Preparing Prints for Competitions & Exhibitions

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This leaflet explains how to present your photographic prints for WPS competitions and the Annual Print Exhibition. The information also applies to inter-club competitions and exhibitions within the Southern Counties Photographic Federation (SCPF) and nationally.

The Need for Mounting Prints

It's all about protection and presentation.

Primarily a mount provides stiffening to allow a print to support itself when being displayed either on the print easel at competitions, hanging in an exhibition, or stored/transported in a print box with other prints. It protects the image from creasing and getting dog-eared at the edges, and in the case of recessed mounting, protects the surface of the print from rubbing against other prints when stacked or carried in bulk.

In terms of aesthetics, a mount around a print can greatly improve the presentation, adding contrast, impact and leading the eye into the picture.

There is no requirement to put prints in frames and behind glass - they would be too heavy, the glass would create reflections and there is the obvious danger of broken glass!

Methods of Mounting

There are two basic methods for mounting prints, the precise methods of which are explained in more detail further on:-

Surface Mounting: This is probably the simplest and easiest method, particularly when you are starting out. The print is simply stuck onto the front of your chosen mounting board. The print is afforded protection by stiffening, but be aware that the surface of the print is still liable to be scratched or rubbed when in contact with other prints.

Recessed Mounting A method requiring a little more skill and equipment, but worth the extra effort. The print is sandwiched between a backing board and a front mountboard which has an aperture (window) cut in it, usually with bevelled edges. As well as producing a very professional finish, the main benefit of recessed mounting is that the front surface of the print is better protected from being rubbed by other prints when stacked or carried.

Mount Size

A standard mount size of 50cm x 40cm has been set by the SCPF and prints submitted to any inter-club competitions and exhibitions must adhere to this. At WPS we have also adopted this size for our Annual Print Exhibition.

However, for our own WPS internal competitions we relax this slightly and allow mounts of up to 50cm x 40cm, thus allowing more modest sized mounts, which beginners often prefer particularly if their prints are quite small. If you do choose to use a smaller size, please be aware that your image would have to be remounted if it were accepted for an external competition or for entry into our Annual Print Exhibition. You may therefore decide, as many do, to standardise on the 50cm x 40cm size from the outset.

Most photographic print boxes are designed to accept the 50cm x 40cm size, eg Nomad Print Boxes.

Adhesive Tapes

Avoid using any type of tape which is not long lasting such as decorators' masking tape, parcel tape, cheap cellotape, etc. These all suffer from poor quality adhesives which deteriorate over time causing the adhesive to fail. The poor quality adhesive often results in sticky residues along the edge of the tape which is damaging to anything else coming into contact with it when it is laid down. Poor adhesive can also 'creep' and stain your print. Use a quality tape from a craft shop, such as those which claim to be 'acid-free' or of 'archival' quality. The more precious your print, the more attention you need to pay to the quality of adhesive you use. If a print is being mounted for short-term use, and longevity is therefore not an issue, you must still ensure your adhesive does not damage others' work.

Mounting Board

This can be coloured mountboard, foamcore board or in fact any suitably rigid cardboard that you have to hand. If you choose to flush mount your print, where none of the mounting board shows from the front, you can afford to be less choosy than when the mounting board is 'framing' your print. In this case, consider carefully the colour of your mount: either a complementary colour or a neutral (eg white, off-white, grey, black). Mountboard and foamcore board can be purchased in large sheets from craft shops and picture framers, or ready-cut to 50x40cm from me.

How to do it

1. Surface Mounting

With this method you are simply going to stick your photograph onto the front of your chosen mounting board. It is easier to start with a piece of mounting board that is larger than you actually want, to stick your print onto it and then to accurately trim the perimeter to achieve the finished size (either flush or with border showing). This way you do not have to be too accurate with your positioning of your photo as you can correct errors when trimming.

If, however, you start off with a mounting board of exactly the required finished size you will have to be pretty accurate when sticking down your photograph to avoid it being crooked! Careful measuring, light pencil guide marks (erased later of course!) and the use of a *repositionable* adhesive will help.

The sticking-down can be achieved with a number of adhesive methods. Spray adhesives give a uniform adhesion and are easy to use; some allow a small amount of repositioning after contact. Double-sided tape can be used, but is less satisfactory as it does not secure the entirety of the print and rippling of the print may occur. Ensure the tape is placed close to the perimeter of the print to avoid the edges lifting. When the print is in position lay a sheet of plain paper over it to protect the surface and press it down well to make sure it is stuck.

2. Recessed Mounting

Cutting the Aperture: Recessed mounting is a little more complicated and you will probably need to purchase, at minimum, a hand-held mount-cutter, which holds a blade at 45 degrees, to cut the bevelled edges, as well as a special metal ruler with a channel that guides the blade exactly along the line that you have marked. Practise a few times on some off-cuts of mountboard before embarking on the real thing as there is quite a knack to it!

When deciding on the size of the aperture don't choose very narrow borders; anything less than about 2" of mountboard all round can lead to a rather floppy mounted print and a less pleasing presentation.

Once you have decided on the aperture size you want, take a sheet of mountboard that has been accurately prepared with all sides at true right angles. Mark out the lines on the reverse side of the mountboard. Position your mount cutter at the start of the cut (usually indicated with a guide mark on the mountcutter) and press firmly and make the cut in *one move*. Do not stop half-way, and do not go over the cut a second time or you will end up with a messy edge. When all four cuts have been made, the centre piece of your mountboard should fall out easily. If it doesn't, take a craft knife blade and carefully insert it into the corner which is sticking and gently release the join. Do not pull it or it will tear and spoil your neatly cut corner. Always use a fresh blade in your cutter for best results.

An alternative to cutting apertures yourself is to purchase ready-made recessed mounts. These can be bought from craft shops and come in a (limited) range of colours and only standard sizes. The drawback is that your photograph has to conform to the standard size of the aperture, rather than to the unique dimensions of your image so you will have to make your prints fit the aperture rather than the size that best suits the image, not ideal for photographers who are encouraged to crop their images! A better alternative, if you really can't manage to cut your own mounts, is to get someone else to do it for you! . . .or ask me!

Assembly: The best way to mount your print is to fix it to a backing board which has been hinged to the front mountboard, ensuring that the print is positioned so that it lines up perfectly with the aperture. Start by hingeing the front mountboard to the backboard, usually along the longest edge, with a continuous strip of tape. With the two sheets open like a book, place the print loosely onto the backing board. Close the 'book' and, viewing the print through the aperture, adjust the positioning of the print until you are happy. Put a paperweight on it to hold it in position whilst you lift the top mountboard up again and then attend to fixing it. Place a couple of short tabs of tape at two points along the top edge of the print, or a 'T-hinge' if you know how, leaving the other edges of the print free to move, allowing for expansion and contraction of the paper in differing temperatures and humidity levels. This avoids any rippling. Next, using double sided tape, adhere the top mount board to the bottom backing board, along the outside edges and also closer in towards the print itself if you feel it is necessary, to seal it.

Do not economise by avoiding the addition of a backing board and simply taping your image directly to the reverse of the front mountboard. The photograph will be unsupported and vulnerable to being damaged. If taped *all around* the edges of the print, as would be necessary to hold it in place, this will not allow the print to move in relation to the mount, often resulting in unsightly ripples appearing in the photograph over time, spoiling its presentation. More importantly, any tape used on the back of a mounted print can have sticky residues along its edges which very often causes it to stick to any other print coming into direct contact with it, eg when placed in a pile of prints at a competition night. You would not want to be responsible for damaging the surface of someone else's valuable print!

Print Labelling

Once mounted, your print should be labelled on the back with:
• Your name   • The title of the print   • For WPS League Comps, the class in which you are entering, eg 'Beginners'

IMPORTANT: Ensure that your labelling reads correctly when the print is held the right way up otherwise it may be placed upside-down on the easel and then judged in that orientation!

Do **not** put any information on the front of the print, or on the mount.

Good Luck ! If you need any further help, please do give me a call, Louise Brown   Rev Oct 17