

A Guide to Preparing Your Photo For Exhibition

This is meant to be a quick guide containing fundamental information you may need once you decide to print your photo and hang it at Simple Pleasures, Orchard Creek Lodge, Buonarotti's, Umpqua Bank, Kilaga Springs Lodge or at any of the venues where Rhonda arranges an exhibition opportunity for the Club. Some of the "steps" are optional and may be much more labor intensive than you want to attempt but many are simple, common sense ways to display your photos. You probably have a stockpile of photos that you've taken. But let me ask you a question, have any of them seen the light of day?

Displaying your work to the public is the best way to improve your confidence as an photographer and artist. I'm under the strict opinion that art is meant to be consumed. Photography is art, therefore it doesn't do any good to keep it locked up on a hard drive.

First Step

You can create something completely new and tailor it to the "challenge" or theme of show you're participating in. Or you can pull work from your archive. Shooting something new has it's advantages, but also takes a lot more planning. If you're on a deadline, then it can be very difficult.

If you have a large body of work filed away, and you plan on pulling images from that to submit, then consider how they were made. Your new digital camera might make great 11x14 inch prints, but that 1.3 megapixel thing you were working with in college might not enlarge so nicely.

Printing

Obviously, if you plan to display one or many of your images, the first thing you need to do is have it printed. You have several options available, and while none are wrong, some are better than others. The simplest option, in terms of work for you, is to use a photo lab or print service. If you like more control, you can choose to print the images yourself on your own photo quality inkjet printer. Using the same brand of paper as your printer is usually the best option. Red River Paper is another good source for all types and sizes of photo paper. Even then, there are things to consider.

B&hphoto.com, itsupplies.com and atlex.com are great sources for purchasing high quality Inkjet photo printing paper from such manufacturers as Ilford, Hahnemuhle, Epson, Moab et.al. Red River Paper is also a good source for all types and sizes of photo paper that they manufacture. Even then, there are things to consider.

Printing your photos can be very expensive. There are times when printing at home isn't the best option. What if you want to print onto canvas? Or what if you own a printer that meets your day-to-day needs but can't hold large enough paper for your art and you only have a few prints to make? In those kinds of cases, you should outsource the job, and you have two basic options: go local such as Sierra Framing in Lincoln, or use an online company that will mail you your prints. Costco, Target, Walgreens, Bay Photo, Shutterfly, etc., are all viable options if you wish to have your photo(s) printed. They all offer a variety of "media" for your prints - photo paper, metal, glass, canvas, etc. They all have a return option. If you don't have a Photo quality printer, this is your best bet. I often use Costco and have had excellent results. The online Costco Photo Center makes it easy: you upload image(s) from your computer to the website and the website tells you if your image needs to be cropped or if you have poor resolution. Pretty simple. It's quick - your print, on Fuji Crystal archive paper is usually ready within two (2) hours. It's inexpensive: an 11" x 14" glossy print costs \$3.99. However, if you don't get the results you expected, Costco will reprint for free. Most sites allow you to upload your photos without going the store and you can pick them up or they will mail them to you. Be sure to allow the extra time in any case.

Labs offer some decided advantages over printing images yourself. When choosing a lab, you want to find one with a reputation for good quality control and customer service. I've found getting recommendations from other photographers to be incredibly helpful when looking for a lab.

Other things you'll want to consider are their products. Do they print using the method you want? Do they offer the sizes you want? Do they print on media other than photo paper, such as canvas, acrylic, or metal? What kinds of finishing options do they offer? Is the canvas gallery wrapped? Do they offer mounting or framing? Do you want or need those services? Answer those questions, knowing what you want or need, and that should give you a good answer as to whether the lab will fulfill your needs.

Your work should look at least as good as it does on your computer screen. Aaron Bros. has a buy one get one for one cent frame sale at least twice a year. Their high quality frames (as the Signature brand) includes glass and a very professional back board. This makes attaching the wire very easy.

Matting

Paper prints, to be properly displayed, need to be matted and framed. The people at Aaron Bros are extremely helpful. I usually take my print with me and if I'm unsure about the mat (happens a lot), I ask for advice. They can also help you with frame selection (I had *no* idea about frames when I first walked in). And of course, the "buy one, get one more for \$.01" sales are great.

Mount the photograph to an archival quality mat board in a light cream color. Center the photograph on the board and attach it with photo tape or photo corners.

You can find various qualities of mat board, using terms such as “Buffered pH Neutral” or “Acid-Free”. These are basically the same thing, meaning the acid has been removed from the paper to avoid harming the prints. Acid-free mats have a protective lifespan of about 7-12 years.

The next grade of mat board is known as “conservation grade acid-free” or sometimes “museum rag”, which is what you’d want to use for a serious art display in a gallery. In addition to removing the acid, another component harmful to paper, called lignin, is also removed from the mat board. Conservation mats that are acid and lignin free have a protective lifespan of 50 years or more. Conservation grade mats are more expensive than simple acid-free ones.

Which type of mat should you choose? It really depends on your purpose. If you’re planning to display the print as art in a gallery and possibly for sale, conservation grade mats are the best choice. This helps add value to the print by preserving it, and lets the buyer know you are serious about your work and their potential investment in it. If the use is something less important, such as a temporary display that won’t be for sale, you can certainly save some money and go with a simple acid-free mat. Aaron Brothers carries a large supply of matts.

Framing

One of the big mistakes I see new photographers and artists make when showing work in a gallery or exhibition is framing their work in overly ornate or colorful frames. When an art buyer purchases a new piece of art, if it is framed already, that frame becomes part of the consideration. By keeping the frame simple and understated, it allows the buyer to view the art neutrally without considering the frame. They won’t feel the frame has to be married to the image and can feel free to consider their own framing choices.

Try to pick a frame style that matches your venue. Coffee shops and businesses will appreciate this. Framing can easily be the most expensive part of your show. Really cheap 8x10 inch frames can cost \$5, but they look like they cost that much! Unless you're going with a non-traditional presentation, look to spend at least \$15 on a frame with a mat to hold an 8x10 inch photo. The price is proportionally higher the larger the frame. Aaron Brothers and Michaels often have sales on frames so it pays to “stock up” with two or three good frames when the sale comes along.

You should choose the appropriate frame size for the photograph, which is usually one size larger than the picture. For example, 11-by-14 inch fame should be used for 8-by-12 inch photograph. Your photos will show better if framed no smaller than 11x14. Make sure the color and texture of the frame compliments the photograph. Keep in mind that if you wish to sell your prints, the frames must compliment and “add” value to your

print. Using an old frame with scratches or smudges on it will only detract from your print. Even the back of the frame must be in great condition. Scratches and other blemishes detract from the image of a professional job you wish to present. No Duck tape or Saw Tooth hanger both of which are tacky to use in a professional environment.

Make sure all your artworks are suitable for hanging or display with wire and D-rings attached. Attach a hanging wire across the back about 1/3 (too close to top will cause the wire to show, as it stretches) of the way from the top edge of the picture - taught — not too loose, not too tight.

1. The “D” rings should be mounted approximately 1/3 the distance from the top of the frame. (These can be purchased at any hardware or framing store - Arron Bros, Michaels, etc.)
2. The wire should have approximately 2 ½ inches wrapped around the “D” rings, half of the wire should be twisted around itself towards the center, then the rest twisted back down.
3. When the wire is taut in the center there should be approximately 1 ½ inches from the top of the frame.

It is also a good idea to apply cardboard corners to protect the frame during transport. See the attached sheet on framing for more detailed instructions.

The Final Presentation

Photos should be “matted” to present a nice look unless you are printing on metal, glass or canvas wrap.. Although more expensive to print on metal and glass, you may offset that extra cost as you won’t need a frame or mat for your print.

As with any artwork, you should always, without fail, sign your images. Signing your images signifies that you created the image, personally took responsibility for it from capture to print, and lets whoever is hanging the print on their wall know who created it. It adds value for art collectors.

There is always some debate, it seems, but I will go on the record as saying that it is always the print that should be signed, and never the mat. The mat can be removed, and thus, so can your signature. Choose either the bottom left or bottom right corner and sign your prints with a neat, clear signature that identifies the image as your own.

Again, you’ll want to use archival ink that won’t harm the print, in a color that will stand out. For darker prints, silver or gold metallic works nicely, while for lighter colored prints, a black ink will suffice. I prefer the Deco Color Liquid Fine Paint Markers to sign my prints, canvases, metal prints, and acrylics. There are several thicknesses available so you may want to experiment to find what works best for you.

Note from Brad Senn - For me I now sign the print but outside the printed area. I oversize the print paper so it matches the frame size giving me ample room to sign. True, you cannot see my signing, but I personally do not like to sign over the printed area. I then sign the mat. This is my personal preference only and not necessarily the industry standard. He also encourages you to sign your work in pencil as it is the standard method which insures originality.....very difficult/impossible to copy pencil.

Caption each image with the title, media, and size. Put the title in italics. Include the height and width of the artwork. You can also include your artist name. List these details on the back of the images of your artwork.

- For example, you may write, "*Nightview*, Sadie Lee, archival paper, 14 x 20" or "*Explosion*, Fiona Crackle, mixed media, 50 x 80."

You do not need to add the price, as this may change, and it will be on the title card next to the hanging photograph.

In terms of presentation, keep in mind that outlandish presentations might not look so great on a wall in a restaurant. Also, make sure everything is extremely secure and that all of the glass in your frame **is as clean as possible**. T

Your photos are meant to be seen, not just take up space on a hard drive! So take pride and these tips and start showing your images off.

Sales

First, I'd like to preface this section by saying that you should not expect to make money at your first showing - or your second - or most of the ones after that. If you go into it as a money-making endeavor, you'll probably be disappointed.

My first suggestion is to price your pieces reasonably, but don't undersell yourself. Price mainly by size. All your 8x10 inch photos should be the same price if they are all presented in the same frame. If you used a special process or paper or frame for a few, those can be more expensive. Don't price things based on what you think is best or worst.

Sources:

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Photo Club Members:

Rhonda Campbell
Brad Senn
Bob Dale
Bob Baikauskas

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