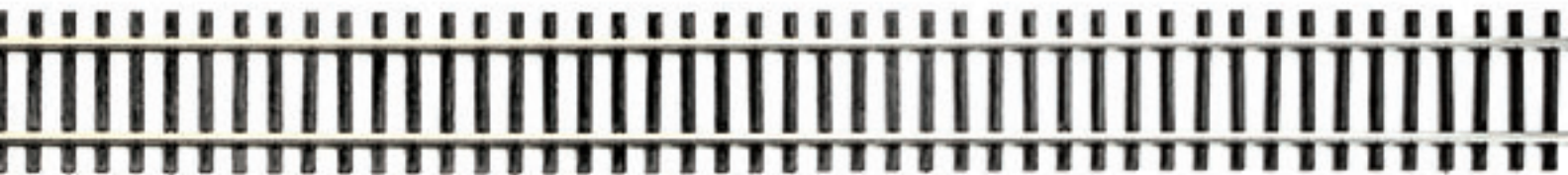
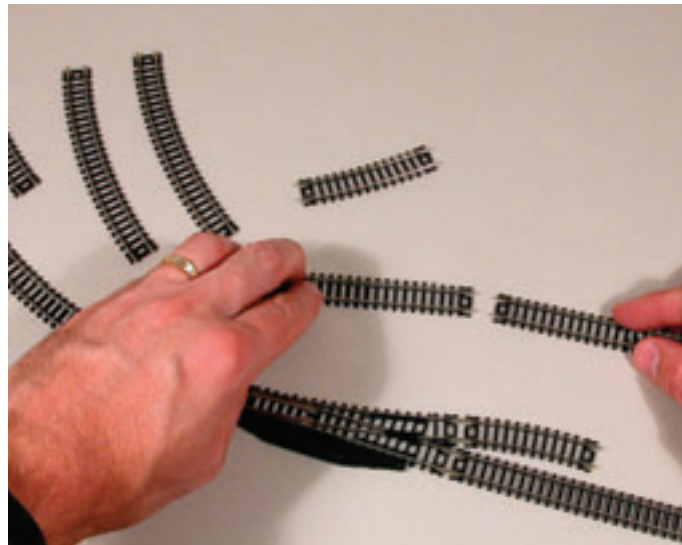


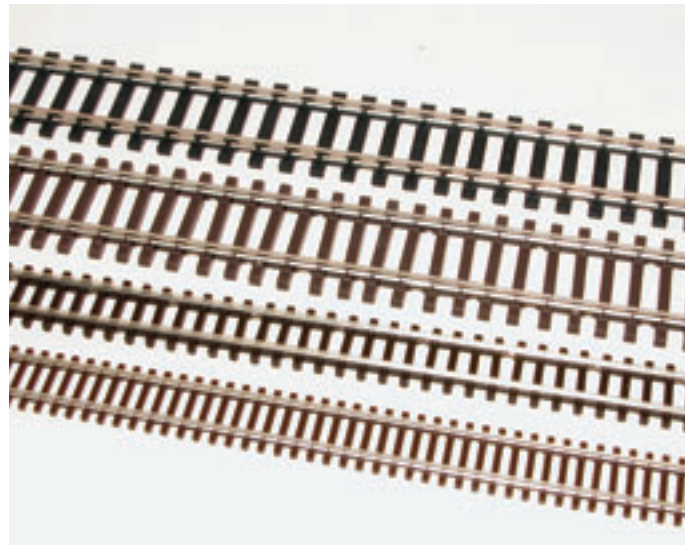
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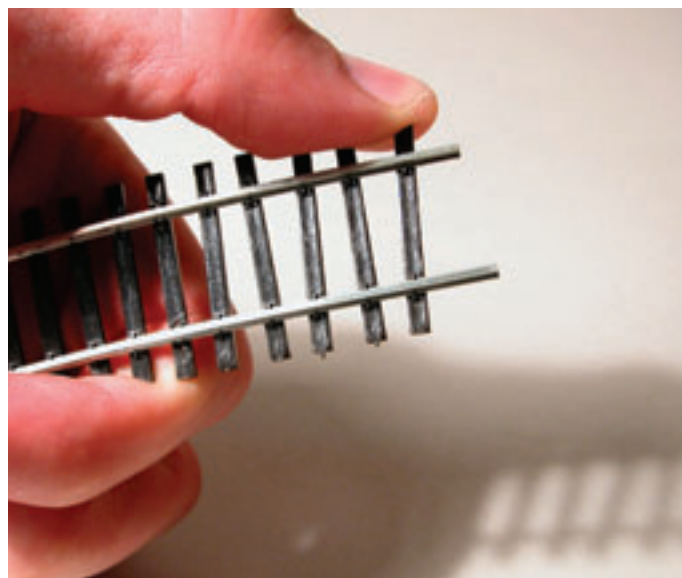




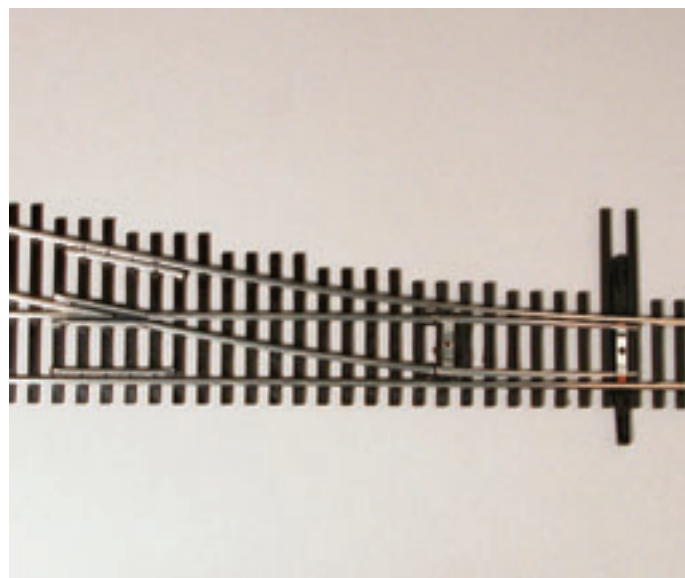
12 Sectional track makes it easy to experiment with track configurations.



13 Many brands and types of flextrack are available, including (bottom to top) N scale Atlas code 55, N scale Peco code 55, HO scale Atlas code 83, and HO scale Atlas code 100.



14 Bending flextrack makes one rail longer than the other, meaning the rail must be cut to fit in place.



15 The turnout (or switch) lets one track branch into two, opening up an infinite variety of potential track configurations.

The main disadvantage of flextrack is that it is more difficult to lay than sectional track. Curving the track means that one rail becomes longer than the other does—it therefore has to be cut to fit. See fig. 14.

Although cutting and fitting track scares off many modelers, the advantages of flextrack far outweigh the hassles. With a bit of practice, you'll find that laying flextrack is not difficult. Chapter 4 guides you through the process step by step.

Turnouts and crossings

The track switch (usually called a "turnout" in modeling, to differentiate it

from an electrical switch) is probably the most valued piece of track in modeling. See fig. 15. Turnouts allow us to design layouts with multiple routes, passing sidings, industrial spurs, and yards.

An array of turnouts is available, including curved ones and wyes of many lengths. Chapter 5 explains these types in depth, and provides tips for trouble-free operation.

Another important piece of specialty track is the crossing, shown in fig. 16. These allow tracks to cross each other on the same level (at grade).

Crossings are measured by the angle of the intersection. Crossings of 90

degrees, 60 degrees, 45 degrees, and 30 degrees are available in most scales, and modelers in HO and N scale have many additional choices.

Combination track/roadbed

The past few years have seen growth in all-in-one track that combines the track with molded plastic roadbed that has a rough texture to simulate ballast. See fig. 17. Chapter 3 lists and shows the various brands available. Each manufacturer uses a different means of connecting the track and roadbed, so all-in-one track from various manufacturers isn't interchangeable.

TRACK PLANNING BASICS

If you're new to the hobby it's a good idea to start with a published track plan. Magazines, such as *Model Railroader*, publish plans monthly, and there are also many books on track planning that discuss ideas beyond the scope of this book.

Here are a few thoughts to keep in mind as you begin planning and laying track:

- **Stick to a minimum radius.** Many modelers feel tempted to squeeze more track onto a layout by tightening curves. Don't succumb to this temptation! You'll find that in HO scale, 18"-radius curves and no. 4 turnouts are good for four-axle diesels and 40- and 50-foot freight cars. If you want to run six-axle locomotives and longer freight or passenger cars, you'll need at least 22"-radius curves (preferably broader) for equipment to operate well and look good.

- **Follow minimum track spacing.** Track spacing on parallel prototype tracks is generally about 14 feet. This will work on tangent (straight) sections of model track, but you'll need wider spacing on curves, especially if you run passenger cars or other long equipment.

Also, as the photo at upper right illustrates, wider spacing is often preferable for yards or other areas with more than three parallel tracks to allow reaching in to rerail cars or fix other problems. You can find guidelines for track spacing and other track specifications on the National Model Railroad Association's (NMRA) website (www.nmra.org).

- **Avoid S curves.** If possible, always avoid back-to-back curves (see photo at right). You'll find that long equipment (any car longer than a scale 50 feet) can cause problems running through S curves of 22" radius or less in HO and 11" radius or less in N scale. Add a straight section between the curves to help avoid problems.



A You should consider the accessibility of inner cars when planning yards and other areas that have more than two parallel tracks.



B Long cars won't operate well on S-curves. A section of straight track added between the curves will help smooth operations.