

Printing, Matting, and Framing Your Photos

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Over the past few years I've tried several different options for getting photos printed, matted and framed. I've even learned how to make the mats myself. These guidelines and suggestions are what work for me, and are based on my limited experience. I suggest you talk with other photographers to benefit from their experience as well. The Eastman Camera Club is a great place to do that!

Getting Your Photos Printed

There are many options for getting your digital photo printed.

1. Print it yourself on your home inkjet printer
 - a. High per print cost, as much as \$.50 for a 4x6 print.
 - b. If printer is not calibrated then your colors may be off.
 - c. Prints may fade if you use cheap ink.
 - d. Good for quick prints – instant gratification!
2. Have it printed locally
 - a. Take it to the shop or store and wait.
 - b. Send it over the internet and pick up in the store (less waiting).
 - c. Can have your prints in an hour or a day.
 - d. Not all stores will be able to print all sizes or print on paper you want.
 - e. Quality can vary, depending on the store and who's working that day.
 - f. If your monitor is not calibrated then your colors may be off.
 - g. Local options: Eastman, Ritz, Wal-Mart, CVS, etc.
Other than Eastman, you can walk and or upload your photos online and have them ready in about an hour. I've had good experience with Ritz.
3. Online photo printing services
 - a. Often the lowest per print costs.
 - b. You will pay shipping costs – batch up your prints to keep your costs low.
 - c. May take a week or more to get your prints.
 - d. You can let them adjust the print for color balance or leave it unadjusted.
 - e. If your monitor is not calibrated then your colors may be off.
 - f. Each one uses a different combination of printer, paper and ink. One may tend to be more red and another bluer. Some offer metallic paper and other specialized options.
 - g. Make sure they ship your prints flat. I used a service that rolled them up in a tube for shipping. They tended to have creases when I unrolled them.
 - h. Online options: MPIX, Adoramapix, Shutterfly, Snapfish, Ritz.
There are dozens of options for online photo printing services with varying prices, quality and service. I have had good service from MPIX and Adoramapix.

Matting your prints

1. Why mat your photos?
 - a. Insures photo will not touch glass when framed.
 - b. Helps set the photo off from surroundings.
 - c. Gives your photo a professional look.
2. Have it matted locally
 - a. Professionally done.
 - b. May take several days.
 - c. Can be expensive or very expensive.
 - d. Local options: Ben Franklin, Hobby Lobby, Michaels, Carriage House, Up Against The Wall, etc.
3. Buy standard sized mats
 - a. Stick to mats that match the standard frame sizes.
 - b. Good prices. You will pay shipping – batch up your order.
 - c. Good for photo contests.
 - d. Hobby Lobby sells some standard mats. Online sources: Redimat.com and FrameDestination.com. (Disclaimer – I've never used any of these online dealers and don't have any information on the quality of their work or value).
4. Buy custom mats
 - a. Any size, color or style you want.
 - b. More expensive than standard mats, but may be cheaper than local store.
 - c. Local options: Ben Franklin, Hobby Lobby, Michaels, Carriage House, Up Against The Wall, etc. Online sources: Redimat.com, MatShop.com, and many others. (Disclaimer – I've never used any of these online dealers and don't have any information on the quality of their work or value).

Do it Yourself Matting

Doing your own matting can be fun and the cheapest option for matting your photos. It can also be frustrating and expensive due to mistakes and waste. You have some upfront investments in materials and tools and a learning curve to get past. Below are some suggestions based on my experience.

1. Materials and tools

- a. You need a mat cutter.

I have a low end model I got off eBay. You can buy the latest version of this cutter for \$80 at <http://www.framing4yourself.com/>. They go up from there. See the Tips for Selecting The Right Mat Cutter handout

- b. If your mat cutter does not include a straight cutter or if your mat is too big for the cutter then you will need a metal ruler 40" or longer and a sharp hobby knife.

- c. Mat board and foam board come in 32" x 40" sheets and are readily available locally (Hobby Lobby, Michaels, etc.). You can also order in bulk from <http://www.framing4yourself.com/> or other online retailers. Need to order 12 sheets or more at a time to break even. You can often get a better deal by watching for the 1/2 off sales locally.

- d. You need a good book on matting and framing.

<http://www.framing4yourself.com/> has a list of books available. I learned with a copy of Mat, Mount and Frame It Yourself by M. David Logan.

- e. Repositionable spray adhesive. Important that it be repositionable and suitable for photographs (acid free).

- f. Double-sided adhesive transfer tape.

2. Steps for do it yourself or custom matting.

You may need to do steps a. through e. even if you're having someone else do the matting. They may ask you these questions.

- a. Determine mat size

i. Start with print size

ii. Determine good starting boarder size based on "united inches" (print width + height)

United Inches	Starting Boarders
9 – 12"	1 1/2"
12 – 24"	1 3/4"
24 – 32"	2"
32 – 36"	2 1/4"
36 – 44"	2 1/2"
44 – 50"	2 3/4"
50 – 54"	3"

Starting mat size = print size + 2 X starting border – 1/2"

Example: 8x10" print, + 2 X 1 3/4" border – 1/2" = 11x13" mat

If you are going to have it framed or use a standard size mat you should round up to a Standard U.S. Frame Sizes:

4"x5"	11"x14"
4"x6"	12"x16"
6"x8"	14"x18"
5"x7"	16"x20"
8"x10"	20"x24"
8"x12"	22"x28"
8-1/2"x11"	24"x30"
9"x12"	24"x36"
10"x13"	30"x40"

In the case of the 8x10" photo you may want to go with an 11x14" or 12x16" mat to fit a standard frame. You can always get a custom frame, if you want to pay the price.

A rule of thumb is to not have the side borders wider than the top and bottom. You may want to move up to a bigger mat/frame to avoid this situation or if you think a bigger mat will look better.

You may also want to consider a bottom weighted mat where the bottom mat boarder is thicker than the top. Some people like this style. You'll have to decide for yourself.

- b. Determine if you want a single, double mat or no mat at all which is called a float mat. Double matting is twice the cost and effort, but can make the difference in the final product.
- c. Select mat color or colors.
 - i. The mat colors should complement the photo and enhance the room décor.
 - ii. Select a color that brings out the dominant hue in the photo, which is not always to most prevalent hue. If the mat is too close to the most prevalent color it may be "too much" of that color.
 - iii. The mat color should also share the same temperature of the photo (cool = blue, violet & green, warm = red, orange & yellow).
 - iv. When double matting, a rule of thumb is to have the top mat white and the under mat be a color that compliments the photo (see my examples)
 - v. White is often a safe color and suitable for competitions.
 - vi. Rules of thumb are meant to be broken.

- d. If you are double matting your print you need to be concerned about the total thickness. You may need a thin (1/8") foam core or mat board for the back to fit in a frame.
- e. Calculate the window size for a single mat or sizes for double mats. Normally your mat will need to overlap your print by 1/8" - 1/4" on each side. With a matted float the window is larger than the print revealing the mat board between the print and the mat. Double mats typically reveal 1/4" of the under mat. A useful free tool called MatWorks is available for download online at <http://www.gt-photography.com/matworks.html>. I waste a lot less time and mat board now that I have this tool ☺
- f. Cut the mats, and foam core backing.
- g. Attach the photo to the foam core backing. I use repositionable spray adhesive. Spray the foam core and roll the print in to position avoiding bubbles and folds. Pull it up and try again as necessary.
- h. Attach the mats to the foam core using double sided adhesive transfer tape. Standard double sided Scotch tape available in many stores may not hold long term. 3M makes a removable adhesive transfer tape that is supposed to hold better.

Getting Your Photos Framed

A good quality frame that compliments the photo, mat and room décor can really add to the artwork. Framing is often the most expensive part of the total package, but it does not have to be.

Framing Options:

1. Buy a standard size frame, with glass and backing.
 - a. Matted photo must also be a standard size.
 - b. You can often get these frames cheap from a “big box store”, Hobby Lobby, etc.
 - c. Another option for frames is to frequent yard sales, estate sales, Goodwill and other places where people would be selling old framed pictures. Throw away the picture, clean up the frame and glass and you can have a beautiful frame for next to nothing.
2. Buy a standard size open back frame and assemble yourself.
 - a. You buy the frame and glass separate.
 - b. Options for glass: regular glass, non-glare glass, and acrylic (Plexiglas). Non-glare is more expensive but you may want it, depending on the lighting where you hang the picture. Acrylic is lightweight and better suited for frames bigger 24x36”. It does scratch easily and attracts dust.
 - c. You have to put the backing or use the foamcore as a backing.
3. Order standard or custom frames online.
 - a. There are a number of places online where you can order frames.
 - b. Standard sized frames will be cheaper.
 - c. They will also do custom frames. This can be cheaper than getting it done locally. (I’ve not ordered any frames online and have no experience).
 - d. You can order the glass and mats at the same time.
4. Have your picture framed locally
 - a. You can pick out the frame style to match the photo and room décor. Bring your matted or unmatted print with you to see how they look with the frames.
 - b. You can get this done at Ben Franklin, Hobby Lobby, Michaels, or any number of local frame shops.
 - c. It could take a couple days to a couple weeks.
 - d. Can be expensive. Watch the Hobby Lobby ads for specials on custom framing.
 - e. You can have the picture matted at the same time or just framed.