

Changing a Light Fixture

Level of Difficulty – 3

Replacing an outdated light fixture with a new, contemporary fixture is an easy job to do and will give your room an instant facelift. For this project, we assume that you are replacing a light fixture and will make use of the ceiling or wall box that the old fixture was mounted to. Note that if you are installing a ceiling fan, or a heavy chandelier you must verify that the ceiling or wall box can support the weight of the new fixture.

Any time you change a light, an outlet or a switch, carefully note which wires from the ceiling/wall box are attached to what on the part you're removing, then reverse the order as you install the new piece.

The following instructions apply to most wall and ceiling fixtures.

1. Turn off the power to the old light.
 - a. If the old light still works and has a working lightbulb, turn it on, then move to your electrical panel and turn off the circuit breaker that controls the light. If you turned off the correct breaker, your old light will be off. Verify that the circuit is off by toggling the switch to the old light on and off.
 - b. If the old light does not work, you will have to verify that the correct circuit is off by testing the wiring as you take down the light. Use a circuit tester to verify that the hot wire (black) is not supplying power.
2. Remove the old light fixture
 - a. Depending on the fixture type, remove any globes and lightbulbs.
 - b. There are a number of ways that a light fixture is mounted to the ceiling or wall box, so remove mounting screws, decorative caps, lock nuts, etc. so that the old fixture is released from the ceiling or wall box.
 - c. Most likely the only thing supporting the light fixture is the wiring itself. So, while you support the weight of the fixture, remove the wire nuts by twisting them counter-clockwise. The light fixture should be loose and can be set it to the side.
 - d. Remove any mounting bracket that is attached to the ceiling/wall box.
3. Install the new light
 - a. New light fixtures typically come with any bracket and screws that are required for mounting the light to the ceiling or wall box. Mount the bracket to the electrical box.
 - b. Take a moment to plan your installation. If you are mounting a heavy light fixture overhead, supporting the weight of the light can be difficult while connecting the wiring. If you need help supporting the weight, consider zip-tying it to the ceiling box, or try to get help with this part.
 - c. Lift your light fixture near the ceiling/wall box and attach the ground wire (bare copper) to a green screw on the mounting bracket, or by twisting it with the ground from the box and screwing on a wire nut.
 - d. There should be about ½" of insulation stripped from the black and white wires in your new light fixture. Match the white wire on the fixture to the white wire in the ceiling/wall box and twist together clockwise, until the wire nut is firmly attached to both wires. Repeat the procedure for the black pair of wires. Tuck all wires and wire nuts into the ceiling/wall box.
 - e. Now mount the light to the ceiling or wall box, following the instructions provided with your new light.
 - f. Install the appropriate light bulbs. Do not exceed the maximum wattage as explained in the instructions provided with the light.
 - g. Turn the power on at the circuit breaker and enjoy your handy work!