Dado, chair, picture and plate *rails*

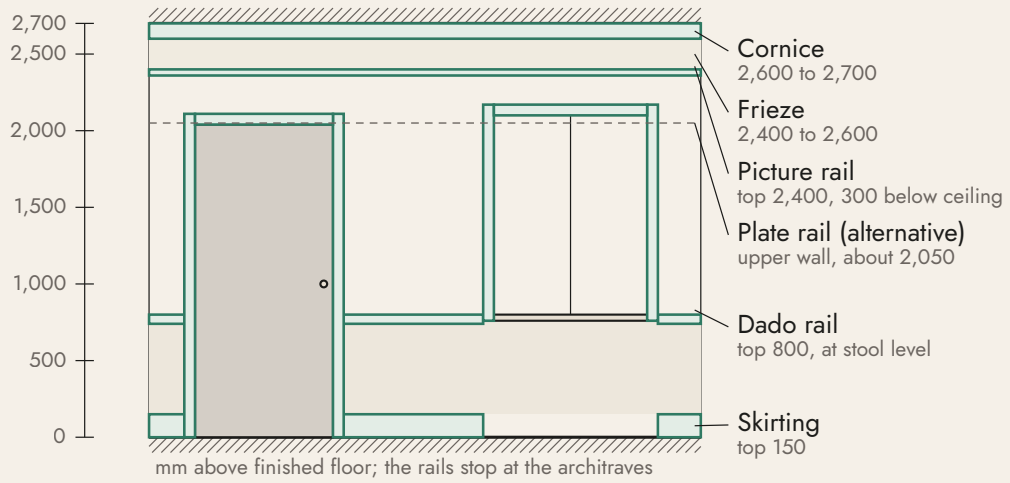
No standard sets the height of a dado, chair, picture or plate rail. This sheet sets the rules in circulation side by side with their sources, draws a 2,700 mm wall to scale, and shows how to fix a height by drawing.

AT A GLANCE

Rail	What it is	Where it goes, according to the sources we read
Dado rail, chair rail	A moulding part way up the wall that tops the dado, the lower wall. One member, two names; "chair rail" is called misleading because protection is not its main purpose.	No rule: 660 to 813 mm (Katz), about 915 mm (36 in.), about a third of the wall height, or level with the window stool.
Picture rail	A moulding fixed high on the wall from which framed pictures are hung.	No rule: Victorian rails are said to sit about 300 mm below the ceiling (no source cited).
Plate rail	A rail or narrow shelf fixed along a wall to hold plates, especially for ornament or display.	No height found. Katz mentions panelling of 4 to 6 ft (1,219 to 1,829 mm) capped by one.
Frieze, cornice	The cornice is the moulding at the head of the wall; the frieze is the band between it and the picture rail.	No height found.

Millimetres above finished floor level. Inches converted at 25.4 mm. Every height is a convention or a report, not a standard; where a source is weak the cell says so.

A 2,700 MM WALL WITH ITS RAILS, TO SCALE



Heights are examples, not rules (1 px = 10 mm in the drawing).

FIRE CLASSIFICATION AND HANDRAILS IN ENGLAND

In England, Approved Document B names picture rails, but not dado rails, plate rails or cornices, among the narrow members that do not count as a wall lining (Volume 1 paragraph 4.3, Volume 2 paragraph 6.3; ceilings 4.6, 6.6; 2019 edition with amendments to 2026). Whether a dado rail counts is for the fire engineer or building control, and panelling below it is a lining. A rail used as a stair handrail falls under Approved Document K (2013, para 1.34).

THE HEIGHT RULES SIDE BY SIDE

Rule	Top of rail, mm
One fifth of wall height (Katz, classical fraction)	2.4 / 2.7 / 3.0 m: 480 / 540 / 600
One third of wall height (Katz; a trade blog)	800 / 900 / 1,000
26 to 32 inches (Katz, 2017)	660 to 813
Swan, 10 ft room (via Katz); more per foot above	about 737
36 inches (Wikipedia citing Savage, 2002)	about 915
Modern guides (no primary source)	900 to 1,100
Level with the window stool (Katz)	the sill height
Stair handrail (Approved Document K 1.34)	900 to 1,000

SPECIFICATION WORDING

DADO RAIL

Ref [R-01]: dado rail, profile as detail [D-21] at 1:1, [60] mm high, [28] mm projection. Top of rail [800] mm above finished floor level, [level with the top of the window stool]. Material [ ]. Finish [ ]. Stops against the architrave at doors and windows; mitred at internal and external corners; scribed to the wall. Drawn heights govern: no proportion rule is to be applied by the workshop in place of a drawn height.

PICTURE RAIL

Ref [R-02]: picture rail, profile as detail [D-22] at 1:1, [40] mm high. Top of rail [2,400] mm above finished floor level, [300] mm below the ceiling. Material [ ]. Finish [ ]. Fixed to [blocking / grounds] at not more than [ ] mm centres.

PLATE RAIL

Ref [R-03]: plate rail, profile as detail [D-23] at 1:1, [with / without] a groove for display. Top of rail [2,050] mm above finished floor level. Fixed to solid blocking in the wall. Maximum load per metre run [ ] to be confirmed in writing by the maker before the rail is ordered.

TERMS USED

Dado rail

A horizontal moulding part way up a wall that tops the lower wall, the dado.

Picture rail

A moulding fixed high on the wall from which framed pictures are hung.

Chair rail

Another name for the dado rail, from the idea that it protects the wall from chair backs. Wikipedia calls the name misleading, since the rail is mainly decorative.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- Gary Katz, Correct Height for Chair Rail and Wainscot, Journal of Light Construction, 31 July 2017: 26 to 32 in., pedestal fractions and Swan's rule as reported there. Read 5 Nov 2026; Swan not read.
- Approved Document B Vols 1 and 2 (England), 2019 edition with amendments to 2026; Approved Document K, 2013 edition (England): B paras 4.3, 4.6, 6.3, 6.6; K para 1.34a. Read 5 Nov 2026.
- Designing Buildings wiki; The Victorian Society; Wikipedia, Dado rail: period practice; none cites a primary source for heights.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/dado-chair-picture-and-plate-rails. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.