
Tutorial - Mounting Photo Prints

We all know that good “presentation” has a strong effect on the perceived quality of a photograph. Although matting and framing is a great presentation approach for special prints that will hang in a home or gallery, simply mounting the print on a rigid mounting board is more appropriate for informal viewing and sharing. This tutorial describes a mounting technique that has been consistently effective for me, with prints ranging in size from 4 by 6 to 12 by 18.

1. Summary

This is a summary of the procedure, with details of the mounting process and specific information on tools and materials in following sections.

- Cut a mounting board to finished size
 - I use a 3/16 inch thick black foam core mounting board because it is rigid enough to stand the photos on an easel, it usually doesn't warp, and black almost always shows off my landscape prints well.
 - Rather than cutting a custom mounting board for each photo, I use two standard sizes. For prints in the 8 by 10 size range, a board cut to 11.5 by 14.5 provides margins of about 2 inches, depending on the aspect ratio of the print and the amount of white border you prefer around the print. For prints in the 12 by 18 size range, a board cut to 17 by 23 provides margins of about 2.5 inches. This standardization simplifies preparation of mounting boards and also allows more convenient storage of the mounted prints. If you require identical margins of a particular size on all sides, you can always cut a custom mount board for each print.
 - I buy foam core in large sheets and have the supplier do the cutting on their large vertical cutting stand. With this approach, the sizes are more uniform and the cuts are consistently cleaner than I can do with an Exacto knife or Utility cutting blade and steel straight edge on my workbench. Furthermore, cutting boards is a cumbersome and time consuming task that I prefer to avoid. One large sheet will yield 12 of the small mounting boards or 5 of the large size mounting boards.
- Trim the print to finished size
 - I trim my prints with a cutting mat and a rotary blade that were intended for working with fabrics. This approach provides a smooth, clutter free surface that can be placed on any table top or counter top without worrying about “cutting through”. This makes trimming easy and I get consistent results. This equipment is less expensive, easier to store, and easier to use for large prints than the rail and meat cleaver style of paper cutters.
- Apply adhesive to the print
 - I use a dry transfer adhesive technique that is simple and inexpensive, requires no precision cutting, and doesn't involve heating, presses, or glue spraying. I consistently get smooth mounts with no bubbles or ripples, and have had no problems with peeling or corner lifting.
- Press the print onto the mounting board.
 - I use a small piece of wood with a smooth edge as a “burnishing tool”. A rubber print roller will do just as well.
- Print and stick a label on the back of mounting board

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- I attach a printed label because it adds a nice touch to a mounted print and because small label printers with many kinds of adhesive label stock are now readily available

2. Detailed Mounting Procedure

- Select a properly-sized, clean mounting board and put it in a position convenient for laying on the sticky print without further handling.
- Place a clean sheet of blue “non-stick” paper on the table to protect the print - wipe away loose glue particles on the blue paper.
- Place the trimmed print face down on the blue paper
- Cut a piece of adhesive paper slightly large than the print - accuracy is not important - better too large than too small.
- Peel off the “overlay” sheet to expose the adhesive
- Place the adhesive sheet on top of the print with adhesive side against the back of the print.
- Roll or burnish the adhesive sheet against the back of the print to transfer the glue. I use a small piece of wood with a smooth edge to smoothly press the adhesive sheet uniformly across the entire back of the print.
- Peel the adhesive sheet from the print so the back of the print now has a uniform coating of glue.
- Carefully hold the sticky print and wipe off loose glue particles that sometimes accumulate on the edges of the print.
- Wipe loose glue particles from your fingers
- Carefully pick up the print by its edges, eyeball the proper position, and place it lightly on the mounting board with the glue side down - you are now committed - let well enough alone - trying to move the print is usually worse than not - the alignment police are very lax.
- Wipe away loose glue particles
- Place a clean sheet of blue non-stick paper (not the same one you just used while applying adhesive to the print) on top of the print to protect it while pressing.
- Roll or burnish the print against the mounting board. I use a small piece of wood with a smooth edge to smoothly press the entire print against the mounting board. A print roller will do just as well.
- Wipe away loose glue particles
- Print an adhesive backed label and press it against the back of the mounted print.
- Take mounted print to DIG or Shutterbug meeting.

2.1 Precautions

- The biggest problem with this technique is that very small particles of glue can easily drop off the adhesive sheet and end up on the print. Although this is a minor problem compared to using sprayed glue, the little glue particles are very difficult, to remove from the print without leaving smudges. You must therefore pay very close attention to cleaning the table top, your hands, the “non-stick” paper, and the mounting board before every step. I just wipe every surface with a paper towel before each step.
- You should also place the peeled off overlay sheet and the used adhesive sheet directly and immediately into a waste basket - don’t set them aside on the counter where you are working. Keep other prints away from the mounting area.

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- To make it easier to handle the adhesive sheet, the adhesive paper has one edge with a quarter inch area of no adhesive - be sure to cut the sheet large enough to accommodate that “no glue” area.
 - This technique is easy with 8 by 10 sized prints, but 12 by 18 prints require extra steps because one adhesive sheet is not large enough to cover the print. After placing a full sheet of adhesive paper to the print, I cut two strips of adhesive paper just wide enough to fully cover the back of the print. The large prints also require much greater care in positioning the print properly on the mount board and avoiding glue particles.
 - Note: the adhesive paper comes in a smaller size if you are doing 4 by 6 prints.
 - Don't try this in a hurry - take your time at every step. A two person operation is faster and creates fewer errors.

3. Tools and Materials

3.1 Mounting board

- Buy 40 inch by 60 inch sheets of 3/16 inch black foam core material
- For mounting 8 by 10 inch prints, cut the large sheet into 12 pieces at 11.5 inch by 14.5 inch
- For mounting 12 by 18 inch prints, cut the large sheet into 5 pieces at 17 inch by 23 inch
- Purchase the foam core at Arizona Art Supply (Indian School just west of Central) for approximately \$25 per large sheet, including their cutting charge.

3.2 Adhesive paper

- Buy packs of **StudioTac** Dry Transfer Archival Adhesive made by Bainbridge
- Make sure you get the “High Tack” version (with the red cover not the green cover)
- Each pack contains 20 sheets of adhesive covered paper with a protective “overlay” paper on each sheet. The pack also contains one sheet of “non-stick” blue paper.
- Each sheet is 11 ½ inch by 17 ½ inch
- Purchase at Arizona Art Supply for approximately \$30 per pack. That is the only place I have found this particular product.

3.3 Tools for Print Trimming

- Omni Grid Mat, 36 inch by 23 inch - Item 36WG
- Olfa Rotary Cutter, 45 mm
- Fiskars 24 inch by 6 inch plastic ruler
- Purchase at a fabric store such as Jo Ann's

3.4 Tool for Label printing

- Dymo Label Writer, model 330 (or current equivalent)
- Roll of white “Shipping Labels” - item 30573
- Purchase at Staples

4. Mounting Cost

- Mounting board cost: \$2 for small size, \$5 for large size
- Adhesive paper cost: \$0.75 for small size (one sheet will cover 2 prints) and \$2 for large size (it takes about 1.3 sheets for 1 print)
- Total mounting cost: \$2.75 for small size prints and \$7 for large size prints.