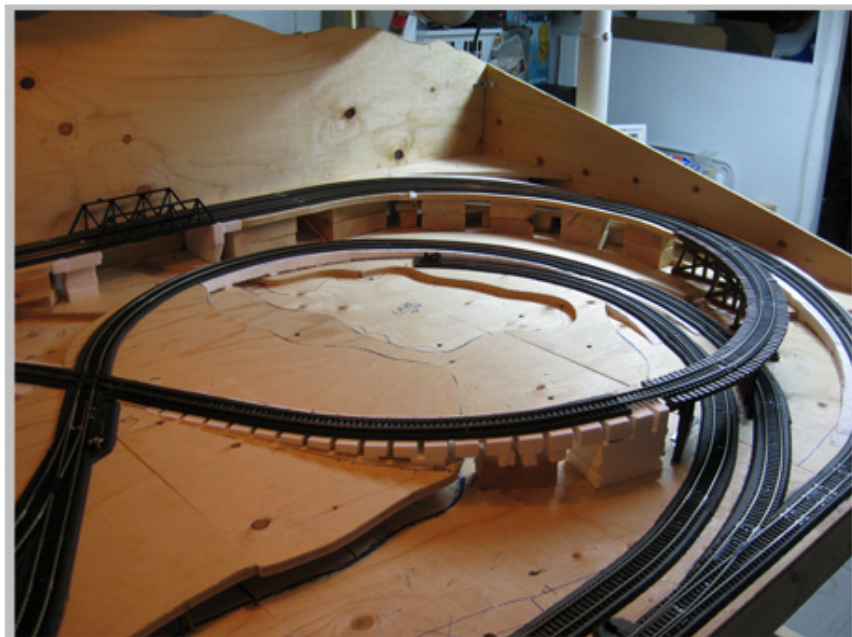
You have a couple different options for putting the track down on your layout.

Use a product like DAP Dynoflex 230 sealant, which can be found at most home centers and hardware stores.

Step 1

First, you put down a thin layer of the dynoflex caulking and then you press your track into place and let it dry.

Trackwork is Crucial during Planning



DAP Dynoflex 230 Sealant



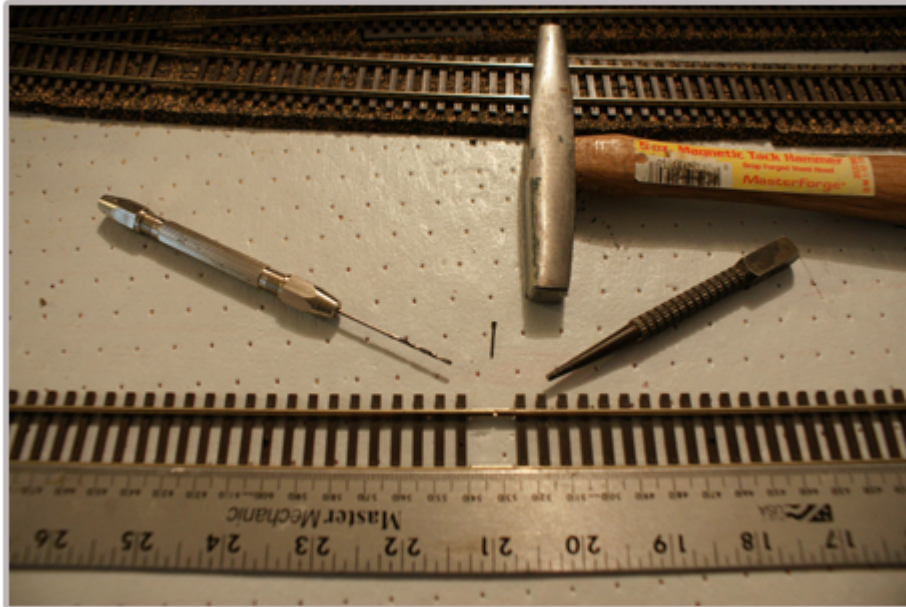
Pros: Effective technique that saves time and is easy to do.

Cons: It is difficult to remove the track once you have laid it down or if you want to change your track arrangement.

If you don't want to use sealant, another time tested option is to use **track nails**.

The most important things to remember are to put the holes in for the track nails on the track itself and then hammer the nails into place

Time Tested Option is Track Nails



The most important things to remember are to put the holes in for the track nails on the track itself and then hammer the nails into place.

On tracks such as the Atlas Flex Track, the ties are smooth on the top but when you flip it over there are tiny little dimples in the back of the track. We need to drill those out before we can install the spikes. In order to drill the holes, the best item to use is a pin vise with a number 65 bit installed.

Setting our track on a piece of wood such as bench work provides a nice surface to do the drilling and ensures your holes are being drilled on a stable area.

Instructions:

First off, take the bit put it into the dimples of the flipped over the track and drill the holes. Once the holes are drilled you can flip over your track and place it on the layout, where you have drawn the scales to be placed. Once you have placed it down, insert your track nails into the holes and use a nail set and a tack hammer to drive the nails in and secure it into place.

Then just go on down the lines and insert your track nails into the rest of the track and secure you're the track to the bottom of your model train layout.

Useful Advice:

- Pin vises and track nails can be found at most all hobby shops
- You don't want to drive the nail so far that it bends the tie
- For a faster way to insert track nails use Dremel tools instead of a pin vise and tack hammer

- If you ever want to change the arrangement of your track, you can simply use some needle nose pliers and pull out the nails from the track ties and you are free to move the tracks around.

This was sure and quick way to lay down trackwork but there's still 10 other things you must know to be able to run your trains smoothly.

- Stagger all of the joints in the track, roadbed, and sub roadbed
- Avoid humps or dips in the track, especially near curves, turnouts, and places where grades begin or end
- Drive spikes gently, using just enough pressure to seat them without putting a vertical kink in the rail
- If you're using track nails, drive them gently until they're snug without distorting the plastic ties
- Carefully align every rail joint and make sure both rails are fully seated in the rail joiners
- Eliminate any potential bump by removing the ties beneath a rail joint, sanding them thinner, and then replacing them
- Smooth the top inside corner of all rail joints with a small file until you can slide a fingernail over the joint without feeling any snagging
- Use a small file to sharpen all switch points to obtain a smooth path for the wheels to follow
- During installation, solder the wires to the underside of the rails so they'll be hidden by the ballast
- Use a National Model Railroad Association gauge to check and adjust the spacing of the rails and guardrails in turnouts

Next, learn detailed step by step directions on the following:



- Cleaning track
- Grade crossings
- Manual switch controls
- From track plan to benchwork
- Laying road bed
- Easy easements
- Grades
- Laying flextrack on curves
- Sectional track

- Track terminology

The most important part to **running smoothly** operating model trains is **planning trackwork** ahead of time. To avoid endless frustration due to **derailment issues, dirty tracks and trains that stop moving**, understanding the trackwork is crucial. The best feeling in the world as a model railroader is enjoying a fully operation layout with all the bells and whistles.

To **master trackwork** will take countless hours trying to figure out the exact process for each.

You must know each of the bullet points above to ensure your locomotives do not have **erratic stops, derailments or lack of speed on gradients**.

Fortunately, you don't have to **spend hours and money with trial and error**, here's all everything you need to know packaged into one resource.

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#3 Benchwork

You are about to learn **how to build model railroad benchwork.**

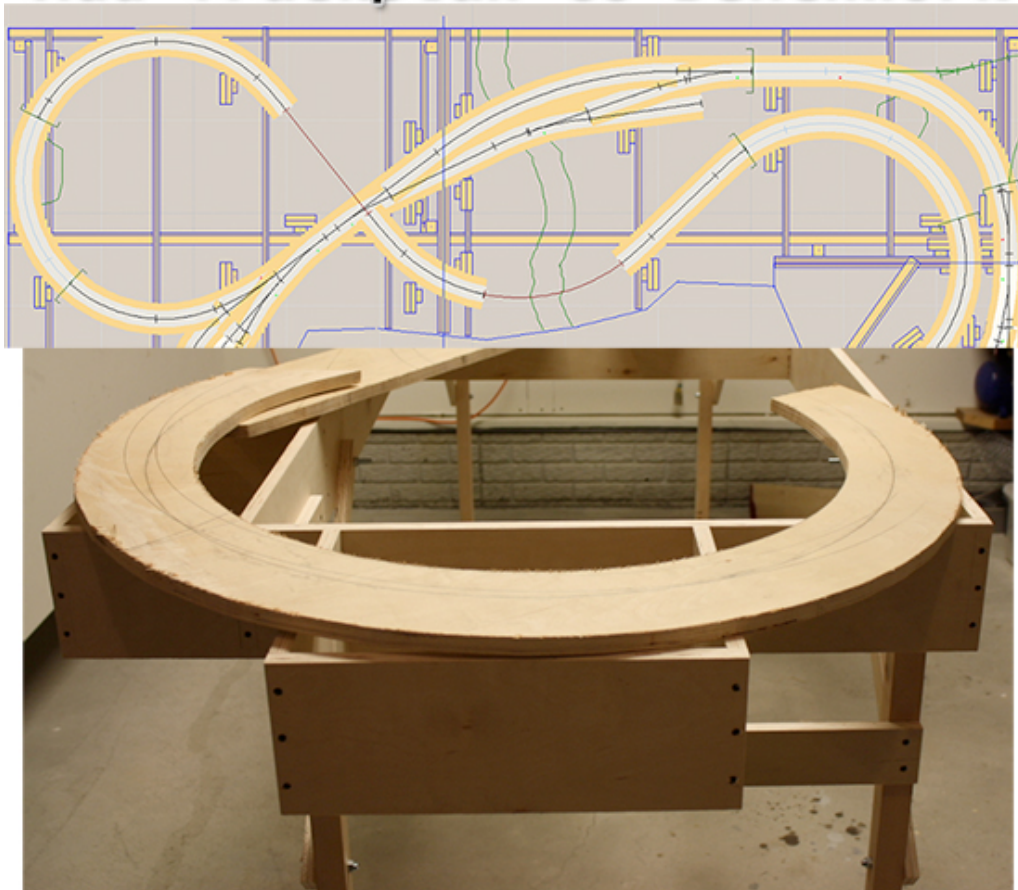
The purpose of building benchwork for your model railroad is to sturdy up your layout. Usually the plywood base that your model railroad is built on is floppy and weak. The only way to sure it up is by adding a benchwork beneath the plywood that gives the layout a strong foundation to keep building even heavier items on top of your layout such as mountains, lakes and tunnels.

One of the most common mistakes is **not using a trackplan.** Following a trackplan while building benchwork is necessary. TIP: If you have carefully drawn your trackplan on grid paper using a scale of say 1 inch = 1 foot, then you will be able to measure the size of platform you need on top of the supporting structure.

Step 1

Draw a general plan and see how it fits onto the benchwork.

Add Trackplan to Benchwork



Important questions to ask

- Do I want a “loop to loop” configuration? “Point to point”? Both? Do I need a wider area to loop trains around at each end of the layout?
- Do I have a large freight yard or big industry that I need to fit into a certain area?
- Do I want lots of mountains and valleys?
- Do I want one layer, or level, of trains - or 2 or 3 levels?
- Will I need a helix to get trains from one elevation to another?
- How much aisle space do I need? Hint: Don't skimp on this!

- Does my model railroad benchwork need to be portable? Will I be showing it at model railroad events? Will I be moving to a new residence soon?

Step 2

Build the benchwork based on the model train layout trackwork that you've planned. Even though the trackplan is not 3D nor contains all of the mountains and tunnels, it still gives you a good idea of perfecting the measurements. You should leave some benchwork area as a buffer for any new plans that become part of the layout.

Construct the Benchwork



Step 3

Start laying the terrain of the model train layout and then begin the exciting process of [laying the trackwork](#). One of the best ways to lay track after building a sturdy benchwork is to use modules such as Mod-U-Rail" kits made by Woodland Scenics and lay track one module at a time.



The most important part to **running smoothly** operating model trains is **building sturdy benchwork** ahead of time. To avoid endless frustration due to **derailment issues, dirty tracks and trains that stop moving**, understanding the benchwork is crucial. The best feeling in the world as a model railroader is enjoying a fully operation layout with all the bells and whistles.

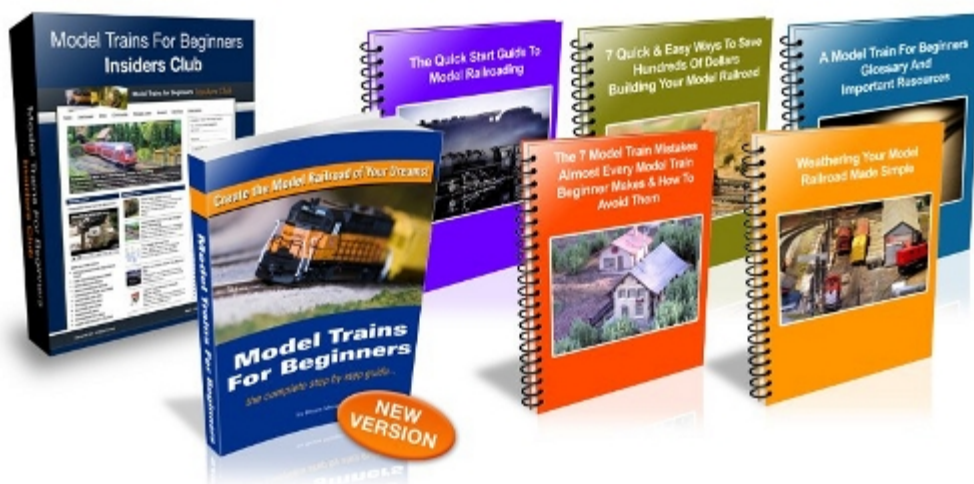
To **master benchwork** will take countless hours trying to figure out the exact process for each.

You must know each of the bullet points above to ensure your locomotives do not have **erratic stops, derailments or lack of speed on gradients**.

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#4 Electrical

Understanding basic wiring is one of the most important skills for model train beginners to acquire to ensure that their locomotives run smoothly and at the speed they want to achieve their ideal railroad layout.

How did model trains move before DCC?

The standard way model trains use to run was by varying voltage and polarity on the rails to create different speeds and directions of the trains. By controlling model trains by voltage, the higher the voltage the faster the locomotives moves and the lower the voltage the slower it moves.

How was direction controlled?

If the right rail is positive with respect to the left rail, the locomotive moves forward, if it is negative, the locomotive moves in reverse.

What is DCC?

DCC stands for Digital Command Control. It is a system where digital commands are sent to the locomotives through the rails.

Benefits of DCC

- DCC is allows independent control of multiple locomotives without complicated wiring, toggle switches or power packs
- DCC provides for digital control of turnouts and signaling
- DCC allows for sounds, block detection, momentum control and ability to latch together various locomotives
- DCC is an NMRA standard, which means that locomotives that use decoders from different model train manufacturing companies can be used with any DCC system

Biggest mistake model train beginners make with DCC wiring is mixing DC and DCC can ruin your DCC electronics by potentially frying them. Don't combine both!

Another big mistake model train beginners make is converting old locomotives to DCC. Converting old locomotives can take a tremendous amount of time!

How to choose the right DCC starter set?

- Buying a starter set will give you everything you need right out of the box and be more cost effective than buying individual items. Your starter set should include the command station, booster and throttle. Some sets combine the command station and booster together.
- Choosing which DCC brand to use is very important. Usually the command stations and throttles are not interchangeable between manufactures. Make sure the brand you choose offers upgradable systems, to allow you to grow with your needs. Also, try to find a brand that allows for computer inference to use in the future for computer automated signals; automation and even programming sound decoders.
- Find a brand that employs a full featured throttle network

How much power do you need?

- Most starter sets come in amperages ranging from 2.5 to 8amps
- Calculating track length is not necessary for power, the track does not consume power, it just delivers it

- HO scale layout will need the least amount of wiring, S or O scales will need double compared to an HO scale
- Too much amps can cause serious issues, such causing a short, derailments at turnouts and damage to your locomotives, so pay as you grow and don't purchase the largest power supply or booster

DCC item list:

The following is a list of items that can be purchased to expand your layout. These are ideas to keep you on track to running your locomotives. You can pick and choose from below which best suits you.

- The starter set is just that, a starter set. It gets you moving a train. But, if you have a few locomotives, you'll need a few more decoders.
- However, before installing that decoder, we recommend you test it with a decoder tester. They typically run about \$30 and can be found from various vendors.
- If you have a reverse section, you'll need an automatic reverser. Boosters typically have these built in, but if you have a reverse section, it's best to wire that independent of the main track. There are many different auto-reversers from various manufacturers, it's hard to find a bad reverser.
- It's fun running trains with friends. You'll need an additional throttle for each engineer. The Digitrax Zephyr lets you use 2 "old-style" DC power packs as 'jump throttles,' so you get 3 throttles for the price of the one Zephyr.
- You need a throttle network to plug those additional throttles into. Each manufacturer has various ways of setting up their network. This typically involved running a wire from the command station to the area(s) where you will want to control the trains. The wire is terminated into a jack that allows you to plug throttles into.

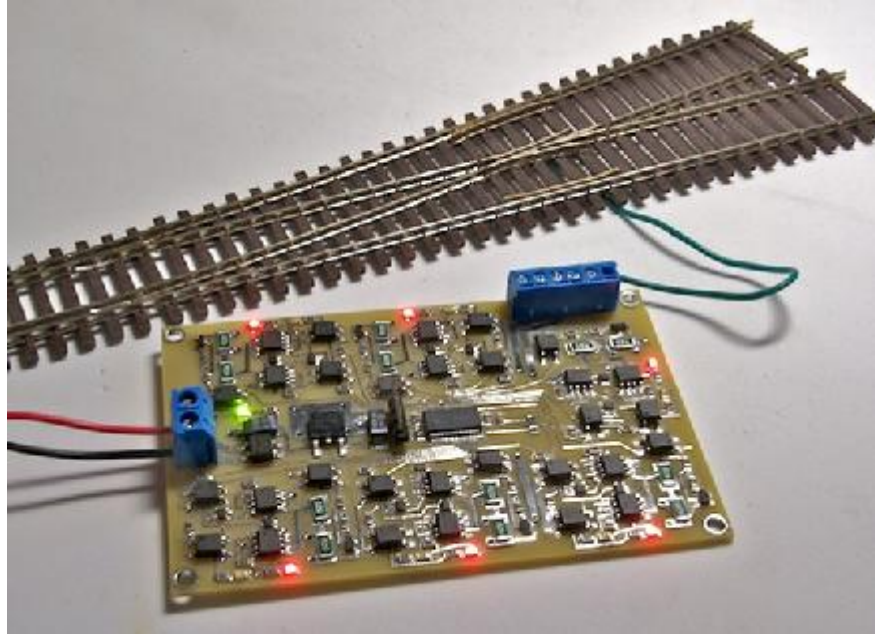
Need help answering any of these questions?

- *What is a DCC system and can analog locomotives be run with decoders on a DCC system?*
- **How do you convert your analog layout to a DCC system and should you even consider DCC?**
- *Why you need boosters in your system and how to calculate how many locomotives you can run at one time with 1 transformer?*

Model trains is not necessarily an expensive habit but beginners who fall prey to the standard trial and error format of learning how to build model train layouts end up losing motivation due to the costs of making errors.

Especially when it comes to wiring, Do not go down this route...spend a few bucks on a guide that will save you hundreds of dollars in the near future. This is the secret that will put you ahead of any other mode train beginners and save you time, money and a whole lot of frustration.

Next, learn detailed step by step directions on the following:



- Installing decoders in Locomotives
- Programming Decoders
- Competitive Equipment Comparisons
- Requests to wire your layout not accompanied by generous rewards
- Fixing Problems if you already wired it or messed with it. (for any rewards no matter how generous)
- Track power bus
- Cab bus wiring
- Handling common track features – turnouts, reversing loops
- Requirements and Installation of DCC Wiring
- Basic power and track wiring

The most important part to **running smoothly** operating model trains is **planning wiring** ahead of time. To avoid endless frustration due to **analog / dc, soldering and trains that stop moving**, understanding the dcc wiring is crucial. The best feeling in the world as a model railroader is enjoying a fully operation layout with all the bells and whistles.

To **master analog and dcc wiring** will take countless hours trying to figure out the exact process for each.

You must know each of the bullet points above to ensure your locomotives do not have **erratic stops, derailments or lack of speed on gradients**.

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#5 Scenery

You are about to learn how to build hills and trees for model railroads.

Materials List

- Woodland scenic large hill no 1320
- Backmann 2"-4 conifer trees no. 32155
- Noch summer trees no. 24200
- White glue
- Skewer or awl
- Woodland Scenics Clump-Foliage no.FC683
- Testors Micro Sheer sprue cutter

Step 1 - Instructions on installing a model train hill

Flip the Woodland scenic large hill over and place a nice bead of caulk all the way around, don't want to get too close to the edge because we don't want to get oozing too close to our scenery.

Use a product like DAP Dynoflex 230 sealant, which can be found at most home centers and hardware stores.

Scenic Large Hill



Alternative hills: If you don't want to use a pre-built hill, make your own hill. One way to make hills is by using this pink or blue foam, which is a construction insulation material. You can stack it up in various ways, or it can be carved with a hot knife, using a hot wire tool to carve the foam. When your ready you can cover it with a sculpture mold plaster or plaster cloth and then paint on your dirt color by using fine sand or dirt sprinkled on the hill.

Woodland scenic large hill:

Line up the hill and press it into place. Press it down correctly the first time, you only get one shot at this because the caulking will spread all over the ground if you re-lift it. If the hill does not seem to stick, try putting a book down over it to help it seal.

Place the Scene Hill Down



Instructions on installing a model train trees

Step 2

Next step is to start installing trees on the railroad you can basically plant any tree you want such as conifer and pine trees.

Conifer Trees



Model trees come in an assortment of sizes, when I put trees together I usually like to clump them in an assortment of shapes.

Plant an assortment trees, if your layout is a foam base, then drip the end of your trees in glue and place the tree in ground.

Setting our track on a piece of wood such as bench work provides a nice surface to do the drilling and ensures your holes are being drilled on a stable area. This will help the trees get securely placed after being dipped into glue and stuck into the holes.

Dip the Model Tree in Elmer Glue



Useful Advice:

- trees always look good in sets of odd numbers such as 3 or 5
- drip tip of trees with elmer glue before adding it into the drilled hole

- use clump foliage to hide areas that don't glue properly and seem unbalanced

This was a sure and quick way to quickly and easily add hills and trees to your model train layout but there's still 10 other things you must know to perfect your scenery and make the layout look as realistic as possible.

Top 10 Scenery Must Know How's

- Build telegraph lines, use "Easy-Line" - it comes in black, rust and a greenish oxidized copper hue
- Construct inexpensive grassy hills using crumpled newspapers shaped into a hill, add construction paper over it then tape it to your layout
- Use Kitty Litter as ballast or build gravel roads and rocky shores
- Use white out (correction pen) to make cool graffiti scenes for urban scenes
- Use various grades of sand from coarse to very fine and add it for track ballast. Remember to wash the sand before you use it
- Add ground cover with saw dust. Dye the saw dust different colors to make it very unique
- Make stumps by cutting the middle of the grape vines bump with a pruning shear
- Construct model railroad trees from a cheap plastic xmas tree
- Make streams with tin-foil by wadding it up and cut into desired form. This way you still get the rippling effect with the water

Next, learn detailed step by step directions on the follo



- Building Roads
- Pine Trees
- Bushes
- Business Signs
- Downspouts and Piping
- Rock Ledges

- Ground Cover
- Urban Scene
- Wire Fence
- Snow

The most important part to **creating realistic scenery** that transforms your model railroad is by first **planning scenery** ahead of time. To avoid endless frustration due to **"forcing" perspective issues, lifestyle scenes and lighting**, understanding the order of adding scenery is crucial. The best feeling in the world as a model railroader is enjoying a fully operation layout with all the bells, whistles and scenery.

To **master scenery** will take countless hours trying to figure out the exact process for each.

You must know each of the bullet points above to ensure your model railroad does not **look boring, unrealistic or lack unique scenery moments**.

Fortunately, you don't have to **spend hours and money with trial and error**, here's all everything you need to know packaged into one resource.

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- ❖ The 4 different track options explained and compared to allow you to make an informed decision on what you should be using
- ❖ The best way to create grassed meadows and fields and fire scenes!
- ❖ What repairs you should do yourself and when you should use an experienced repairer
- ❖ The secrets to creating realism and an aged look... how to create rust, mud and tire marks on your rolling stock
- ❖ Handling common track features – turnouts, reversing loops
- ❖ How do you convert your analog layout to a DCC system and should you even consider DCC?
- ❖ How to avoid those frustrating electrical shorts on your turnouts?



Here's what to do next:

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In all of my years, I have found one resource that I've always recommended to the model train beginners I coach on a regular basis. It is the best beginner's book I have ever come across.

In this book you will learn how to:

- Repair model trains so you don't have to waste money and time at a hobby shop
- Maintain model trains to look as stunning as when you first acquired them

- **Wire the perfect current flow so all of your trains run smoothly at different speed. This is one of the secrets for creating the most realistic model train layout possible**
- Convert DC to DCC and have intricate layouts with numerous trains on it, following their daily routes at varying speeds with no power issues
- **Create terrain and buildings from scratch , this will help you to build the layout of your dreams and save you tons of money on buildings, which are some of the most expensive accessories of a model railroad**
- Avoid common mistakes that every beginner makes that costs time, money and lots of frustration
- Find cheap model train stuff, so you can free up your budget to spend on additional details for your model railroad
- **Build model train layout plans that will have your railroad looking display ready very quickly**
- And a ton of other valuable information that would take 10 to 15 different books, sitting on forums threads filtering the amateur hour content from the real deal content from experts. Get all of the information you need to build a model train layout all in one place

I can honestly say that this information guide is the best investment for model train beginners and past railroaders.

The main benefit is the the fact that an expert has put everything you ever need to know about building your first model train layout into one place and also provides a "members only" online library of video tips, tricks and secrets.

It may set you back a few bucks but the information is so valuable that it comes with a **60 Day Money Back Guarantee**. This guarantee allows you to get a complete refund if you don't like it. No risk on your end, sounds like a no brainer!

[View Model Train Book for Beginners](#) - what do you have to lose?



Sincerely,
James "Jim" Reynolds
Model Train Expert

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