Tolerances to write into a specification

What is made, what is built and what lies between, and how to write a number for each.

Compliance guidance. Figures are quoted only where a document named here gives them, with its edition: LABC Warranty Technical Manual Version 11, Section 20 (December 2022), read on 5 November 2026 and since replaced by Version 13. British Standards are named from BSI Knowledge listings and were not read. Guidance, not a specification or legal advice: your contract, your engineer and your workshop set the tolerances.

AT A GLANCE

What is limited	Who controls it	What to write	Number from, and the sheet
Made: sizes, squareness, flatness, height	Workshop	± mm by size band, at a stated humidity; the method drawn	Agree with the workshop; no UK furniture standard we read gives figures. Furniture tolerances
Made: welded or fabricated metal	Fabricator	A named standard class and edition; a drawing figure governs	BS EN ISO 13920:2023 (welded); BS EN 22768-1:1993 (machined, sheet-formed). Values not read. Visible metalwork
Made: doors, stone, board, sheet	Supplier or workshop	The product standard and edition, allowed for in the build-up	Named, not read. Doors, stone, boards
Built: walls, floors, ceilings	Main contractor	The limits you assume, to one datum, then a survey	LABC Warranty, Version 11 (2022): walls flat ±3 mm on 2 m, 8 mm from plumb to 3 m; floors flat ±5 mm on 2 m, level 3 mm per metre to 6 m. Scribing
Between: scribe and filler	Designer, by detail	A margin in mm at each end, from the survey	Arithmetic from the survey, not a standard
Between: shadow, door and drawer gaps	Workshop and installer	Width, evenness, method, judged on a mock-up	No standard we read gives one. Shadow gaps
Moves: timber, veneer, upholstery, floors	No one: design for it	The conditions the numbers apply at	Timber movement

Figures appear only where a document read for this sheet gives them; the rest is 'agree with the workshop'. Warranty acceptance levels are not design tolerances, and LABC Warranty now lists Version 13 (quotes from 1 January 2026), not read in full.

A TOLERANCE SCHEDULE: M MADE, B BUILT, G GAP (INVENTED VALUES)

Ref	What	Datum and method	Tolerance	Checked by, when	Number from	If outside
M1	Table height	From finished floor, each leg; steel tape	± [3] mm	Workshop, before dispatch	Shop drawing	Rework
M2	Top flatness	[1,000] mm straightedge and feeler gauge	[2] mm gap, max	Workshop, before dispatch	Shop drawing	Rework
B1	Wall flatness	[2] m straightedge, equal offsets	assumed ± [3] mm	Contractor, before survey sign-off	Stated assumption	Notify before fabrication
B2	Wall plumb	Level or laser, full height	assumed [8] mm in [3] m	Contractor, before survey sign-off	Stated assumption	Notify before fabrication
G1	Scribe margin	Worked from survey, each end of the run	[25] mm each end	Installer, at fitting	Survey [ref]	Revise margin or vary

Ref	What	Datum and method	Tolerance	Checked by, when	Number from	If outside
G2	Door to drawer gap	Gap gauge at corners and middle	[3] mm, even ± [1]	Designer, on the mock-up	Approved mock-up	Concession or rework

SPECIFICATION WORDING

SCHEDULE AND ORDER OF PRECEDENCE

A tolerance schedule, ref [ ], forms part of this specification. Each line gives a datum, a method of measurement, the conditions, the party who checks it and when, and the basis of the figure. Where figures differ the order is: (1) a tolerance on the approved shop drawing; (2) the tolerance schedule; (3) the class of [standard and edition] named on the drawing; (4) the workshop's declared tolerance for the process, ref [ ]. Each shop drawing dimension carries a tolerance or refers to the class in (3). 'Normal' tolerances are not accepted.

ASSUMED SITE CONDITIONS AND NOTIFICATION

The joinery is designed on the assumption that walls, floors, ceilings and openings are within [3] mm of flat on a 2 m straightedge and [8] mm of plumb in [3] m (basis: [state the source and edition]). [The main contractor] confirms this by survey [ref] before shop drawings are fixed. Where the measured conditions exceed these limits, [the contractor] notifies [designer] in writing before fabrication begins, and the parties agree [correction by the contractor / a revised scribe allowance / a variation] before production.

MEASUREMENT AND VIEWING

Tolerances are measured by [party] with [instrument], at [ ] degrees C and [ ] % relative humidity where it matters, at the hold points in [inspection and test plan ref], and recorded on [form ref] with the date and name. Appearance (joints, gaps, finish, match) is judged [from [ ] m, in natural daylight / in the lighting of the finished space] against approved sample [ref] or mock-up [ref].

WORK OUTSIDE TOLERANCE

Where finished work is outside a tolerance, [the workshop / the installer] notifies [designer] in writing within [ ] working days, with the reading. [Designer] decides: rework, replace or accept. An acceptance is a written concession recorded against the schedule line and the item; it does not change the tolerance. Built conditions outside the assumed limits are corrected by [the main contractor].

TERMS USED

Tolerance
The variation either side of a stated size that is agreed to be acceptable. Write it with a datum and a method of measuring.

Scribe
An oversized strip or edge cut on site to follow an uneven wall, floor or ceiling, so that no gap shows. Draw the margin.

Critical dimension
A dimension on which a fit, a limit or a joint depends. It carries its own tolerance on the drawing and is measured and recorded.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- LABC Warranty Technical Manual Version 11, Section 20 Tolerances (pp. 448 to 456; December 2022): 20.1.3, 20.1.5 to 20.1.7 read 5 Nov 2026. Version 13 (quotes from 1 Jan 2026): change list read, Section 20 not.
- BS 5606:2022; BS 8000-0:2014+A1:2024; BS 8000-5:1990; BS 1186-2:1988: BSI listings: all Current (BS 1186-2 under review). Not read.
- BS EN ISO 13920:2023; BS EN 22768-1:1993: BSI listings: Current (22768-1 under review). General tolerance classes; scope text only.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/tolerances-to-write-into-a-specification. 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.